

Pioneering International Partnerships

An Interview with University at Buffalo President
Satish K. Tripathi

SATISH K. TRIPATHI, *president of the University at Buffalo (UB), is the institution's first international-born president. Tripathi, who served as UB's provost and executive vice president for academic affairs from 2004–2011, has led the university to achieve significant academic growth through the recruitment of many prominent faculty in key areas of research and scholarly activity, enhanced student quality and diversity, and an expanded international presence. As president, he seeks to build on this strong foundation, moving UB into the highest ranks of the nation's leading research universities.*

Tripathi served as dean of the Bourns College of Engineering at the University of California-Riverside from 1997–2004. Previously, he spent 19 years as a professor of computer science at the University of Maryland, including seven years as department chair. He also has held visiting professorships at the University of Paris-Sud in France and the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany.

He graduated top of his class from Banaras Hindu University in India, and holds a doctorate in computer science from the University of Toronto, as well as three master's degrees—one in computer science from the University of Toronto and two in statistics from the University of Alberta and Banaras Hindu University.

A fellow of the IEEE and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Tripathi was awarded the honorary doctorate of sciences from the Indian Institute of Information Technology, Allahabad, the university's highest degree.

IE: You received degrees in your native India and in Canada, and you were a visiting professor in France, Germany, and Italy. Now you are the first foreign-born president of the University at Buffalo. How do you think your international background influences your leadership style as a university president for a U.S. institution?

TRIPATHI: I feel very fortunate to have such a multifaceted cultural background, and it certainly has shaped my outlook in key ways—as a scholar, a teacher, and now as a university president. The examples I have seen throughout my own scholarly experience abroad—and here at the University at Buffalo, where we are fortunate to have one of the largest international enrollments among U.S. universities—have taught me that geographic and cultural diversity in the classroom and in the campus community contribute to an exceptional living and learning environment for our students.

As president of an internationalized university like UB, I view global competency, cultural fluency, and international scholarly collaboration as vital elements in the success of our academic enterprise. Preparing our students to compete successfully and contribute meaningfully to a global world, and fostering an academic climate that encourages scholarly collaboration across borders of all kinds, are key to our University at Buffalo mission as an internationalized university serving a global community of scholars. And that is the case for virtually all U.S. universities. The academic community is increasingly a borderless one in the twenty-first century.

On a personal level, my own experiences also make it very easy for me to identify with the perspective of our many international students at UB. I remember my



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own days as an international student—and later as a young visiting scholar overseas—very clearly. I know firsthand both the excitement and trepidation that our foreign students feel when they travel halfway around the world to pursue educational opportunities overseas—often far away from family and loved ones.

And having reaped the great personal and professional rewards of this experience, I am all the more enthusiastic about the value of study abroad for our domestic students. While we are proud that our UB students study internationally at a rate that is more than five times the national average, I want to increase our study-abroad participation rate even further. It is a transformative experience in the life of any student.

IE: How is international collaboration between scholars at the University at Buffalo and scholars at foreign universities encouraged? Have there been any groundbreaking studies or research discoveries as a result of these international research collaborations?

TRIPATHI: This kind of collaboration is encouraged in a number of ways. UB fosters and facilitates institutional cooperation with a large number of partner universities around the world. Many of these part-

nerships grow organically out of contacts between faculty members at each institution who share common research interests and who benefit from institutional ties.

In addition, UB's Faculty Internationalization Fund is a competitive travel grant program to facilitate travel by UB faculty to institutional partners to develop and implement collaborative activities including study abroad, joint research and scholarship, and the development of new courses and enhanced curricula. In a number of areas, UB's international research collaborations have led to important discoveries. To take a current example, our School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences collaborates with the University of Zimbabwe in Harare on an innovative approach to the delivery of anti-retroviral therapy that is having a major impact on AIDS/HIV in that country.

IE: How does the university support international activities for faculty?

TRIPATHI: We coordinate this support through the aforementioned Faculty Internationalization Fund, which helps defray travel costs for faculty initiating international research, educational, and service activities with institutional partners overseas.

On a personal level, my own experiences also make it very easy for me to identify with the perspective of our many international students at UB. I remember my own days as an international student—and later as a young visiting scholar overseas—very clearly.

IE: In 1980 the University at Buffalo became the first U.S. university to establish an institutional affiliation with a university in China following normalization of relations with that country. How did this distinguish the university as a leader in internationalization?

TRIPATHI: UB's early entry into China was a critical first step in the university's long-standing and extensive engagement with that nation and with Asia generally. That pioneering step led to several other UB "firsts," including the first comprehensive exchange agreement between a Chinese and a U.S. university (1980), and the first U.S. instructional center in China following normalization (1981).

These initiatives helped make UB one of the best known U.S. universities in China. They also made possible the awarding of a contract by the Chinese government and the U.S. Department of Commerce to our School of Management to deliver the first American MBA program in Dalian, China (1984-1989).

Our experience in China helped UB compete for other major sponsored programs in Asia, including a \$15 million cooperative education program delivered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1986-1991). Ultimately, these programs helped pave the way for our current branch campus in Singapore, where we enroll more than 1,500 students in six UB degree programs.

IE: The University of Buffalo has partnered with the Singapore Institute of Management since 1996 to deliver an Executive MBA program, and later in 2004 to offer UB undergraduate degrees in several fields. What has made this collaboration successful? How do students

from each country benefit from this collaboration?

TRIPATHI: We have an excellent working relationship with our colleagues at SIM, and the success of our EMBA program at SIM—which drew upon our School of Management's considerable experience delivering programs overseas going back to the Dalian program—in particular helped consolidate that relationship. This laid the groundwork for expanded collaboration eight years later. Working with SIM on a daily basis through our resident UB staff there has strengthened and matured our institutional ties.

SIM recognizes the value and quality of our American degree programs and has succeeded in attracting large number of students to our programs, both from Singapore and neighboring countries in Southeast Asia. To cite one interesting statistic, UB now has more communication majors in Singapore than we do in Buffalo! Students in Singapore benefit by being able to earn a highly valued UB degree entirely in Singapore, and at a cost that is less than half what it would cost them to earn the same degrees in Buffalo. They also have the option to study in Buffalo for a semester or two of their program. Buffalo-based UB students likewise have the opportunity to study in our program at SIM for a semester or more, or during the summer.

IE: As a public research university, has the University at Buffalo ever faced scrutiny for offering degrees in Singapore? Where did the criticism come from? How has this been handled?

TRIPATHI: In general, there has been little criticism as such. Our campus community has recognized the extraordinary

opportunity that our programs in Singapore represent for UB in terms of internationalizing the institution—our faculty, students, and curricula. Dozens of our faculty benefit by teaching in these programs and enhancing their course curricula through this experience. Our students benefit by having relatively easy way to access the rapidly emerging economic and cultural center that is Asia. Taking UB courses in Singapore provides a rich cross-cultural learning experience and a fruitful exposure to one of the world's great cities.

IE: Among University at Buffalo's many international partnerships is one established in 2006 with Amrita University India that offers a joint master's degree in information technology. I understand that another joint program is planned; can you discuss what the next joint degree will be? Also, recently, UB's School of Social Work started a joint research center with Amrita University. What are the goals of the center?

TRIPATHI: UB and Amrita are currently discussing a possible dual master's degree program in Embedded Systems, which would enroll employees of multinational companies in Bangalore, where embedded systems—computer systems integrated into many parts of our everyday environment—are a major growth industry.

Our School of Social Work has been collaborating with Amrita counterparts for more than two years. Together they launched UBARI (UB/Amrita Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Institute) in 2010 and have jointly organized at Amrita an annual International Conference on Society, Technology, and Sustainable Development. The center seeks to facilitate

ongoing collaborative research between scholars in Buffalo and India, and to assist Amrita in building research capacity.

IE: As recently at 2010, the University at Buffalo opened a Confucius Institute with the Office of the Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), and Capital Normal University in Beijing. What are the goals of the Confucius Institute and how will it give back to the local community?

TRIPATHI: The mission of the Confucius Institute at UB is to promote and support the teaching of Chinese language and culture in K–12 schools throughout Western New York.

Enhancing our engagement with our larger community—a guiding principle for the university more broadly—is the chief objective of this initiative. A secondary goal is to strengthen the teaching of Chinese language at UB and to develop a graduate-level program for teachers of Chinese that will enable them to gain New York Certification in Mandarin. Ultimately, many more schools in Western New York will be able to offer Mandarin, and many more students will learn the language.

IE: How does the University at Buffalo's geographic proximity to Canada allow the university to participate in U.S.-Canada higher education collaboration? Has your location been an asset in working more with Canadian institutions or improving U.S.-Canadian studies as an academic field?

TRIPATHI: By all means. This extraordinary geographical advantage enables UB to maintain extensive formal and informal ties with institutions and colleagues throughout Canada, and particularly Ontario and Quebec. UB and our partner York University in Toronto have helped launch a network of 13 research universities on both sides of the border.

Canada offers unique opportunities for comparative studies and analysis across a vast range of fields. UB not only has many faculty members who come from Canada but also many faculty engaged in Canada-re-

lated research and teaching. For this reason, UB has been one of the leading recipients of grant funding from the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. This is a tribute to our outstanding Canadian-American Studies Committee, which oversees this activity.

IE: Does the University at Buffalo have any future strategic international partnerships that have recently begun or will soon be launched?

TRIPATHI: One of our key strategic partners is also our closest partner geographically. Brock University, only 30 miles away in the Niagara Region of Ontario, is partnering with UB on what will be our first joint international degree program—a master of arts in Canadian-American studies to be taught jointly at both campuses and at locations on the border, including the Peace Bridge connecting Buffalo and Fort Erie, Ontario. This program, which is undergoing approval processes with educational authorities on both sides of the border, is anticipated to launch next academic year.

IE: Several years ago, you oversaw the development of a strategic plan for UB's internationalization. What has the implementation of that plan involved? What are some of the goals that UB has achieved in this process?

TRIPATHI: The university-wide task group that developed the strategic plan made a large number of recommendations respecting the internationalization of the student experience, our faculty and the institution itself. Our Council on International Studies and Programs, a longstanding advisory committee with representation from across the university, took up the task of overseeing implementation of many of the plan's recommendations. It worked with the deans and a variety of subcommittees tasked with the implementation of various parts of the plan.

One aim was to leverage UB's large international enrollment and extensive experience delivering overseas programs to expand internationalization at home. We recognized the need to internationalize the curriculum and provide more inter-

national opportunities for our faculty, as internationalizing faculty is essential to internationalizing the student experience and the institution as a whole.

IE: UB has a prominent place among U.S. institutions enrolling the largest number of international students. What are the benefits of these students to the university, and how do you make them a resource for the campus?

TRIPATHI: We are proud of our success in recruiting outstanding international students from around the world. Having been one of the first public research universities in the U.S. to develop a fully integrated international recruitment and enrollment management program, UB continues to strive to attract the best and brightest students from more than 110 countries—despite rapidly increasing competition from institutions both here and abroad.

As I noted earlier, the strategic internationalization plan recommended that UB finds ways to take advantage of the great resource that is our international students. International students are integral to our intellectual environment, and make major contributions to our research and educational endeavors.

In keeping with our plan, we are also developing more programs to bring international and domestic students together in mutually beneficial ways. For example, as one major element of a cross-disciplinary experiential learning initiative for our undergraduate students, we have created a Global Perspectives Academy—a diverse community of students and faculty that is focused on fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration while enhancing campus understanding of international affairs and global challenges.

Across the university, we are focused on providing our international students with increased opportunities to share their unique experiences and perspectives—not only in the classroom but beyond. Our local students will benefit even further from this enhanced interaction, as will our campus community as a whole. **IE**

ELAINA LOVELAND is editor-in-chief of *IE*.