# VICE CHANCELLOR'S INTERVIEW

DTU Times interviewed the newly appointed Vice Chancellor of DTU, **Prof. JP Saini**. Read on as he talks about his vision for the university, the status quo, and the upcoming AI-powered classrooms of DTU.

You have been the Vice Chancellor of NSUT for the last three years, and have only recently been appointed as the Vice Chancellor of DTU. Based on your limited time here, can you share your reflections on our ecosystem?

I have been closely associated with DTU for the last four and a half years. My friend, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, Prof. Yogesh Singh, had roped me into numerous academic activities conducted by various bodies of the university. Prof. Yogesh Singh is himself a member of the board of management at NSUT, which helps us implement state-of-the-art practices across both institutions simultaneously, so that both NSUT and DTU progress in tandem.

In fact, I will say, on the record, that when students contemplate choosing between one of the two to pursue their studies, they should consider their comfort and proximity to the university rather than compare the universities' academic virtues. Both DTU and NSUT are excellent institutions with experienced faculty and well-developed infrastructure. When it comes to cultural events, both the universities whole-heartedly participate in each other's fests. Even the faculties host friendly tournaments of cricket and football wherein they invite the other university's faculty members.

The students and faculty of DTU have been conscientiously working towards authoring research papers, as well as implementing them. In spite of this, we still lag behind in the research impact facet of the NIRF rankings. What do you think causes this mismatch and what can be done to improve the status quo?

The students and faculty of DTU have been working in synergy to produce scientifically sound research, but the mismatch, as you said, still exists. One of the primary reasons for it is that the present population of the university is around 14,000, and a vast majority of them are undergraduate students. Due to the lower number of students pursuing Masters and PhD, the research culture hasn't flourished extensively. Nonetheless, around 70 students were awarded a PhD degree last year and this time, even amidst the pandemic, 60 students were conferred with a PhD.

To encourage students to take up research, DTU has started various schemes and grants ranging from ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakhs. These awards are meant to inspire students to come up with research ideas worthy of being published in reputed international journals. Additionally, for students who are interested in pursuing research and wish to be internationally acclaimed for their work, these grants will aid them in their journey, by amalgamating both academics and research. This would also help the students gain financial independence as they pursue their research interests.

We are also integrating research into the curriculum of undergraduate students. We must play to our key strength, which is the sheer number of undergraduate students, and in order to encourage them to adopt the research culture, the faculty must involve them in as many projects as possible. DTU-IIF is also doing their part to encourage the students and faculty members to work on startups. The university provides up to ₹10 lakhs in incentives to the students for this. We are also working on strengthening our research labs and infrastructure and equipping them with bleeding edge industrial softwares.

The students must avail schemes like these and should approach the faculty for guidance. I think the undergrads have the capability to publish better papers than the PhD scholars because there isn't any pressure on them to complete their work in a given frame of time. Free minds have no bounds, and have endless potential to realise.

Pursuing research would also help the students gain practical knowledge, which will in turn give them an edge over others during the placement season. Industries today are looking for people who don't fit the mould, who can apply their skills practically and think out-of-the-box. This would also aid students who wish to pursue their graduate studies in universities outside India.

Leading educational institutions around the world have conducted studies which underscore the same fact: in-person classes are more productive than online ones. Is there any plan to reopen the university to all students for theory classes, or is there a blended mode of education in the works?

We are trying our best to resume educational activities in the offline mode, because I believe that the campus provides a congenial atmosphere for learning. But we are waiting till the end of December for the government's orders, which will be based on an evaluation of the impact of Omicron.

The present plan is to conduct practical classes in person. Apart from that, we are also working on inviting renowned professors from leading international universities to present lectures in their domains which would allow the students to receive a diverse exposure of learning and enhance networking. We are also working on a hybrid mode of teaching. This method will entail classrooms retrofitted with microphones, cameras, virtual boards, and networking capabilities. On the surface, it might seem like an ordinary classroom, but in reality, these classrooms will combine the best of both worlds: professors can present lectures from anywhere while if a student is unable to attend any class, they can tune in online. This has already been implemented in NSUT and now we are working to incorporate it in DTU as well.

Do you think that hybrid classrooms are the future?

Definitely. I don't think that physical classes will be completely phased out, but there will certainly be a push to make sure that no one misses out on their education simply because of their physical absence. This is also true for the faculty members. If a teacher cannot attend a physical class, then they can present lectures from their location and everything will be properly displayed in the classroom. Both the teacher and student will have this freedom. Furthermore, the podium is also built in with writing units. So that if a teacher writes on it, it automatically displays on the classroom's digital board. Each classroom has its own YouTube channel where these lectures are live-streamed. This lets students access them anywhere and at any time. At present, twelve classrooms have been inducted into the first phase of this change. We hope to revolutionise the conventional modus operandi of physical classes with these futuristic classrooms.

What is your vision for DTU?

My vision for DTU is to implement short term goals in order to make instrumental differences in the long run. We have gotten a lot of things right along the way, while there are areas we can improve on. I don't intend to upend the way things are conducted here. I believe it is imperative that we maintain our path, while making small modifications that will steer us in the appropriate direction. In the coming years, DTU will implement every facet of the NEP, which will place us as an elite institution catering to students from all domains. Additionally, I will ensure that we keep improving the status-quo, by constantly refreshing the curricula and encouraging technical and cognitive development of students. I intend to imbue the university with the principles and values of historic Indian institutions such as *Nalanda and Takshila*.

What message would you give to the students of DTU?

Never stop following your dreams. Always give your one hundred percent and work hard towards achieving your goal. In life, you will always receive more opportunities, so make the most of them. Furthermore, move out of your comfort zones, push your limits and try to do something innovative and distinct in your chosen fields. Most importantly, always be grateful for your culture, your country and your family; other tangible things are ephemeral.