

A win-win situation at University College of Fraser Valley



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British Columbia's economy is fuelled, in part, by the trade and industry of the province's South Asian population, says Kim Lawrence of the University College of Fraser Valley.

They have "the highest proportion of Indo-Canadian people of any metropolitan area in Canada" and that's reflected in their student population. "Approximately 22 per cent of the population in Abbotsford (British Columbia) has roots in South Asia, and one in five UCFV students is originally from India (the majority of those being from Punjab)," said UCFV's Communication Officer Crystal Sawyer.

"Because of strong ties with, and wide support from, British Columbia's Indo-Canadian community UCFV decided two years back to establish a campus in Chandigarh to impart under-graduate business education with their location at the Sanatan Dharma College and Punjab University," she explained. In fact Sawyer has spent a lot of time in Chandigarh lately looking after their campus along with Dr B S Sandhu, coordinator of the program in Chandigarh.

"UCFV is committed to serving and representing the Indo-Canadian community, and have started several initiatives such as the Center for Indo-Canadian Studies and an institution wide internationalization team that we view as catalysts for transforming our university into a place that truly reflects the diversity in our region," Lawrence explained.

As part of this commitment, we are always excited to welcome students from India to our campuses, she added.

They recently sent a group of 50 students to the Canadian Studies Center in the Department of Public Administration, Punjab University, under their 'Heritage Program'.

This program is part of initiatives of the Center. It provided students a glimpse of the Indian social, economic and cultural

set-up. That's the way Canadian and Indian students inter-act leading towards internationalization of education in Canada. Whether Indian students study in Canada or Canadian students go to India, the result is their close inter-action with immense benefits to students in both countries, Sawyer explained.

She said the Canadian Studies Center was set up in June 2005 after UCFV and Punjab University signed a Memorandum of Understanding. This MoU provided that the center would work for promotion of Indo-Canadian Studies with focus on Punjab and British Columbia.

Ghuman, who's coordinating activities of their campus in Chandigarh said that UCFV has given the center a grant of Rs 10 lakh (about \$26,000). "The aim is to promote Indo-Canadian studies in the social sciences, sciences, humanities and professional disciplines," he said.

They will also encourage search on Indian Diaspora in Canada and the center would work on issues like social and community ties, NGOs women empowerment,

urban planning and policy oriented research acts.

There are 20 centers all over India and these students from UCFV visited all those centers.

It is interesting that in their campus in Chandigarh, UCFV has given the option for students to study all their four years of under-graduate courses in Chandigarh or opt to study 2-3 years in Chandigarh and balance four years in Abbotsford in British Columbia.

"Many foreign universities in India have introduced the 'two plus two system: finish two years of a degree in India then complete the remaining two years abroad," Sawyer explained. "While good in theory, the problem occurs when students are unable to gain study permits (students visas) to leave India —universities do not teach the remaining two years in India, leaving students at a loss for the balance of their education."

It is for this reason, said Sawyer, UCFV decided to leave it to a student whether he/she wants to study all through in India

or spend sometime in Canada. "It is left to them to decide. Even if they want to come to our campus in Abbotsford and they don't get the Canadian students visa no harm is done as they would still be able to complete their under-graduate program and get their BBA degree from UCFV, Sawyer said.

Sawyer put *India Abroad* in touch with some of their BBA students who offered their own comments as to why they chose UCFV's Chandigarh campus and what they were hoping to achieve after finishing their under-graduate programs:

Shefali Joshi, 18, is happy joining UCFV's campus as "the concept of business world being taught to us are those that are being used in the real world.

"The practical knowledge being given to us with the help of professors who themselves belong to the corporate world helps an individual to learn from their experiences too," she said. "This knowledge will help an individual in not only entering the service sector after the completion of degree course but to achieve the dream of being an entrepreneur."

Kamalpreet Kaur Brar, 19, said the course at UCFV provides him "with better job opportunities and, as compared to normal BBA students, we are a way ahead, because what we are learning in first year they won't even learn in the three years. No practicality is involved in their studies."

The group activities, which are very much in vogue there, give students to learn "to work with each other even if we don't like the person," she said.

"I joined UCFV's BBA program because it is more practical than Indian BBA program," said Gaganjot Kaur Hunjab, 21. "Before joining this program I was in Indian BBA which requires only cramming skills before exams to get good grades. Not so at UCFV where "we have a better classroom interaction, we give presentations and are assigned with projects and various group activities."

She believes at the end of her four-year program, she will be "more confident to face real life challenges as we are taught in very practical way and moreover studying and solving cases and in class ideas actually help me to grasp the concepts well which I need to know for performing my task efficiently when I will start my own business."

It is interesting to hear from these young students, one after another, talking about starting their own business.

Shivam Goswami, is barely 20 but he already owns Solutions Beyond, a software development firm.

"By the end of first year, I had already put many of the concepts I had learned to practice in my business," he said "Things are running more efficiently and I have increased my sales and I am making more money."

There were similar comments from Jyoti Sahi, 18, Jasleen Gill, 19, Javijai Chauhan, 19 and Varun Bhasin, 19.

"The program curriculum has been designed in conjunction with employers to ensure that students are learning both hard and soft skills to meet the needs of today's businesses," explained Crystal Sawyer. "Employers partner with UCFV over the long term, to design the curriculum and to provide real projections for student completion. They often donate equipment and technology to the university and ultimately, they hire our graduates."

It is all win-win situation in Chandigarh for UCFV and, more importantly, for the students.

