

India-Canada Education Summit 2011

A Shastri Delegation of Indian University Vice-Chancellors representing twenty one Universities and the Chair of University Grants Commission, India and a contingent of twenty plus Canadian University Presidents/designates participated in the two-day India- Canada Education Summit held on June 17-18 2011 at Carleton University. Initiated and supported by the Indian High Commission in Canada, the Shastri Vice-Chancellors Delegation initiative was piloted by Shastri President Prof. Sunaina Singh. The Summit was co-organized by Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute in partnership with Carleton University, and co-sponsored by AUCC (Association of Universities and Colleges Canada) Canada) and DFAIT (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada).

Shastri President, Prof. Sunaina Singh, celebrated in her welcoming address the Education Summit as a milestone in India-Canada education collaboration and cooperation, and emphasized the need to keep the momentum going for furthering the joint educational agenda

Mr. John Baird, Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Govt. of Canada delivered the inaugural speech. "The relationship between Canada and India has come so far over the past five years," said Baird commending the efforts of both countries in strengthening and developing India-Canada relations based on the leadership of the prime ministers of these two great nations. "We look forward to accelerating deliverables as part of the Canada-India Memorandum of Understanding in higher education cooperation."



From Right to Left : Smt. D. Purandeswari, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Govt. of India shaking hands with John Baird, Foreign Affairs Minister, Govt. of Canada, H.E. S. M. Gavai, Indian High Commissioner to Canada, Prof. Sunaina Singh President, SICI and Prof. Braj Sinha, Vice President/President elect, SICI.

Leading the Shastri delegation of Indian Vice Chancellors was Minister of State for Human Resource Development Smt. Daggubati Purandeswari, who delivered the key note address at the inauguration of the Education Summit and Shastri Engaging India Conference taking place simultaneously on Carleton grounds. "Education can no longer be considered a goal in itself, but rather should be considered a powerful driver of socio-economic change." said Minister Purandeswari, as she emphasized the importance of the current reforms being implemented to improve India's education. Minister Purandeswari also honoured the Shastri Institute and reaffirmed her support by attending the Shastri Canadian Member Council Meeting on June 19th also at Carleton University.

Among the speakers at the Summit inauguration were Indian High Commissioner to Canada Shri Shashishekar Gavai, who noted that India's high growth rate makes it attractive to foreign investors, but added that "without an adequate, educated, and trained workforce, it is very difficult to maintain high economic growth ... I strongly believe that foreign universities can add enormous Value to what we would be doing in India."

Prof. Braj Sinha, the Shastri Vice President/President Elect also spoke on the occasion. He emphasized that administrative leadership and academic leadership need to work closely in developing a bi-national education blueprint for enhanced student experience, heightened research and scholarly collaborations. He also acknowledged the hard work and leadership of Carleton President, Dr. Roseanne Runte in organizing the Education Summit.

Among the noted speakers at the Summit was also Prof. Ved Prakash, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, India who described the commission's five-year planning cycle and the role and goals of Institutions of Higher Education in India. The plenary sessions of the Education Summit were conducted in conjunction with and attended by the Shastri Engaging India Conference delegates who included institutional member representatives from the Shastri Canadian Member Council and eminent academics from Canada and India. Among the plenary session speakers was the Hon. Kevin Lynch, Vice-Chair of BMO Financial Group and former Clerk of the Privy Council, described the challenges faced by Canada and India and offered some exciting solutions. Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, the father of India's Green Revolution, also delivered an uplifting speech exhorting the participants to think of Education as means of social change and empowering the downtrodden in pursuit of a fulfilling life and individual dignity. He emphasized how through innovative thinking and personal dedication individuals can truly make difference in their lifetime, thus adding an inspirational note to the Summit.

The Education Summit deliberations resulted in the identification of obstacles, and the participants in the summit made some concrete suggestions regarding ways and means of enhancing Educational collaboration between Canada and India. These included suggestions for use of mobile technology including the cell phone applications available to students in both countries; creating a common platform for approved transfer credits reducing the need for case by case evaluations and acceptance; developing a student experience as well as content and contact hour based approach to mutual credit recognition; need for a web portal for use by individual researchers and the Universities looking for appropriate partners and linkages; support for student and faculty mobility to enhance educational experience and research collaborations; and strengthening institutional ties by identifying specific institutions with areas of excellence. A suggestion was made to create a Committee for the purposes of working on the credit recognition and credit transfer issue.

The Education Summit has undoubtedly paved the way and inspired the initiation of future collaborations and initiatives to further facilitate joint ventures and exchanges. In the concluding panel discussion of the Summit many participants lauded the work of the Shastri Institute in promoting student and faculty mobility, as well as research and scholarly collaborations. It was suggested that Shastri needs to be supported by all parties concerned as the nodal agency to support and promote these areas of the Canada-India educational relationship in a more expanded and concerted fashion.