



The India Center

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT



The India Center continued to enhance its local and global reputation during the 2023-24 academic year. India has grown into the most populous country and many of the center's public events and activities this year focused on themes related to population growth. Highlights included The India Center's inaugural in-person conference, themed "India - Growth, Challenges, and Opportunities," as well as visits and presentations by representatives of India's diplomatic corps and other special guests from India.

In addition, The India Center hosted nine public events this past year. A diverse range of speakers, including non-resident fellow Monica Singhania, Ph.D. and Fulbright-Nehru fellow Lalita Kulkarni, Ph.D., gave public presentations, guest lectures, and engaged with UCF students, faculty, and staff. These events also welcomed members of the Central Florida community. Events and outreach provide opportunities to build and deepen connections to many community members and associations in the Orlando area.

With support from the local community, The India Center continues to thrive and grow its impact. UCF is grateful for Anil Valbh's recent generous donation, which supports the Indian Community Endowed Chair. UCF is also grateful for alumnus Kannan Srinivasan's establishment of a new scholarship for students in honor of Professor T.J. Srinivasan.

The India Center is growing its global footprint, expanding partnerships with institutions of higher education in India. Several delegations from universities in India have visited UCF, and additional efforts to establish partnerships and opportunities for students and faculty are ongoing. At UCF, faculty across the university support and work with The India Center. UCF student associations focusing on the Indian subcontinent have also developed stronger ties to The India Center.

The significance of India is growing on a global scale, but also at UCF. In 2023-24, UCF was home to 189 faculty and staff and 677 students and scholars from India. UCF was honored that Leila Chacko, Director of Public Affairs for The India Center, was selected by the Council for American Overseas Research Centers as one of 12 individuals nationally to participate in an Overseas Faculty Development Seminar in India. The India Center aims to increase the understanding of India at UCF and beyond, while furthering India-U.S. relations.

Engaging UCF and the Community through Events

- In August 2023, **Aditi Walunj**, First Secretary of Culture and Education, Embassy of India, and **Madan Kumar Ghildiyal**, Acting Consul General at the Consulate General of India in Atlanta, celebrated India's 77th Independence Day with students, faculty, and members of the community at UCF. **Provost Michael Johnson** welcomed the representatives of 10 Indian American community associations and acknowledged their support during the event.
- In September 2023, non-resident fellow **Monica Singhania, Ph.D.**, University of Delhi, visited and met with faculty, staff, students, and community members. Her public presentation discussed "Impact Investing and Sustainable Population Growth: Exploring the Linkage."
- In October 2023, **Madhu Kalimipalli, Ph.D.**, Professor of Finance at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics at Wilfrid Laurier University, led a webinar on emerging markets. Buvaneshwaran Venugopal, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Finance at UCF, moderated.
- In November 2023, The India Center presented "Diwali: The Festival of Lights Celebration," featuring musicians and dancers in collaboration with the Asian Cultural Association, the Orange County Asian Committee, FusionFest, and **Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings**.
- In November 2023, **Tanvi Madan, Ph.D.**, Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy program at The Brookings Institution, visited for a discussion on "The India-US- China Triangle: Past, Present and Prospects."
- In March 2024, **Ruchita Gupta, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Housing, School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, delivered a virtual presentation on "Informal Housing in Delhi: Policies and Case Studies." Amar Sawhney, Professor of Architecture, Building Construction, and Interior Design at Miami-Dade College, served as moderator.
- In March 2024, landscape architect **Geeta Wahi Dua** gave a webinar entitled, "Garden as Universe, Universe as Garden," about curating the book *Bagh-e-Bahar* for the 2023 India Art, Architecture, and Design Biennale. Jennifer Elliott, Director of Sustainability Initiatives and the Arboretum at UCF, moderated.
- In March 2024, The India Center hosted **Ramesh Babu Lakshmanan**, India's Consul General in Atlanta, for a half-day visit. Consul General Lakshmanan also met with students and senior UCF leadership on campus and presented a public lecture on India-U.S. higher educational opportunities.
- In March 2024, The India Center hosted **Lalitagauri Kulkarni, Ph.D.**, Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellow. During her four-day visit, she guest-lectured in a UCF social work class, met community members, and spoke with students at Valencia College and Dr. Phillips High School's Center for International Studies. Dr. Kulkarni also gave a public talk at UCF on "FinTech and Financial Inclusion: Myths and Realities."

Exchanging Ideas at the 2024 Inaugural Conference

In April 2024, The India Center held its inaugural one-day in-person conference on “India – Growth, Challenges, and Opportunities.” Experts from think tanks and academia participated on panels on international relations and security, subnational governance, and sustainable development in India. **Richard Rossow**, Senior Adviser and Chair in U.S.-India Policy Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, presented the keynote luncheon address on “The Promise of a U.S. – India Partnership.” UCF students, faculty, staff, and community members were among the attendees.

Spearheading Change through Global Collaboration

UCF signed three new MOUs with higher education institutions in India:

- General collaboration between UCF and IIT Guwahati
- General collaboration between UCF and Manipal Academy of Higher Education
- Reciprocal student exchange program in Hospitality Management with Shoolini University

The India Center at UCF in India

Leila Chacko, Director of Public Affairs, was selected as one of 12 awardees nationally by the Council for American Overseas Research Centers to participate in an Overseas Faculty Development Seminar in India from December 2023 to January 2024. The three-week, fully funded seminar focused on Exploring Urban Sustainability through India’s Cities and was administered by CAORC in collaboration with the American Institute of Indian Studies and supported by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The seminar included visits to the cities of Delhi, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Lucknow.



Ramesh Babu Lakshmanan, Consul General of India in Atlanta, addressing students, faculty, staff, and community members at UCF



FOCUS ON STUDENTS

- The **Professor T.G. Srinivasan India Center Scholarship** was established to support undergraduate students who engage in experiential learning in India.
- During the winter, 15 students with **International Medical Outreach** at UCF worked at a hospital in India, gaining first-hand medical experience. The India Center provided support for the students’ travel.
- The India Center worked closely with the **Indian Student Association** and the **Indian Graduate Student Association** on programming and events throughout the year.



DIGITAL CONTENT

The India Center maintains an archive of digital content, including recordings of many of our events. To commemorate **India’s moon landing**, we spoke with the **Jaydeep Mukherjee, Ph.D.**, Director of the Florida Space Grant Consortium about plans for India’s space future. The India Center’s conference keynote speaker, **Richard M. Rossow**, was also featured in an episode of WUCF’s *Global Perspectives* television show.

ABOUT THE INDIA CENTER

Our vision is to establish The India Center at UCF as the nation's preeminent location for the study of India's role in the world today: a national leader in the formation of U.S.-India partnerships, scholarship and research focused on India, India-centered educational programs, and outreach to the Indian community in Florida and nationally.

This vision, and the continued development of The India Center, requires partnerships with groups and individuals interested in shaping and supporting the Center's future direction. We are grateful to the early supporters who have already committed substantial funds for an endowment to establish a preeminent center and we welcome additional contributions to make this vision a reality.



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL FLORIDA

The India Center

Kerstin Hamann, Interim Director
Leila Chacko, Director of Public Affairs
theindiacenter.ucf.edu | indiacenter@ucf.edu