



Q & A

with Dean
Sunil Saigal

Sunil Saigal was named dean of Newark College of Engineering in 2007, with an appointment as distinguished professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. He comes to NJIT from the University of South Florida, where he served as interim dean of the College of Engineering and as a professor and chairman of civil and environmental engineering, with a joint appointment in the biomedical engineering program. Saigal, who holds a PhD in aeronautics and astronautics from Purdue University, has received more than \$4.3 million in funding from federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation.



NJIT Magazine: What attracted you to NJIT?

Saigal: Bringing my family to an intellectually vibrant part of the country was a personal attraction. Of course, the location attracted me professionally as well. For example, New Jersey has one of the nation's highest concentrations of companies in the pharmaceutical and biomedical fields. Interaction with these organizations, and companies in other high-tech industries, offers great potential for helping to enhance the reputation of a fine engineering school and an outstanding university.

NJIT Magazine: Which experiences do you feel were especially important in preparing you for the post of dean at NCE?

Saigal: I have benefited from a variety of experiences, beginning with getting a sense of management styles

from my graduate advisor at Purdue. He was dean of the school of engineering at the time, and he started me thinking about what it takes to be an effective, innovative leader in academia. It's something that I continued to be aware of as I entered teaching, progressing from assistant to full professor and reflecting on what constitutes the best academic environment.

I've also managed National Science Foundation programs, which helped me gain insights into funding and managing research. My administrative experiences at the University of South Florida, where I chaired the department of civil and environmental engineering and served as interim dean of the College of Engineering, have been very important as well. You might say that I have put these experiences in the bank over the years.



Now I have the opportunity to draw upon all of them at NCE.

NJIT Magazine: What can you tell us about how you will approach your role as dean?

Saigal: I like to actively engage with people, one on one, and I try to do my best as a mentor. The success of our mission in education and research depends primarily on the success of our faculty and staff. It is my intention to do whatever I can to ensure that our people receive all of the support needed to succeed professionally in their respective positions.

I also like to give people every opportunity to share their ideas and their concerns with me. I am always available for this, and I want to be open about sharing my ideas, too.

NJIT Magazine: And some of your ideas are?

Saigal: I think we need to clarify short- and long-term goals, and we need to be specific about what we want to accomplish. For instance, I think it would be very effective for us at NCE to focus on three or four research areas where we can achieve excellence in the relatively near future. We can plant the seeds of such excellence today with the expectation of seeing initial results in, say, four to five years.

For the longer term, I would like to build on the substantial reputation for research that NCE already has and develop even more effective strategies for achieving truly national recognition in research excellence. NCE can make important contributions to NJIT by becoming a national research powerhouse.

It will be an important part of my role to move toward these goals by encouraging consensus among all concerned — faculty, staff and students. Together, we must decide how best to invest all of our intellectual and capital resources in the future.

NJIT Magazine: In addition to research, what are your educational priorities?

Saigal: What we can do for the future success of our students is on the same level as research in my mind. They are the two sides of the same coin. Today, the reality is that we must do all that we can to prepare students to become global leaders in science and technology. I know that you will hear the same thing from many people. But that is the reality of the 21st century. Preparation for leadership in this globalized environment is what will continue to enhance our reputation as a college of engineering.

We also have to offer undergraduate and graduate programs that prepare students for careers in disciplines where professional demand is greatest. Bio-related

technologies, energy, and infrastructure development are some examples. That's why we are planning new master's degrees as well as taking a close look at all of our current programs. A very significant aspect of this process is making it possible to serve a greater number of students, especially on the graduate level. Reevaluating prerequisites to make graduate study more accessible to non-engineering undergraduates and offering working professionals the flexibility to customize programs in their fields are important steps in this direction.

NJIT Magazine: What are your thoughts on involving students in research, and what are the challenges of doing so at NCE, and NJIT in general?

Saigal: First, let me say that education and research are inseparable at a university such as NJIT. Engaging students in research at all levels also adds great value to their university experience and will enhance our educational reputation as well. It benefits everyone.

However, let me add that there are definite challenges. One is that many NJIT students work in order to afford a college education. We must take such a demand on their time into consideration when designing a curriculum that emphasizes the research experience. We must make it possible for them to participate in this key aspect of an education in science and technology to the greatest degree possible. We must recognize the needs of all our students and be flexible and creative in meeting those needs.

NJIT Magazine: How can alumni help to achieve NCE's goals and objectives?

Saigal: Alumni have helped to support the college for many years, and in various ways. But we need even greater involvement. That's why I have personally reached out to alumni groups in New Jersey, and on recent trips to Connecticut, Florida, and Washington D.C. While financial support is always important, we need greater alumni assistance with recruiting students across the country, and in key advisory capacities.

NCE alumni have achieved positions of leadership in many industries and in government. Their advice and perspectives are critical when it comes to the future direction of our educational and research programs. Quite simply, alumni are NCE's best champions, our best marketeers. ■

INTERVIEWER: Jean M. Llewellyn is executive director of university communications at NJIT.

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