

[Section Home](#)

[Management](#)

[Marketing](#)

[Strategy](#)

[E-Business & Tech](#)

[Books & Ideas](#)

[Columnists](#)

[People & Careers](#)

[B-schools](#)

BS Headlines

Hindi, Urdu to be taught in US varsity

Archana Mohan / Ahmedabad December 18, 2006

In a landmark step for global education, the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) has been selected by the American government's National Security Education Programme (NSEP) to create the first national flagship language programme in Hindi and Urdu in the US.

UT-Austin will receive over \$700,000 (around Rs 3.2 crore) in funding from NSEP in 2006-07 to launch the new flagship programme. The rationale behind the programme for the US government is to produce more professionals with high level of proficiency in these languages for security reasons.

NSEP was established by the Congress in 1991 to address the rising need for Americans to communicate and compete globally through knowledge of the languages and cultures of other countries. NSEP had previously launched comprehensive programmes of instruction in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian and Russian.

"Ideally, we are looking for students who already have some knowledge of Hindi and/or Urdu. That favours students of South Asian heritage, but we plan to balance that with other highly accomplished students with an interest in South Asia who will be starting their study of Hindi and/or Urdu from a scratch. Our mandate is to take on ten students the first year, and twenty in following years," James Brow, Director of the South Asia Institute at University of Texas-Austin told Business Standard.

Since the first year of the programme is set for 2007-2008, a recruitment initiative of academically excellent high-school students with some knowledge of Hindi or Urdu is under process and the university in a summer language camp will enhance language skills of entrants.

The principal faculty involved in the flagship programme are current members of UT's Department of Asian Studies. However, the recruitment of additional faculty, either from India or elsewhere, is a possibility, said Brow.

For every year except the third, which will be spent in India, the programme will offer two core courses each semester; a flagship Language Course and a flagship Area-Content Course.

The flagship language course, which is at the heart of the flagship curriculum, will guide students to fluency in Hindi focused on contemporary issues, such as the environment, rural development, globalisation, religion, and gender.

The complementary flagship area-content courses will be regularly scheduled courses taught by members of various departments that contain an additional component in Hindi-Urdu that is specifically designed for students in the flagship programme.

These two core offerings will be offered alongside courses in the individual student's major discipline.

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