

India Initiative to bolster S. Asian Studies

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[Divya Subrahmanyam](#)

Staff Reporter

Published Thursday, December 4, 2008

Since the launch of the Yale India Initiative two weeks ago, the South Asian Studies program has been drawing up a wish list of additional programs and hirings in anticipation of a large-scale expansion.

Program administrators said they hope the initiative will help them build up a strong core group of **faculty** — particularly in anthropology, political **science** and history — as well as expand resources for studying South Asian languages, although professors and students differ slightly on where the **expansion** should focus. Still, the field of South Asian studies had been growing rapidly at Yale even before the initiative was announced: The South Asian Studies Council was founded in 2000, and South Asian Studies was established as a secondary major just last year.

“It’s not just about becoming good at the study of India,” said professor K. “Shivi” Sivaramakrishnan, chair of the South Asian Studies Council. “It’s about using the study of India to enrich the production of knowledge in many disciplines.”

A faculty search is currently underway to appoint a professor in anthropology and South Asian studies, and Sivaramakrishnan said the program has begun discussions with the political science and history departments to make joint **appointments** there as well. The goal, he said, is to have at least two new professors from each of those three key departments also affiliated with the South Asian Studies program.

After those appointments have been made, Sivaramakrishnan said, the program will work with the professional schools, such as the **School of Management** and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, to develop faculty with specialized area expertise. He also said he would like to see the program grow in the areas of contemporary history, art history and music.

But professors and students affiliated with the program differ on what areas the expansion should prioritize.

Andrew Samuel '09, a South Asian studies major, said though he thinks offerings in anthropology and political science are already satisfactory, he would like to see more courses in South Asian literature.

Phyllis Granoff, former chair of the South Asian Studies Council, said she thinks the program needs to strengthen its pre-modern history offerings, add faculty members in literature and philosophy, and bolster the **library** budget.

“We need also to keep strengthening our languages, both classical and modern,” added Granoff.

Currently, Yale offers Sanskrit, Hindi and Tamil, though the languages are taught by a handful of professors, and certain levels have not always been offered every year, Sivaramakrishnan said. For example, there are currently two instructors teaching Hindi from level one to level five, with over 50 students enrolled, said Seema Khurana, a senior lecturer in Hindi.

To remedy this, administrators have initiated searches for senior lectors in Hindi and Sanskrit, as well as a lecturer in Tamil. In the future, administrators will consider adding Urdu and Bengali, said Ashwini Deo, linguistics professor and coordinator of language study within South Asian Studies program. Both languages are spoken in India as well as in other South Asian countries. (Urdu is spoken in Pakistan and Bengali in Bangladesh.)

Though the India initiative will increase the program's resources for **research** related to India, Granoff said the program will not neglect the other South Asian countries.

“I don't think we should focus exclusively on India,” Granoff said. “I don't think we ignore the other areas, but maybe we need to increase emphasis there.”

Deo will soon travel to Mumbai to work on establishing a Yale Summer **Study Abroad** language immersion program in Mumbai by summer 2010, and she said she wants to generate more such opportunities for interested students.

While the faculty searches are taking place, the program will continue to appoint several visiting professors and postdoctoral scholars each year to increase the

variety of courses offered, Sivaramakrishnan said.

“We want Yale to become a place where younger, junior scholars have an opportunity to come here and do research,” Sivaramakrishnan said. “We want it to be a hub for scholarship and scholarly exchange.”

And in a few years, when the program has grown sufficiently, discussions may begin to convert the South Asian Studies major from a dependent, second major to one that can be taken alone, Sivaramakrishnan said.

But first, the program must attract interested students and potential majors, he added. Only two South Asian Studies **majors** will graduate with the class of 2009 in May.

Though centers for South Asian study exist at many of Yale’s peer institutions — such as Harvard and Columbia universities, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Chicago — Sivaramakrishnan said the University is not modeling the reinvented program on any other such program, calling Yale’s “unique” and more ambitious than the efforts by other institutions.

“While we will continue to learn from well-respected programs around us, we are also charting a pioneering path,” he wrote in an e-mail.