

We will continue to expand as a world-class varsity

EducationWorld October 2021 | Cover Story Magazine

Dilip Thakore interviewed Dr. (Prof.) C. Raj Kumar, an alum of Madras, Delhi, Oxford, Harvard, and Hong Kong universities and founding vice chancellor of the top-ranked O.P. Jindal Global University (estb.2009). Excerpts:

Although the wholly residential JGU's campus has been under lockdown for over 60 weeks, the word is that you have been able to maintain learning continuity of your 8,200 students throughout the lockdown crisis. How satisfied are you with JGU's learning continuity record during the pandemic?

As a university deeply committed to promoting academic excellence, we switched to digitally-enabled classes in March 2020 immediately after the lockdown. We constituted a Planned Intervention in Virtual Learning and Online Teaching (PIVOT) task force to design a process-driven programme to cover all academic and administrative operations within less than a week after the lockdown was extended. Under our PIVOT programme, we held over 20,000 online classes, achieved 100 percent digitisation of the library and conducted 1,250 online examinations by the end of 2020. Moreover in the academic year 2021-2022, we have built digital capacity to fully support our current student base of 8,200 students and 910 faculty.



Therefore, I am proud that during the 16-month lockdown period, we have not only ensured 100 percent teaching-learning continuity, but also created value for our academic community through numerous initiatives. Given JGU's swift transition to digital education to maintain academic continuity during the pandemic, we have been awarded the QS I-GAUGE 'E-Learning Excellence for Academic Digitisation (E-LEAD)' certification.

When do you expect to resume teaching-learning and research on the JGU campus?

Reopening the campus of our fully residential university is subject to directives issued by the government of India and/or state government of Haryana. Meanwhile, we have been maintaining our campus with all preparations to safeguard the health and safety of students and faculty, and to welcome them on campus as soon as government regulations permit.

We have also prepared a plan to reopen our campus in phases so that at any given point of time, to maintain the prescribed social distancing norms, only a select fraction of students will be on campus. We are fully prepared with a hybrid learning model of online and in-person classes.

Additionally, we have upgraded JGU's on-campus health infrastructure. We have built indoor influenza wards with essential equipment to handle any emergency and have constituted a JGU Medical Advisory Board comprising distinguished professionals from the medical sciences to advise us on ways and means to improve the health infrastructure and ecosystem of the JGU community.

Going back 12 years, what were the major objectives of JGU when it was registered in 2009?

Our vision was to build a multidisciplinary, research-driven university providing excellence in teaching, research and community service.

More specifically in 2009, our major objectives were to provide a globally benchmarked environment of academic freedom to our staff and students. We set out to build an academic ecosystem offering an intellectually engaging, discovery-based learning environment for our students through internships in leading organisations; semester abroad programmes, participation in community service projects as also in national and international academic, cultural, and sports events. We were also determined to create and maintain a research culture that encourages academic collaboration and work with local, regional and international communities.

How satisfied are you with progress of the university 12 years on?

The milestones we have successfully crossed in this short span of time is very satisfying. We have been awarded the NAAC 'A' accreditation and graded autonomy status and JGU is satisfactorily ranked in the QS Asia, BRICS and World Rankings, and is ranked India's #1 private university in the latest QS World University Rankings. Moreover JGLS — our law school — is ranked India's #1 law school and #76 worldwide in the QS World University Rankings by subjects. JGU has also been conferred the status of an Institution of Eminence by the Government of India. And most recently QS has ranked us among the Top 500 universities in the world for graduate employability. By all metrics, this is a good record of institution and nation-building.

For this, substantial credit has to be given to our founding chancellor and benefactor, Mr. Naveen Jindal for his complete faith, philanthropy, and excellent leadership. This support has played a major role in the development of JGU into a higher education institution of national and global excellence.

Conceptualising and developing great academic institutions requires building firm foundations. What in your opinion are the essential characteristics of great universities?

I believe the defining characteristics of the world's most respected universities are academic freedom and institutional autonomy; multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning culture; merit-based transparent admissions process; international outlook; outstanding faculty comprising inspiring teachers; strong culture of research and publication; respect for institutional accreditation and rankings; a not-for-profit ethos; and diverse, inclusive faculty and students communities.

Despite its young age, JGU is currently ranked India's #1 private university by QS, London and #3 by EducationWorld. How important in your opinion are independent external institutional rankings?

Independent institutional rankings frameworks have become indicators of institutional quality. They measure the real-world impact of universities and success as knowledge creators. Therefore, it's very important that Indian universities embrace rankings frameworks and accreditation processes that benchmark them against universities in India and around the world.

We are proud to be ranked India's #1 private university in QS World University Rankings and #3 by EducationWorld. I believe that commitment to fair and objective ranking league tables prompt education institutions to identify areas for innovation and improvement so that we can provide our students the best possible education.

What's your take on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which proposes wide-ranging reforms in higher education? How prepared is JGU to implement these reforms?

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 heralds a new imagination for the Indian higher education system. It contains inspiring vision and potential to nurture world-class universities and higher education institutions in India. However, this vision requires commitment to implement the systemic and sustainable reforms envisaged by NEP 2020. Also, the proposal to establish an Atmanirbhar University and Atmanirbhar Higher Education system in India is truly inspiring. It combines the vision of John Henry Newman's 'Idea of a University' with the Humboldtian imagination of modern research universities to create multidisciplinary, democratic, inclusive, aspirational and international higher education institutions.

JGU already embodies much of what has been envisaged in the NEP 2020 for universities in India. Therefore, as a young, agile and evolving institution, JGU is ready to implement further reforms if required, to be 100 percent aligned with the goals set for Indian universities in NEP 2020.

Industry receptivity, aka placements, is an important measure of academic excellence. How satisfied are you with JGU's placements record?

As a young 12-year-old non-STEM university, JGU has had to work intelligently to ensure suitable placements for our graduates. To this end, we have established a dedicated Office of Career Services which has played an important role in collaborating with 1,200 public, corporate and non-profit organisations in India and abroad. This office also enables students to take the entrepreneurial option and promote their own ventures.

Our sustained effort in ensuring satisfactory placements for our graduates has been recognised externally. In QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2022, JGU is ranked among the Top 500 universities worldwide making us the youngest and the only Indian university focused on social sciences, arts and humanities to be included in the international employability rankings league table.

What are the management's plans for the expansion and development of JGU in the post-pandemic years? During the past 12 years, JGU has grown from one school with 112 students to 12 schools with over 8,200 students, and over 910 faculty members with the Jindal School of Languages & Literature and Jindal School of Public Health and Human Development being the latest additions.

As we move forward into our second decade, we will continue to expand as a world-class multidisciplinary university. This programme includes establishment of new schools; physical expansion and upgradation of our campus; strengthening digital governance; raising our rankings to evolve into a respected world-class institution; engagement in research to build a knowledge society; development of global perspectives; and engagement with the community for nation-building.

Also read: [The Very Extraordinary Dr C Raj Kumar](#)