

A Day in the Life of UB President Satish K. Tripathi

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Patrick Lageraen:

Welcome back to another episode of the UB School of Management podcast. My name is Patrick Lageraen and I'll be your host along with Eric Raine. Today we have a very special guest, the University of Buffalo President Satish K. Tripathi. We talk about what the president actually does, his journey from growing up in India to the role of president at UB, and some really cool initiatives happening such as the \$400 million investment from New York State into a new AI supercomputing building housed at UB as part of the Empire AI consortium. All right, President Tripathi, thanks so much for taking the time to sit down with us.

Satish Tripathi:

My pleasure.

Patrick Lageraen:

So one of the most rewarding parts of recording all of these episodes over the past year, especially with professors in leadership, is getting to peek behind the curtain, if you will. We're students so we only see the student perspective and we consume the university's product, which is an education, but I think it's really valuable and interesting to learn about what it takes to make that happen. So just getting right into it, what is the official job description of the president? And in other words, what do you actually do in a day?

Satish Tripathi:

That's a very good question. What I do day-to-day is different from day-to-day. Let me talk about job description. It is really work on behalf of our UB's mission of excellence and impact. That's the job description. And it's a tripartite mission. If you think about mission of a research university, it's the research scholarship, creative activities. It's educating the student, next generation of scholars, workers and so on, and also the impact in the community, what kind of community service we do. So that's our mission and we are always focused on those three pillars.

It's the research, it's education, and service. So how do we really make meaningful impact given that those are the three categories that we work on? So we enhance the research productivity, continue to

elevate the academic profile of our students and prepare them to live and lead in a global world. If you think about why do the universities exist, they exist because they're students. And so our main focus really is to prepare the students to have a successful life in whatever they do, whether they go and work somewhere or they start their own business or they do public service, whatever job they take, they should be prepared to do that. And we also integrate inclusivity into all aspect of our university. And of course, one of the things really important for us here in Western New York is how do we contribute to the prosperity, vibrancy, and health of Western New York?

None of this can be achieved in silos. This is really something that we should be emphasizing in. We could not succeed on these front without the full investment of student, faculty and staff

Patrick Lageraen:

All working together, right?

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. So rewarding to see how investment on our scholarly community is our goal, this is really very important I think. And as I said before, the success of students is what really can be valued as what we do. Now, in terms of your other part of the question, I said earlier that no two days are alike. That said, think about a lot of meetings, think about our cabinet meeting, faculty senate, UB council, community stakeholders, SUNY president meeting, AAU, Mid-American conference, college football playoff.

So you can really think about a set of meetings. I also have with the provost, we go and meet with departments faculty. We have about 100 departments on the campus. So far, we have met about 40 of them this last few months. So that also is really important part to see what's going on in the department. But any of these meetings, actually our goal is still the same. To look at how we are doing respect to education, respect to research, and our community service. The responsibilities are really seven day a week, morning, evenings. It's not nine to five job. Of course I knew that when I took the job, so I'm not saying-

Eric Raine:

No bankers hours. Yeah.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. So it's hard to predict a given day though.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. Maybe could you give us an example day in the life, maybe today, for example. So we're starting your day with the podcast. What's next from here?

Satish Tripathi:

I started the day much earlier. I had a meeting at eight o'clock, a phone meeting with some colleagues. As you know, last night we had some protests here and so we looked at the situation, what happened, reevaluated it. Then I had a meeting with this candidate for CIO job on the campus. I had a meeting with my chief of staff and now I'm meeting with you guys and I have a lunch with one of the deans and there are probably four or five other meetings before I joined the 100th anniversary celebration for school of management around 05:00 or 05:30.

Patrick Lageraen:

Busy day.

Satish Tripathi:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

Well, we feel very fortunate to be able to be fit into such a busy schedule today, especially amongst all those things you mentioned. So we appreciate that.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. So coming back to your job, why do you enjoy it? What do you find valuable in it?

Satish Tripathi:

One of the things, as I just mentioned, no two days are the same and I enjoy that. It's not monotonous in terms of what we do. There's so many incredible people that I interact with and these are our faculty, students, and staff. For example, you two, you doing a great job really podcasting and working with the faculty and community leaders and students.

How many such events are broadcasts are on the campus? Not many. And I get to know you. You think about different backgrounds of people that are on the campus from all over the world. You think about

the major issues in the community and how we are involved in solving. So really there are a lot of things. You can make an impact not only in a life of a student, you can make an impact in the city and the region that we are in. And not that I'm making that impact, but I see the impact being made by our faculty and students and staff locally here. So really it's a very noble job. It has goals there and I'm just enjoying it. So really in this every day we are working to realize UB's mission and the mission is really noble.

If you work in a scholarly environment, there's no parallel anywhere else because you got multiple perspectives. You have the whole campus here from humanities and arts all the way to the medical sciences. And think about the impact that our public health and medical sciences made during the pandemic. It was very tough for our of us, but the whole UB's contribution in terms of the health of the Western New York regions was remarkable.

And that's what makes me really think about the enjoyment we have. Think about impact that the school of management makes with the entrepreneurs, with respect to the leadership training that it provides, the students it provides, the kind of work our students do, helping in terms of even accounting and tax preparation. All of that really makes it so exciting. I get a lot of the credit, but really it's not me. It's really what we get done here by our students and our faculty. So I really like it. I also like meeting with the alumni and that's really a great part of the job. People feel good. They most likely will say that their life was made here. It's changed their life.

Patrick Lageraen:

I've heard that so many times.

Eric Raine:

It's such a profound impact to be participating in this community.

Satish Tripathi:

That's fantastic. Yeah.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely.

Satish Tripathi:

And one of the things I want to say is while we make impact locally, our impact is global actually. The research we do, the scholarship we do, the student go all over the world, the impact is really a lot more and it's not just locally here.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. I mean quite literally, one example would be the Singapore Institute of Management. You can go take UB classes literally on the other side of the world.

Satish Tripathi:

And we have a campus in Singapore. They housed at the SIM but really these are our students. And many of them come and spend a year here. And you can go any part of the world, there are UB graduates.

Patrick Lageraen:

It's really cool. So conversely to what you enjoy about the job, what would be some less glamorous parts? What's something maybe people don't expect about the role of the president?

Satish Tripathi:

Glamorous is kind of a tough world, less glamorous. I think the part people don't understand is how much travel is involved.

Patrick Lageraen:

Good point.

Satish Tripathi:

Whether it's travel to get to meet our alumni, whether it's travel to do fundraising, whether it's travel to meet with the elected, going to Washington. I mean, there's really a lot more travel involved. I personally, I mean I don't mind travel, but it really is... And I don't get jet lag actually.

Patrick Lageraen:

Really?

Satish Tripathi:

I can sleep on the plane, I can get up in Beijing or in Bangalore without much jet lag and I work and come back really.

Eric Raine:

That's a superpower.

Satish Tripathi:

That's a superpower I have. My wife on the other hand has trouble.

Eric Raine:

So how much as a percentage of time throughout a given year are you traveling, like a quarter of the time?

Satish Tripathi:

Yeah, I would say about quarter to a third.

Patrick Lageraen:

It's a lot.

Eric Raine:

That's a lot of travel.

Satish Tripathi:

But it's rewarding too. It's not glamorous in the sense that I'm on the camera, I'm speaking somewhere, but it is very rewarding. It's very satisfying to talk to our alum friends and get to know what they did here and how they value it. I once went to, I remember my first year in my job and I was going to meet alum in Los Angeles. That morning, I was appointed by the governor as the co-chair of the Regional Economic Development Council.

In the afternoon, late afternoon the evening, I was in Los Angeles and I met with, he was a business graduate who was very high up in aisle company, I would say second rank. And he knew exactly what was going on and he had graduated 40 years ago. He knew exactly what's going on at UB. He was reading the news and immediately said, "Oh, so you were in this in the morning" and so on. Such a dedicated alum, following and of course supporter of UB and from Buffalo, following what's going on in

the city, what's going on in the UB and how things are going. That's really, you don't get it. Somebody who's been out 40 years.

Eric Raine:

Very true, especially at that level of a role too.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly, and knowing what's going on. So some of these things, you don't get it here. You have to travel to find.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right. Yeah. Well, I guess that's a testament to UBS communication department.

Satish Tripathi:

Definitely.

Patrick Lageraen:

They're putting out the right materials.

Eric Raine:

Keeping people informed of everything.

Satish Tripathi:

And the only thing he followed only few things he followed. One was really Bills through the newspaper and one was UB.

Eric Raine:

Well, one of the things that we did want to ask you about was maybe what are some of the most unexpected challenges that you've overcome as you've been rising through your professional journey over these years to become the university president? If you could talk to us a little bit about what that journey was like and maybe some of the challenges you overcame along the way.

Satish Tripathi:

So my journey is slightly different than you'll find a lot of academics. Although I'm a fourth generation teacher, my father was a principal. My grandfather was a Sanskrit scholar with his own school. So I was expected to be teacher. When I was growing up in a very small village in India, I was expected to teach and I loved it. I wanted to teach. I wanted to teach high school math and science. I love math from very beginning, and I always tell people it wasn't because of my father, it was because of my mother. She was really good in math, and so I could do math very easily. And so I did my 10th grade. In India, the 10th grade is called high school. The 12th grade is called intermediate college and then you go to college. And those exams, the 10th and 12th are board exams run for the whole state and you pass or fail, go back again and do the whole year.

So I did the 10th grade with math, science, biology, physics, et cetera, and some humanity subjects. And then there was nothing in science near the village so I went to 50 miles away to hostel, which is boarding, and did my 11th and 12th. And I still wanted to teach math and science.

When I went to college, I enjoyed it more. And I felt that I can not only do teaching in high school, I could teach in a university. So I did physics, math and statistics, and then I did the statistics. And most of the people who did well in my university, the top few people in the class, did go for PhD, but they came to North America mostly because institutions were good here, scholarships were available. In those days, India did not allow you to take a foreign exchange, so you had to get a scholarship to get out. And so I came to Canada, did my PhD, I did in computer science. One of the things I did actually, and I appreciate myself, is I was willing to change. I did physics and statistics and I loved that, but I learned a little bit of computer science in India, and then I decided this is the area I want to get in. Think about it. This is 1970s, not many computer scientists then.

Eric Raine:

But that would be the future.

Satish Tripathi:

And didn't know it was the future, right?

Eric Raine:

At the time. Yeah, exactly.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. So I did PhD in computer science at Maryland and great department. I mean not Maryland, I'm sorry, you should go back. I did PhD in computer science at Toronto, great computer science department. And I got a job right away as a faculty member at University of Maryland in computer science. Went through the ranks and really loved it.

I had excellent students, a lot of PhDs. 10 years later when I became full professor, I was asked to be the chair of the department, a very large department, about 45 to 50 faculty, 250 PhD students, 1400 graduates. And here I'm 37-year-old. I'm the chair of the department. I loved the time I was chair, and my research was never better than when I was chair. And I did teach a class as well. So really, I always tell my colleagues, faculty members that if you get a chance to be the chair, be chair of the department. You're very close to the faculty, you're close to the students. I stepped down as a chair and I started to go back to being the researcher and faculty, which I did. But then I got a chance to establish a new school of engineering at University of California, Riverside.

Patrick Lageraen:

Interesting.

Satish Tripathi:

Now, this was really something which I had never thought. This was something that other people thought might be a risk for me because it's not established. I'm in top 12 departments in the country. I'm doing well. I thought if I need to really build something, this was a chance to do it.

Eric Raine:

That was the chance, yeah.

Satish Tripathi:

Right, So my older son was already in college in California. The younger one was senior in high school, so we could steer him towards west if we wanted to. My wife was not as happy, but she was fine because our son was in California and we had lived in Maryland for 19 years. So we went to California, took a chance. Again, I took a chance from being a high school teacher to a college teacher, to statistics, to computer science to...

Eric Raine:

And it represents another big change, right?

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. So I always tell people that you should have a path that what you might want to do, but you'll be willing to change.

Patrick Lageraen:

Be flexible.

Satish Tripathi:

And sometimes you take risk because sometimes it pays off, for me it paid off, but it may not. So you should always look at what the fallback and what you do. As a professor, that wasn't really a big risk. You could always go back and be a professor, do your research, do the teaching. I think that was a great decision for me to go to California. And then I came here. I was there for seven years. Great job there. People are doing well. Came here in 2004 as a provost. So that's my journey from a very humble village beginning where actually there was no school in the village. The primary school was two miles by foot.

Eric Raine:

And then taking a 50-mile change.

Satish Tripathi:

Change. And I always tell the story and you can actually edit it if you don't like it. I always tell the story that I used to tell my sons that I walked two miles, three miles actually to my junior high school each way and they never believed me.

Patrick Lageraen:

Uphill both ways.

Satish Tripathi:

They used to say that, but I don't come from hills, I come from flatland. So they never believed it. But last year I took my son and daughter-in-law. Daughter in-law is from her, so she had never been to India and she wanted to see my school. So we went to our village, although nobody lives there, but there's a house there. And so we went there and then I said, "Okay, let's go to my school."

Patrick Lageraen:

And you walked?

Eric Raine:

Did you walk?

Satish Tripathi:

No. Good question, yeah. But we drove. We didn't have enough time. We drove and it was after we reached there, my son said, yeah, it is three miles.

Eric Raine:

He's like, you weren't lying about that.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly.

Eric Raine:

But no snow though, right?

Satish Tripathi:

No snow. But actually our schools in April and May, it would be 110 degrees.

Eric Raine:

Wow.

Satish Tripathi:

But we walked on the road and there were trees on both sides of the road and they were mostly mango trees, so we could eat too.

Eric Raine:

That's awesome. Well, what a journey. I have to say too, being fourth generation teacher, like you talked about, you've definitely served your family proud and then some on the journey that you took in going into academia and then looking to see where you've come to today. So thanks for sharing that with us.

The next question going off of that, more specific to your role as president would be maybe what some of the most unexpected challenges you've faced in the role of president here at the University of Buffalo in the years that you've served?

Satish Tripathi:

Our students today have come a page in traveling times. If you think about from many different viewpoints. And one of those is really the pandemic. You guys are the pandemic kids who went to high school and had a tough time. During the senior year you come to campus, you still had tough time.

And this really has been something that we all realize that we are never prepared for everything. The implications on the lives of not only the students, the faculty and staff, the mental anguish and mental impact that has happened with that. And then if you think about the question of our future of our planet, the climate issues that are real, these are really, and then the third aspect, we can talk more about a lot of things, but the third aspect really is the incredible social divisiveness in the country that really has, and then of course the Middle East concerns. There are a lot of things that our students are experiencing, our faculty or staff are experiencing. So this means that not only we need to focus on the academic preparedness of our students, but we have to commit on everything else as well. We have to commit on their mental health. And as you see Governor Hochul has made an emphasis on that, provided money. SUNY has put that money on the campuses and we have hired more counselors.

We have to look at the mental health of the students every day, how there is not just the times of the exams and other things, it's all the time.

Eric Raine:

Overall wellness.

Satish Tripathi:

All the moments. So really this is the most unexpected struggle. And I'm sure at different times people had different struggles to go through, but right now it seems like a lot of these things are coming together. So I would say that's really what I feel is something that has been unexpected.

Patrick Lageraen:

So just thinking more about your role as the president, I know earlier we discussed how busy your schedule is and there's so many different areas at UB, buildings, projects, clubs, organizations.

Eric Raine:

Hundred departments.

Patrick Lageraen:

And at any point you could be asked about any one of them at a happy hour, a meeting, how do you stay up to date?

Satish Tripathi:

So I have to read a lot. Not only you have to be up-to-date about UB, you got to be up-to-date about what's going on around, not only in Western New York, in the state of New York, nationally, internationally. I mean that's something that we got to... Fortunately, there are a lot of avenues you can get the information from. Some not so correct, but you got a lot of avenues to get information. On the campus actually, I have frequent meetings with leadership, talk to the students, provost and I walk every day on the campus. And this is something that I find really very refreshing because we meet with the students while walking. During the winter, of course we try to walk inside, but there are students inside there too, and that gives us a chance to peek and see what's going on. Not that it's complete information, but we get a view what's going on.

I personally meet the leadership. I have faculty dinners that I host five every semester, randomly selected faculty, different ranks from different units. That gives me a chance to look at more longer term information, not day to day. And it's not easy to be totally up-to-date. And I rely on my senior leadership, I rely on the faculty leadership. I go to the faculty senate meetings and get information from there, what's going on and talk to people in the community because not everything you get, I'm on a couple of major community organizations. I get information from there. So of course, there's a lot of information these days and one of the things we all have to learn is how to filter it and I hope I can filter.

Patrick Lageraen:

Because you would just have too much.

Satish Tripathi:

Yeah, yeah. I mean think about your life. You're getting too much information yourself.

Eric Raine:

Constantly bombarded.

Satish Tripathi:

Bombarded and what you trust, what's the right information? And hopefully the four-year education here gives you a sense of-

Eric Raine:

How to think through it.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly, what's the right information. We all have to be able to really think about that. We have a big center here on information integrity, which is really part of the AI initiative. And they are always asked about, is this right video or is this right thing? Even the major publishing houses, ask them at our campus, but we can't ask that every time. We are getting all this feed. But I can't claim that I know everything going on, but I try to know as much as I can.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right. You have to at least be intelligent enough to have a conversation about it and learn more.

Eric Raine:

Critically thinking through it all, right?

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. And I think one of the things that's very important is really not only the verbal information, but one should be able to look at the numbers and think about does this make sense, right? I mean that's really so critical these days. People throw numbers out and they are a lot of times inconsistent. So hopefully our intuitive thinking, our critical thinking provides us that way to think about numbers as well.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. So being a School of Management podcast, I did want to address that at least once. Just from your perspective of seeing the whole school, because there's so many different schools within the university. How do you see the school of management as part of the university?

Satish Tripathi:

So as I said before, this is the 100th anniversary for School of Management. And if you look at the list of people that it has produced, it's remarkable. It's Fortune 100, Fortune 500, CEO's, chief officers of different kinds, founders. It really has a remarkable history, not only globally and nationally, but locally as well. And to me, the local economy is very critical to what UB does. And the programs that we have, whether it's the entrepreneurship program here, I think we are ranked one of the top in our entrepreneurship program. Just recently the ranking came out.

If you look at the Center for Leadership that produces and trains the people in the CEO role for a startup and things like that. If you look at the community impact that makes through the tax preparation, other advising that goes on, I think it plays a very critical role relationship between the community and UB, relationship between business and UB and provides that leadership.

In addition, of course, the people who have been so successful because the education they got, and they always will tell you it's the education they get here. And hopefully you'll tell the same thing when you became very rich and famous that this is the four years at UB School of Management that got you there. We are very proud of the school of management and what it has done. And it's not just contributing separately. I think there's a lot of relationships within the university. There are a lot of joint programs, whether it's MD/MBA, with the JD/MD, social Work MD or undergraduate engineering and MBA. So there's a lot of really programs with MBA that exist on the campus and that attract some top students here as well. So impact is not just isolated to SOM, the impact really is on the other units on the campus.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Eric Raine:

I agree.

Satish Tripathi:

So that part really people forget, but having a great school of management also improves everything else that we have.

Eric Raine:

That's very true. I'm a Pharm D/MBA dual degree student, and I can second that for sure. The relationship between school of Pharmacy and school of management and the ability to be able to be pursuing one path while also simultaneously gaining skills that I would've maybe not gotten in a singular program, but also working with school management and the relationships between school management and other programs that the university is profound.

Satish Tripathi:

I just visited a couple of departments, provost and I did, and I can tell you the work going on on entrepreneurship is fantastic. It's a recent program, a salary rank in the country. So really I feel that without the CEO, without the important partner with the Co-Lab, without this management school, I don't think we can make the impact. So as I say, I can't say one school is the best, the other one is not. We got 12 children here. But if you look at a school that has really more impact on many other schools. So if you look at a child who has more impact on children.

Eric Raine:

That's a good way of putting it. It is. Yeah.

Satish Tripathi:

The management plays a very central role.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, I'm glad you said that. That was actually my exact thoughts when I wrote that question was that the school of management stands alone, but it's also highly complimentary to all the other schools.

Satish Tripathi:

I mean, if you think about the social impact fellows, right? I mean these are really combination of management, arts and sciences and-

Patrick Lageraen:

Social work.

Satish Tripathi:

Social work.

Eric Raine:

Public health, yeah.

Satish Tripathi:

Public, and you combining those three to work on, it won't be possible without the thinking of what you're talking about can make sense outside. So that's really so critical. If you think about the Panache competition, Panache was a pharmacist actually, as you probably know.

Eric Raine:

Yep. His son actually came in and spoke at School of Pharmacy.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly.

Eric Raine:

Incredible family.

Satish Tripathi:

But he gave money and said that this is for entrepreneurship. And then we have a couple of very successful companies have come out of it. And again, it not would have been possible without really having the mix of schools we have, the school of management that we have, and it's not a new school. It's really something that they're doing for a long time, 100 years.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. So one area I want to just drill a tiny bit deeper on, so we just had the dean of the school of management on a non-fire. And then one of his strategic initiatives for the school of management is the business of climate change. So I'm just wondering how that ties into UB as a whole. How is that a concern for you guys sustainability?

Satish Tripathi:

Sure. Before I get there, actually, you talked about the new dean joining in. Ananth is an entire, he is expert in supply chain as you know. He was instrumental. We had a recent proposal called Tech Hub. This is something that it goes from Buffalo, Rochester to Syracuse to look at the technology-based hub,

and it's a federal grant. We have been selected first to apply. Now we have applied and Ananth has played a critical role. His expertise because supply chain becomes a very important thing, has been very critical actually.

The school of management has played a role, but his leadership has played a major role there as well. And that relates to the question you asked because supply chain is one way to look at the business of climate change.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, absolutely.

Satish Tripathi:

And because think about the climate impact on goods going from one to one, the business is working, how can you optimize? Need to collect enough data. And this is something that's important for the university. As you might know, for many years we have been working on net-zero. We have probably in the top five in the world in terms of our plans for the climate. So this perfectly fits into now it brings into all other aspect of business, not just energy consumption because they're all related of course, but it also brings in the business aspect and supply chain is the major aspect of that. So we're very excited about it actually.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, I think we're very fortunate to have his expertise leading the school of management and some of the things we discussed with him on the podcast episode that we had with him recently, he got into some of that in some more detail and it was fascinating to learn about.

Satish Tripathi:

No, I mean I can tell you when we had the thing about the tech hub, we realized that there's expertise here that nobody else has in this whole Buffalo accusation.

Eric Raine:

And leveraging that. Absolutely.

Satish Tripathi:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

And going off of the technology component, one of the things that we've been talking about and has been a hot topic here for us as students in the school management, the MBA program is artificial intelligence, using programs even for practicing interviews. And there's so many different applications that we can use it for. And I know UB's interest goes far beyond even just what school management is looking at. So one of the things that has recently come up is Empire AI. So we wanted to talk to you about what is Empire AI and how does that impact the initiatives that are happening here at UB?

Satish Tripathi:

Let me talk about AI and then get to Empire AI, give you a context. So AI has been at UB for 50 years. We have been doing AI here for a long time, much before it was fashionable. One of the first real project at large scale use of machine learning and pattern recognition was done for the postal service here. So when you write address on the envelope, everybody has a different handwriting, tough to read, especially if a doctor is writing it.

So the postal office came to UB to, this was in the late 80s, early 90s to develop sort of readable program that will read and sort it. And that was a successful program done for the postal service, which basically was what is known as pattern recognition and machine learning, which is really what is AI and what people are talking about. So we have had that kind of really success here. Then about two years ago, we applied for a very competitive research grant from National Science Foundation, which is called the National Science Foundation AI Research Center. We focused on a very important problem. There are about four million children that have learning or speech deficiency. And in many cases, it's hard to detect it and there are not enough qualified people to really go and detect it.

Eric Raine:

Especially early on in development.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly, and sometimes very minute. But if you detect it early on, you can correct it. So our proposal was really to NSF that we'll develop a system that will observe the children in a non-intrusive way and try to

see if they can detect it, and then with the help of a human being, try to correct it, but much faster way and so on.

Eric Raine:

That's really cool.

Satish Tripathi:

And that was funded and it has people from multiple departments here. So we got that award about a little more than a year ago, which is \$20 million grant, many departments on the campus involved and some of the universities outside involved as our team.

Eric Raine:

That's an incredible initiative.

Satish Tripathi:

So the governor actually, as you know, the AI and ChatGPT and generative AI is all really happening all over the country. And governor decided and rightly so, that New York state should be a lead on that. So she formed a consortium, and consortium is really Empire AI. And in the budget she has put \$400 million state money and some private money to have a facility here at UB campus that would have machine power provided for really these large generative AI problems that require a lot of machine power.

And the consortium has four private universities, SUNY and CUNY. The best part of course is that she realized, and people know that this is the pace where AI has a lot more success. So it's on the campus, we excited about it. This gives us a chance to hire more faculty. This gives a chance for us to look at the issues in business, issues in healthcare, issues in social, other issues of really looking at the biases in AI and things like that. So we are excited about it. It provides the machines that we know we need. So this would be really a great attraction for things that we want to do.

Patrick Lageraen:

So this is going to be like a supercomputer?

Satish Tripathi:

So these are not called in regular since the supercomputers, if you remember they were called CPU's, they call GPU's now and they take lots of energy and they require a lot of-

Eric Raine:

That was going to be the question. How do we offset that? Because we talked before about the being neutral and the outputs from something like that.

Satish Tripathi:

So this is really a major issue. I mean, not only that, how do we offset, is there enough power in the country if you go in that direction, all that? And I think alternative form of energy is the way to go. Other sources, of course, we are lucky to have the hydropower next to us-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right down the road.

Satish Tripathi:

Which is really the best thing and that has been there for a while. So we are very lucky with that. But I think if you look at globally, you need power not only to run these machines, but you need power to cool them down, right?

Eric Raine:

Certainly both sides.

Satish Tripathi:

Both sides of it. But I think it's really, really a great... One of the things that destroys also is access to the students to do the experiments.

Eric Raine:

The opportunities that are there within that.

Satish Tripathi:

What we also need is manpower. Governor talked about how do we create the next generation of manpower and this access to these sewer power computing infrastructure and then access to the

expertise of the faculty in these areas. And AI doesn't mean just computer science, it means business, it means humanities, it means pharmacy and healthcare.

Patrick Lageraen:

It's everything. Yeah.

Satish Tripathi:

It's really the usage of it. But there's a lot of problems still that we need to solve, whether we get the right answers, whether it makes sense, it's biased, whether it's ethical, all kinds-

Eric Raine:

Lots of challenges.

Satish Tripathi:

Lots of challenges. And I feel good. I'm a computer scientist, I see that the data, and I'm a statistician as well, I feel the data is so critical. But data, we have to think about how good is the data, how much to trust the data-

Eric Raine:

Can you rely on it?

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. Yeah.

Eric Raine:

And I think you mentioning the manpower component I think is really important and is profound in the context of utilizing AI because I think a lot of reservations that if you were to just pull the general public, a lot of it is the concern over displacement for the human element of jobs and things like that. But it's what you talked about where you're pairing the technology and the data to manpower and how can humans utilize it to improve outcomes.

Satish Tripathi:

I mean, that's example I talked about the National Science Foundation, center of excellence and education we call it, is really quality of life. Think about that hearing problem or a learning problem minute as might be left unattended, the bullying that goes on later on, the quality of life really changes.

Eric Raine:

Definitely.

Satish Tripathi:

And what this provides is really, and it's not replacing anything, they're not enough people to help children. It improves the quality of life. And that's what we wanted. At the end of the day is the human quality of life.

Patrick Lageraen:

Absolutely.

Satish Tripathi:

Of course, I mean there are issues with AI as you all have seen, people have talked about, let's stop it. We might have to come up with some more regulations. But with any technology, you've got to think about that, but the potential is pretty good.

Patrick Lageraen:

So just before we get off the topic of AI, I asked ChatGPT to write you a question. I'm sure you saw it already. So if you were given unlimited resources to start any program or project at the university, what would it be and why?

Satish Tripathi:

I should ask ChatGPT to give me the answer. Could I try?

Eric Raine:

I'd be curious to see what it would think, right?

Satish Tripathi:

That's right. So the thing that I feel is important as a university is to see how we can improve the education we provide and the access to different types of things that our students can have, whether it's really study abroad. As you know about a third of our students are Pell eligible. So many of them not only have to work, but they also have to work in the summer or the winter break. So they can't afford to go to study abroad or they can't do other things that they can.

If you had unlimited resources, I want to really provide them all the things that everybody else does. The better we give them those kind of accesses, the better student they are. I want to really provide more research support. Nothing unusual, it's just the three things I talked about. That's our mission. That's what the university should be doing. Providing the environment where the faculty and student can flourish. That environment includes support from the students to do other things, that environment school includes research support for the faculty, scholarship that better facilities for laughs and interaction. Those are the only things I would do. I mean, I don't think I need a better office.

Eric Raine:

And I think what that really comes down to gets back to what you mentioned before, which is really the improvement to the quality of life. So if that were made possible for students that you used as that example, it improves their quality of experience at the university.

Satish Tripathi:

And as you know, we had a historic faculty hiring last year. More than 150 new faculty were hired probably more than any year since 1960s when it started to expand. And those are the things that I like to do really. So we get the top people here. Now you have to ask the ChatGPT how I can get the limited resources.

Patrick Lageraen:

I'll ask it. I'll let you know. So we've mentioned it a couple times what UB's strategic vision is, is to become one of the top 25 public research universities. My question is why? Why is this interesting to you? And then how do you decide that that should be the direction that we're going?

Satish Tripathi:

That's a very good question actually. So top 25 is not a fixed point. I mean you don't have here's the top 25.

Eric Raine:

It's not the finish line.

Satish Tripathi:

Exactly. And also, it's hard to define because there are multiple of these rankings. So which one do you take?

Eric Raine:

Whichever one ranks you highest I suppose.

Patrick Lageraen:

Whichever gets you there.

Satish Tripathi:

But you got to look at really what's important for the students and what is important as a research university, public research university. And then you look at how do you really look at the top 25. So from the student's viewpoint, of course, the quality of education, our students' preparedness, our students finishing in time, their retention rate here, our students really filling the gap between the underrepresented and the rest of the population. Those are very important things. And this is what U.S. News & World Report does. They do many other things, but at least they take that. So you can think about that as one. If you are a research university, how do you major yourself? Well, you look at least for the areas where competitive grants are available. Are we successful nationally? Do people care what we do? Are we able to successfully get grants?

Not in every area you can get that, but there are area. Two really things that we publish, do people care? And one aspect to look at that is really the citations if other people care about those. Are our faculty members who are critical to our mission, recognized by their national, international societies and so on? Are they getting the awards that are available? Are we writing the right books and how many books are we writing? All of those are also critical.

So we look at all that actually. And we have made a tremendous progress in the last seven, eight years just in U.S. News in the public we were 69, we are in the low thirties somewhere now. So really we were good to begin with. We got to really bring this out. It's not that something I have done, it's really focusing on what's important and showing people that we are doing it. And as I said, it's not a fixed

point. If we achieve that we could continue to do more. But it provides people at least a point to look at where we are, how much progress we have made. And it's not important for me. You ask people that we are trying to recruit now senior faculty, they're excited about it. They know at least one thing. I mean that this is our goal and how they can contribute.

Eric Raine:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

Well, that was going to be my next question is how do we achieve this? Is it up to you guys to hire more faculty?

Satish Tripathi:

It's up to you guys actually. It's up to you guys to study hard, be successful, and we are able to recruit more students, good students coming here. It's actually all of us. It's the faculty. It's for us in the administration to provide the support, try to get the support, the whole flagship designation that the governor made provided extra money for a new research building, a new engineering building that's growing quite a bit. All of that will contribute towards attracting more students, attracting better faculty. And for us really, we can only provide the environment. The real work really goes with the faculty and the students.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

And then the culmination of all those different things leads to that outcome of increasing rank, right? And it's almost accountability in a way over time.

Satish Tripathi:

I mean the students getting the major recognition in the country, whether it's Truman Scholar, Goldwater Scholarship, or other prestigious honors, those are important too. And if you look at last seven, eight years, we have doubled or tripled our numbers that we used to get. So that really, it shows that the students are, but we have to provide them resources to make sure they understand what it

takes to get that. So that's our job. But at the end of the day, it's the students, it's the faculty that really create what we are doing here.

Eric Raine:

And as that capacity grows, that's where the opportunity lies for us to plug in.

Satish Tripathi:

Very true. I mean, the other part really in top 25, which is non-measurable immediately is the social impact we make. That's also important. All of that really contribute to the reputation of the institution. And that actually, I feel that we are contributing in that direction.

Eric Raine:

Well, thank you for walking us through all that. As we wrap up our episode here, we wanted to just ask a fun question and learn a little bit about you outside of the role of president. What do you like to do for fun on your own time? I know your schedule's busy and you travel a lot, but what does that-

Satish Tripathi:

So I've got three grandchildren in Seattle. Both of my sons live in Seattle. So if I get a weekend and if it's long weekend, we fly.

Patrick Lageraen:

Nice.

Satish Tripathi:

We spend some time. I also try to catch up with my sleep sometime and try to get my 10,000 steps if I can. And that's fun actually. Sometimes I can get it, many times it's tougher to get.

Patrick Lageraen:

Plenty of space here.

Eric Raine:

Well, the daily walks you take definitely help.

Satish Tripathi:

That's already 4,000 steps.

Eric Raine:

There you go.

Satish Tripathi:

And we have friends we meet, we have friends. I've lived in Maryland, I've lived in California, we lived in Toronto, so we try to meet with the friends and I try to visit my rest of the family in India. So a lot of things to do. I can't do everything of those, but as much as I can, a lot of times I tell people that if I've got time, I'll sit down in a porch, maybe with the book, not able to read it and sleeping there for a while, just relax.

Eric Raine:

Relaxing.

Satish Tripathi:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, absolutely.

Patrick Lageraen:

All right. Well, I think we covered a lot.

Satish Tripathi:

Yeah, and I watch a lot of sports.

Eric Raine:

Go Bills.

Satish Tripathi:

Go Bulls. Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

All right. Well, Eric and I really enjoyed this. I'm sure some students and prospective students will as well. Over the past year, I recorded probably 25 plus episodes and just getting the chance to sit down with you is my final capstone has been really valuable. So thanks so much for your time.

Satish Tripathi:

Thank you both.

Eric Raine:

We appreciate it.

Satish Tripathi:

And good luck to you as you get into your next chapter. Are you finishing this year too?

Eric Raine:

I will graduate in 2025, so I'm one year away.

Satish Tripathi:

You got two degrees, so good luck to you.

Eric Raine:

Thank you very much.

Satish Tripathi:

You're probably going to go in management then I guess? Pharmaceutical management?

Eric Raine:

A little bit of a non-traditional pharmacy path, but that's why I decided to be a part of MBA program.

Satish Tripathi:

Pharmacy knowledge is so important on a lot of things there. And we have two good schools for you.

Eric Raine:

That's for sure.

Patrick Lageraen:

Oh yeah.

Eric Raine:

So thanks again. We really appreciate it.

Satish Tripathi:

Thank you.

Patrick Lageraen:

I hope you enjoyed this episode. Again, we were speaking with Satish Tripathi, president of the University of Buffalo. My name is Patrick Lageraen and I've been your host along with Eric Raine.

Thanks for listening.