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State Department, UNO tout new initiative aimed at fostering, enhancing research partnerships

By Joseph Morton / World-Herald Bureau Mar 7, 2019 Updated Mar 9, 2019



Patrick McNamara

WASHINGTON — The importance of the U.S.-India relationship has never been clearer.

Tensions between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan have been rattling regional stability. And President Donald Trump is setting sights on India for his next trade battle.

So it was a [timely announcement Wednesday](#) that the State Department has awarded \$1.15 million to the University of Nebraska at Omaha for “Partnership 2020” — an initiative aimed at fostering and enhancing research partnerships between U.S. and Indian institutions.

“This is a very strategic and important time for efforts like Partnership 2020 to be doing outreach — not only for Indian students coming to U.S. universities, but also for U.S. students to better understand India and the world,” UNO Director of International Studies Patrick McNamara said.

He and other UNO officials traveled to Washington this week to launch the new effort during an event at the State Department. Also represented was the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which will serve an advisory role on the project.

The two-year project envisions four main products by the end, including a searchable database of partnerships between the two countries. That database was previewed at the event by Sher Jan Ahmadzai, director of UNO’s Center for Afghanistan Studies, and Katie Kresha, business and finance manager of the school’s international programs.



Sher Jan Ahmadzai

A second goal is to draft policy recommendations for the U.S. and Indian governments, as well as state and local entities, on what they can do to lay the foundation for collaboration and attract private sector involvement.

The third prong is to bring together groups that have already created strong partnerships and create a practical guide of lessons learned.

And lastly, much of the program’s funding will be passed on through subgrants to U.S. universities for joint research with Indian counterparts in 10 strategic areas that include public health, water management and advanced engineering.

Ahmadzai said the project represents a way to push what's already happening even further.

"This will be a tool to enhance the already existing strong relationship between our countries in the field of education," he said.

Wednesday's launch event included a panel discussion with several experts, including Michael Kulma, senior director of global programs and resource development at NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

International students contribute to the U.S. economy, create jobs, drive research and strengthen national security, Kulma said, but the number of new international students coming to the United States has dipped.

Kulma cited challenges in attracting students today, including anti-immigration political rhetoric.

"The United States is in a global competition for talent and is at risk of losing its position as the most attractive country for international students and scholars," he said.

Kulma told The World-Herald that [Partnership 2020](#) is the kind of project that could help encourage more academic exchanges.

"Putting a focus on partnerships, putting a focus on the U.S.-India relationship, talking about higher education, putting a little money behind it, I think there's, absolutely, an opportunity for projects like this," he said.