



The India Initiative

The experience in India provided the Montgomery College team with unique glimpse into the challenges that India—a country undergoing rapid growth and development—must overcome to continue to excel in the global economy. According to 2008 education figures from India’s Ministry of Human Resource Development, more than 62 percent of India’s youth drop out of secondary school before ever enrolling in higher education, and throughout our visit, business leaders emphasized that employees with marketable skills remain difficult to find.

I witnessed extreme wealth and extreme poverty, yet both groups remain committed to helping their country move into the next century, with the understanding that education must be at the heart of future success. I find it profound that India has a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of approximately 12 percent, which means that only 12 percent of young people eligible are currently enrolled in college or university. The Indian government has pledged to raise that number to 30 percent by 2020 in effort to build an educated, skilled workforce. To see a distinctly American entity—the community college model—considered a solution was unbelievably rewarding. Personally and professionally, the trip to India was life changing.

Our first day in India began with an introductory meeting with Dr. Molly Teas, senior education adviser at the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs at the United States Department of State. Dr. Teas developed the idea for an India, America community college educational exchange program, which led to Montgomery College’s selection for a \$195,000 grant. The United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) assisted with grant implementation.

On Monday, March 14–Tuesday, March 15, the College led the National Symposium on 21st Century Community Colleges. Our faculty, staff, industry partners, other community college leaders, and Trustee Steve Kaufman joined me in giving presentations about such topics as workforce development, industry and business partnerships, developmental mathematics, student access, and community college trustees. I want to particularly thank Trustee Kaufman for delivering an informative talk that kept symposium participants engaged. He allowed time for a short question and answer session, and participants inquired about private and for-profit education, community college funding, the impact of outsourcing, and ethical guidelines for trustees. Additionally, his presence throughout the trip meant so much to our College faculty and staff in attendance, and it demonstrated to our Indian colleagues the priority that our governing body placed on this trip.

For U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the symposium and the opportunities to promote dialogue between Indian and American educators is a “win-win.” He shared his message with symposium participants in a video introduced by U.S. Department of Education General Counsel Charlie Rose, who graciously attended the conference and delivered his own inspirational remarks. It was a touching moment to be halfway around the world and to hear our secretary of education acknowledge Dr. Rai and me, “I want to congratulate Montgomery College President Dr. Pollard and Vice President and Provost



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Dr. Rai for their tremendous leadership and vision and we are thankful for the work they do.”

As he explained, "Community colleges like Montgomery College are providing pathways of opportunity for literally millions of America's students all across the United States... the United States and India face many of the same educational challenges, particularly when it comes to providing students with career and technical training for the jobs of the 21st century.”

“In the United States and now in India, leading community colleges have been effective in reaching out to lower income students, putting them at the cutting edge of technological change and giving them the skills not only to land jobs, but to launch successful careers,” said Hillary Rodham Clinton, secretary of the United States Department of State, in a special video message delivered at the symposium and introduced by Timothy Roemer, the United States ambassador to India. Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Roemer see community colleges as playing a vital role in developing the United States’ partnership with India.

“President Obama has called America’s relationship with India one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century and a critical element of our partnership is working together to educate our young people so that they may thrive in a global economy,” said Clinton.

The symposium also provided an opportunity to hear from Indian educators in the government such as R.K. Chugh, deputy director general (training) at the India Ministry of Labour and Employment. As he explained, India with its population of 1.2 billion citizens is the youngest nation in the world with 54 percent of its population under the age of 25 years old. The median age of India’s citizens is 24 years old, as compared to 30 years old in China, 38 years old for Europe, and 41 years old for Japan. Currently, 12.8 million citizens enter the labor force annually, but there is only a training capacity for 4.3 million within that same time period. The country doesn’t have enough government training institutions to handle all the capacity needs.

For this reason, Naveen Jindal, an elected member of Parliament and the executive vice chairman and managing director of Jindal Steel and Power—the fourth largest company in India—has launched his own corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative to increase educational access in India. As Dr. Sanjeev Sahni, head of education at Jindal Steel and Power, explained at the symposium, there is a real demand for vocational training—real, marketable skills; currently, 80 to 90 percent of the workforce does not possess any marketable skills that will enable them to find quality, well-paying employment.

One of my most memorable moments on the trip was when the Montgomery College team spent two days after the symposium with Mr. Jindal in his home state of Haryana, which he represents as an elected member of Parliament. We visited several villages, where citizens welcomed us with open arms, and we saw firsthand the significance of



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democracy to Indian citizens. They had such joy and passion for their lives, and still they had a clear commitment to achieving upward mobility. And Mr. Jindal, who has achieved unbelievable professional success, has a commitment to help his constituents reach their goals.

“For us, it really is a window of opportunity. We must seize it. If we seize this opportunity and give our youth employable skills, they will be able to contribute to India’s economic development,” said Mr. Jindal. “If we lose this opportunity and we are not really able to impart good education to our youth that they will be able to contribute to the nation’s development, then this—the democratic advantage—will not happen. It has to be seized.”

Through Jindal Educational Initiatives, Mr. Jindal, Dr. Sahni, and their team have built schools for younger children, a university, a medical college, several institutes of technology, and four community colleges throughout India. We visited several of the Jindal higher education facilities throughout our visit in India, including the O.P. Jindal Global University, Jindal Institute of Technology, and the Jindal Institute of Power Technology. At each Jindal institution and at the government institutions, we were greeted with such warmth and kindness by the staff and students. Everyone took great pride in showing us their facilities and their work.

In Raigarh, we also enjoyed a delightful cultural program at the O.P. Jindal School. The students from the school and from the nearby Jindal institutes performed a medley of dances and songs, and welcomed our participation onstage at the end of the evening. It was a moment that I will cherish forever—Indian students and my Montgomery College colleagues joining hands to dance, laugh, and rejoice.

Community colleges, regardless of where they reside, are transformational in the lives of our students. The core mission of community college access, delivery of workplace skills, and transfer education are timeless, transcending boundaries and borders. At the Jindal community colleges, their mission is: “If you have will, we have means and ways to turn you into a competent skilled workforce of world standard.” In America, our community college mission allows every person the opportunity to go to college if he or she desires a new future. We are the place where workforce development skills are taught as well as the place where education of the entire person takes place.

We have 1,200 community colleges in the United States, but it is clear that 3,000 to 4,000 community colleges are needed in India to serve the population. I find it incredibly rewarding that Montgomery College will have been a part of community college growth in India by demonstrating the value of community colleges, and by speaking about the mission with such passion. I also understand that the reality in which India operates is different from the reality of our country. The community college model will have to be adapted to an India context.

At the same time, the trip went well beyond helping our Indian partners understand the



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American community college mission. For my colleagues and me, it was an opportunity to think about how the American community college mission will have to evolve in the global economy. I believe that the way community colleges do business in America will no longer be viable in the next decade. This does not mean that community colleges will abandon what we do now, but if you think about global competition, if you think about the significant numbers of students from other shores who will continue to come to the United States for an education, and if you think about our own students who will have to be competitive in the rapidly changing workforce, we will be forced to be much more thoughtful about how we approach our work. We will have to think critically about the education we provide.

I would like to conclude by sharing just a few of the comments from members of our travel team, who so thoughtfully discussed what they learned from their time in India.

- Mario Parcan, chair of applied technologies and professor of construction management on the Rockville Campus: “Both the symposium and our visits to the different educational institutions gave me the opportunity to start a dialogue with our Indian colleagues.”
- Debra Anderson, professor of automotive technology, found “visiting and talking with students at the technical institutes” her most memorable experience.
- Margaret Latimer, associate dean for instructional programs at Germantown: “We saw pride – in accomplishment, in appearance, in people’s optimism about India’s future as a global leader.”
- John Hamman, chair of mathematics at the Germantown Campus: “I hope this is the start of a productive conversation between faculty who come from different backgrounds but have the same goal of producing students who can be competitive in an increasingly global marketplace.”
- Lori Kelman, professor of biotechnology: “It is always gratifying to see that learning is universal and the love of learning is universal. It happens everywhere and it happens in different ways, but, in the end, it is all the same.”

I want to thank Dr. Sanjay Rai, vice president and provost of the Germantown Campus and India project director, and Miriam Carter, assistant to the deans and India project manager, for their hard work and dedication to the success of the India initiative. With them at the helm, Montgomery College and America’s community colleges shined.

I am excited about the future of this initiative, when faculty members from India will travel to Montgomery College this fall to tour our facilities, meet our students, and observe our professors in the classroom, delivering instruction in ways that inspire critical and creative thinking. Montgomery College stands ready to provide the same gracious hospitality to our Indian visitors as they provided to us. I look forward to the next steps in our journey together.