

INTERVIEW | DELHI

We do not want placements to be accidental: Anu Singh Lather



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Expanding the campus; university, social sector and industry partnership will be our key focus areas

Recently appointed Vice-Chancellor of Ambedkar University Delhi talks to *The Hindu* about the importance of expansion, and training students to become job creators rather than seekers

Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD) is now a decade old and you have taken over as its second V-C. What is your vision for the university?

The direction of the university was set 10 years ago, we are looking to take the university to higher echelons. A decade ago, the focus was not so much on entrepreneurship and job creation. There was not so much of technology being used for the curriculum. Students

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We are focusing on an entrepreneurial mindset being developed among our students. When we look at the number of Indian start-up ventures that are coming up, it looks good in terms of world statistics but when it comes to the success of these ventures we are not as good.

On a larger context, I wish to establish AUD as one of the premier institutions of knowledge creation, dissemination in the areas of liberal arts, humanities and social sciences.

What makes AUD stand out from the other universities in the city?

The courses that we envisaged here all have direct social relevance. There is not a single course that does not connect to society or individual requirement in some way. Our students go to tribal areas for fieldwork to get a better understanding of the problems being faced in rural India. Our students are sensitive to socio-economic and political realities, and are being trained to not only be job seekers but job creators for emerging futures. They work towards developing entrepreneurial ventures for the establishment of socially relevant, economically sustainable enterprise for creating jobs and eradication of poverty.

It is tough for students from a social science background to get placed directly from college. How are you planning to reach out to employers?

AUD students have been trained to work in the social sector and will be very useful to organisations at the policy level. We have an entrepreneurship development cell that is working to set up incubation centres and we have several start-ups at present focussing primarily on social enterprises. We need to open up the closed mindset of the employer. It is this mindset that has created a problem for the social sector. The appreciation for science and technology has been much greater than the appreciation for social sector. We need to change this mindset and that can be done by reaching out to them. We are planning a way to do this in a strategic and aggressive manner.

Employers need to look at the social relevance of our courses. We also need to identify the right employers in the government sector, NGOs and organisations like the United Nations. There are accidental placements that happening right now. We need to change that.

Students are the major stakeholders and we are not creating an unemployed workforce for sure. I want my students to get placements. How to reach out to the right kind of employers is very important. We are designing a curriculum which is very niche. And we will have to go the extra mile to reach out to employers and convince them about how relevant our courses are.

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We are going to create more visibility this time with more advertisements. We used to have only one advertisement but this time we will be releasing special advertisements for some of our programmes. We are introducing a new course, which is BVoc in banking and accounting with an intake of 32 seats. Our BA admissions will start from the second week of May. We have realised that if we start admission too early we have many withdrawals. So, it is a judicious decision to start BA admission slightly later. Entrance examinations for the MA programmes will be held in the first week of July.

The administration of JNU and DU seem to be at odds with the faculty and students, with many protests and a crackdown on dissent. How do you plan to keep things cordial in AUD?

I do not see any dichotomy between the administration, faculty and students. If we are upright and moral in our administration then how can there be any problems? Majority of the universities have not failed when it comes to the relationship between students and administration apart from a few stray cases when the individuals who sit in the chair make a lot of difference.

AUD is funded by the Delhi government. The Aam Aadmi Party has announced that its focus, after school education, has now turned to higher education. Have they announced any plans for AUD?

We have a leadership role to play in the coming times. When we presented our case to the Dialogue Commission, we showed that in terms of numbers, other universities in the city will outnumber us easily in terms of students, faculty, placements and several other parameters. Expansion for us is imperative and we need to expand exponentially. Our graduating batch is only 1,300 students per year. We are a minuscule university and have to increase our student strength, course diversity and introduction of more skill-based courses.

We also need to do better in the ranking structure. We are currently 151-200 in the National Institutional Ranking Framework. We need to get into the top 100 on priority basis and then break into the top 20-50. Further, our goal is to be placed in the first 200 list of QS and Times Higher Education ranking.

In the short term, what are the changes being looked at?

We have to create new student facilities and strengthen the existing ones like clubs and societies, as well as sports activities. Construction of a new campus; university, government social sector and industry partnership will be our key focus areas. An expanding institute like AUD will require new structures in place, some of which may be a Human Resource Development Cell, an Equal Opportunity Office, International office.

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Alumni Cell, a centralised facility for all schools, supporting publications and lecture series, a career-counselling cell, and a training and placement cell.

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