

INDO – US 21ST CENTURY KNOWLEDGE INITIATIVE

AWARD 2017-19

In a continuation of the educational partnership between the United States and India, the U.S. Department of State and the University Grants Commission announced the eight institutional partnership projects for the fifth and final round of Indo-U.S. 21st Century Knowledge Initiative awards (formerly known as the Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative).

The proposal entitled **'An Indigenous Studies Field School for Global Exchange in Northeast India: Fostering Educational and Public Health Initiative'** submitted by University of South Florida and Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS), Rajiv Gandhi University has been awarded for the year 2016- 2019.

The initiative aims to strengthen collaboration and build partnerships between U.S. and Indian institutions of higher education. The project will receive an award of up to \$190,000 that can be utilized over a three-year period, with the aim of encouraging mutual understanding, educational reform, and economic growth, as well as the development of junior faculty at U.S. and Indian and institutions of higher learning.

This ongoing INDO – US 21st Century Knowledge Initiative award, is a collaboration work between three institutes, namely, the Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS), Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, School of Social Work, University of South Florida, USA and Research Institute of world's Ancient Traditions Cultures and Heritage (RIWATCH) located in Roing, L/D Valley district, AP. Comprising of interdisciplinary researchers, this international, inter-institutional team is collaborating to establish a unique *“Indigenous Studies Field School for Global Exchange”* in Arunachal Pradesh, India. The purpose of this effort includes fostering innovative cultural resource knowledge and field research skills that will

enable USF and RGU students in public health and social/behavioral disciplines, to study the indigenous people focusing on issues like health, sanitation, etc.

As a part of this initiative, many academic activities such as classroom teaching, field visit and field training were carried out both in India and USA. Below is the brief note on the some of the achievements and current status of the project held in both India and USF, USA.

SUCCESSFUL VISIT OF RGU TEAM TO UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, USA

During December 2017, USF and RGU teams successfully completed the process of acquiring J-visas for the 5 RGU faculty members to visit USF. Subsequently, the team of 5 RGU faculty had a successful visit to USF. Please find below, the names of the 5 RGU faculty who visited the USF in January 2018.

S.No	Name	Position
1	Dr Simon John Samuel	Professor & Director of Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University
2	Dr Jummyir Basar	Professor, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University
3	Dr. Wanglit Mongchan	Assistant Professor, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University
4	Dr. Tarun Mene	Assistant Professor, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University
5	Ms. Lisa Lomdak	Assistant Professor, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University

A brief summary of their visit to USF, USA:

In January (7th-18th), a team of 5 researchers from the Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) in Arunachal Pradesh, traveled to the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa Florida, USA, as part of the US-India 21st Century Knowledge Initiative Grant Award that USF, RGU, and Research Institute for Worlds Ancient Traditions and Culture (RIWATCH) currently hold from the United States-India Educational Foundation.



RGU team with the faculties of School of Social Work, USF, USA

While at USF, the RGU team met with USF leadership and faculty, administrators, and staff, and presented their research to students in the School of Social Work. These interactions involved engaging conversations on experiences of indigenous communities in the U.S.A. and Northeast India, as well as differences and similarities in the geographical, cultural, linguistic, religious and historical contexts of the two countries. The two teams also exchanged notes on their research work with communities in diverse geographical settings such as India, U.S.A, Haiti, Spain, and various Latin American countries. Such meetings promoted insightful discussions on different educational systems, pedagogical techniques used by faculty, student learning styles, and student populations in India and the U.S.A. As part of local community engagement, the RGU team visited a variety of social service agencies in the Tampa Bay Area including a *Salvation Army Counseling Centre* that serves people struggling with drug abuse issues, the Crisis Center, an agency that provides medical and psychological support for survivors of suicide, child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual violence, etc.



RGU team with the students and faculties of School of Social Work, USF, Florida

The RGU team also met with professionals and community organizers from the *Hispanic Services Council* (HSC), and their constituents who reside in the *Wimauma area of Hillsborough County* in Florida and who are migrant families originating from Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. The India team had an insightful conversation with the migrant families and their children, tackling a variety of topics, e.g., maternal languages, aspirations for U.S.-born children, usefulness of educational reading projects for them and their children, immigration policy-related challenges.



RGU team and USF faculties in HISPANIC Center, Tampa

While in the Wimauma community, the RGU team also visited *Reddick Elementary School*, meeting with teachers, administrators, and library staff, who revealed specific challenges faced by students and families of migrant farm worker communities in the U.S.A. Despite this full schedule, the USF team took time to accompany the RGU team to the *Disney World* in Orlando and to some local beaches.

Among the grant activities completed by the USF-RGU team was the *finalization of the curriculum* for the Indigenous Studies Field School for Global Exchange. In May 2018, the first group of students from USF will land in India and will later be joined by RGU students in the Pilot Phase of the Field School. Together, they will first participate in a cultural resource management training conducted by USF and RGU faculty and experts from RIWATCH, immerse in an indigenous context, and then practice the knowledge and methodologies learned by collaborating with indigenous people to undertake research projects that are relevant to their communities. Students from both countries, and community members, will be involved in every stage of the research projects from design, through implementation, analysis and dissemination of findings. The Field School will be conducted every year and the projects that students

undertake will build upon the work of previous student cohorts. In the long-run, the Field School will increase the number of indigenous health researchers in India and USA. In addition, it will lead to sustainable partnerships between USF-RGU-RIWATCH and indigenous communities, resulting in innovative and cutting-edge research proposals that ultimately improve the lives of indigenous people.