Former President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, passed away on July 27, 2015, at the age of 83. He served as the 11th President of India from 2002 to 2007. A student of physics and aerospace engineering, Kalam was a career scientist for four decades before becoming president. He worked on the development of ballistic missile and launch vehicle technology, and was intimately involved with India’s civilian space program and military missile development efforts. Widely referred to as the “People’s President,” he returned to his civilian life of education, writing and public service after a single term. He was a recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Bharat Ratna, India’s highest civilian honor. Kalam visited the University of Central Florida twice: first, in 2009, when he spoke on “Technology for Global Transformation;” and again, in 2012, when he spent several days at UCF and elsewhere in Florida. During that trip, he addressed thousands of students, faculty, staff and members of the community, focusing on the themes of energy independence and sustainable development. His death was mourned across the world with thousands, including national-level dignitaries, attending the funeral ceremony held in his hometown of Rameshwaram, where he was buried with full state honors.
My fellowship opportunity with The India Center at UCF has opened my eyes to India’s global influence. Prior to this fellowship, I had not considered how a developing nation could affect decision-making around the world. India’s presence is felt in the global arena more than ever. A growing economic sector means improved quality of life for the 1.3 billion people who live there, a third of whom are currently living below the poverty line. Through my research, I have challenged myself to think about what it means to live on less than $1 a day. This fellowship has allowed me to hone my reading and writing skills through research, analysis and synthesis. I recommend the fellowship at The India Center to any student interested in economic development and globalization.

- Delani Wood, Fall 2015 India Fellow

For more information on our internships and fellowships, please click here.

**Summary of Sponsored Research**

Dr. Barbara Kinsey and Dr. Nikola Mirilovic of the UCF Political Science Department have been conducting a research project partially funded by The India Center. Below is a description of their research thus far:

“Our research project is titled ‘The Impact of Diaspora Transnationalism: Migration from India to the United States.’ It examines the political, economic and cultural activities and role of Indian-American communities and their organizations in the United States and also in their Indian state of origin. Our project focuses on Gujarati and Keralite organizations and communities, and compares their activism in the U.S. and in India, in connection with U.S. policy and the U.S.-Indian relationship. In studying diaspora transnationalism, we take into account both the state of origin and the host country because we expect that the institutional and policy experiences in the former affect activism in the latter. Previous research tends to examine immigrant integration as involving primarily activism developed in the United States. However, immigrants’ activism is also influenced by the institutional and cultural context in their place of origin.

As part of this project, and with the financial support of an internal grant and The India Center, we conducted field work in New York City (NYC), where Gujarati and Keralite communities and organizations are located in Queens. We interviewed the leadership of Gujarati and Keralite organizations and communities and compared their activism in the U.S. and in India, in connection with U.S. policy and the U.S.-Indian relationship. In NYC, as elsewhere in the U.S., the Indian-American community is growing in numbers, prosperity and political influence. Public officials describe the community as having a strong cultural presence, and also as economically successful, and politically active in community councils. Currently, one of the city council districts is vacant and among the contestants for the seat there are three Indian-American candidates. Thus, it appears that the community is moving from political participation to representation in a relatively short span since settling in NYC compared to other immigrant communities. Political representation is also an active concern of both Gujarati and Keralite communities, both emphasize civic duty and public involvement, and would like to see members of their respective community occupying public office. The factors that account for the policy preferences of Gujarati and Keralite communities are the aim of our ongoing research.”