

“Weaving a Fabric of Excellence: Kumble Subbaswamy”

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Farewell Reception for COAS Dean Kumble Subbaswamy
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1. INTRODUCTION

We are gathered this afternoon to bid farewell to Kumble Subbaswamy, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. We are delighted that Swamy’s wife Mala, their daughter Apurva, and their son Adarsh could be here on this special occasion. Please join me in welcoming Swamy’s family.

Dan Smith, Dean of the Kelley School of Business, recently said of Swamy, “It is literally impossible to count the many contributions Dean Swamy has made to Indiana University. . . . He can always be counted on as a voice of reason; as a leader who has the rare ability to bring clarity to any situation no matter how complex and ambiguous. And he does so with grace. . . . His contributions will forever be part of the IU fabric.”

This afternoon we are celebrating the accomplishments of Kumble Subbaswamy who has been Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University for nearly six years. As Dean Smith has suggested, Swamy’s contributions to Indiana University are too numerous to recount in the time we have this afternoon. I will try, however, to offer a sense of the passion, integrity, vision, and commitment he has woven into the fabric of excellence that is Indiana University.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SCIENCES

Since coming to IU in July of 2000, Swamy has been involved in numerous efforts to expand and improve teaching and research in the sciences at IU. Private funding for the sciences has increased dramatically over Swamy's term as Dean, as exemplified by the MetaCyt grant from the Lilly Endowment in which he played a major part. Indeed, I rank the time Swamy, Ted Widlanski, Peter Cherbas, Craig Stewart, many others, and I worked on this proposal as one of the most memorable in my time at IU. External support for research in the College from federal grant sources has also risen substantially and is currently at an all-time high.

Beyond his impact on funding, Swamy has also had a tremendous effect on the landscape of the IU Bloomington campus. In large part due to Swamy's efforts, a superb new science building, Simon Hall, is nearing completion and a second science building, MSB-II, will break ground this year.

Swamy's impact on the life sciences at IU reaches far beyond the present moment, especially the role he played in the Life Sciences Strategic Plan, which will shape the future of life sciences at IU for many years to come.

3. ARTS, HUMANITIES, SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Many of IU Bloomington's strongest programs and most renowned faculty are in the arts and humanities and in the social and behavioral sciences. Swamy has recognized these traditional strengths and made strategic investments to further improve these areas of teaching and scholarship.

According to Andrea Ciccarelli, Swamy "has been fundamental in enhancing and promoting the existing interdisciplinary strengths of the Arts and Humanities on our campus. . . ." Ciccarelli adds that Swamy's vision and commitment led to the creation of

the College Arts and Humanities Institute, which provides support for traditional and interdisciplinary projects and programs through fellowships, grants, and workshops.

Through Commitment to Excellence initiatives that have originated in the College, proposals to hire new senior faculty in the humanities have been funded. A new Department of Statistics is also being formed to meet a long-standing campus need, especially for our strong social science departments and programs. In addition, a new program in International Studies has been launched, and exciting new initiatives concerning the Two-Thirds World have been funded and are being developed.

4. BUILDING COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

Swamy has always been serious about, and committed to, the high standards he holds for the academic goals of the College and IU as a whole. At the same time, he has established some important new traditions at Indiana University: PARTIES. He hosts an annual fall reception to welcome the new faculty hires and to welcome back faculty from the summer. He also inaugurated a special reception for all staff members, which, rumor has it, is always particularly memorable. Each semester on the first eve of exams, Swamy hosts an event that is now referred to as the “feeding frenzy” in the lobby of the Library where he, and his faculty colleagues, serve all the students in the library food for thought. In fact, this semester’s event took place just last night, and Swamy, no stranger to hard work, fixed sandwiches with the best of them. Each of these events demonstrates Swamy’s desire to create a truly supportive environment for faculty, staff, and students at Indiana University.

5. ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

Besides working to build and strengthen such a supportive atmosphere, Swamy has helped the College reach out to establish stronger ties with other IU schools and the private sector. New programs have either been launched or are in development with

Informatics, the School of Education, the School of Music and the Kelley School of Business.

Ora Pescovitz, Executive Associate Dean for Research Affairs at the IU School of Medicine, reinforces Swamy's crucial role as a builder of communities. She says, "It has been a true delight for me to work so closely with [Swamy]. I have learned many things from him and believe that our interactions played a crucial role in improving collaborations between IU Bloomington and the IU School of Medicine."

Swamy has also worked hard to facilitate ties between IU faculty and the corporate world, most notably in the life sciences as exemplified by IU Bloomington's closer connections to the Eli Lilly Company. The Bloomington Life Sciences Partnership, which Swamy successfully chaired for a number of years, also illustrates his desire to forge coalitions among industry leaders, local government, and the Indiana University community.

6. A FEW WORDS FROM COLLEAGUES

In addition to these remarkable accomplishments that have changed the fabric of the College and the university, Swamy has also had a tremendous personal impact on those around him. By way of conclusion, I would like to offer the words of his colleagues.

Susan Gubar shares one of her fondest memories of Swamy that dates to his active participation in the Campus Strategic Planning Committee meetings. During those meetings, she says, "[Y]ou could see amassing a storm cloud over his head when it looked like people around the table didn't perceive the extent of the College's needs." She goes on to say, "Then he would simply explode . . . in a passionate and always erudite fugue of numbers, statistics, testimonies, and anecdotes. . . [With these he] underscored [not only] the excellence of the College's faculty and programs but also how imperiled they were by insufficient funding."

Ted Widlanski reinforces Swamy's sense of commitment to Indiana University and to the people around him. He states, "I will always be grateful to Swamy for teaching me that leadership comes from principle, not expedience. Swamy had the courage to be wrong and the grace to allow others to be right; these are lessons I will always keep striving to learn from him, even when he is gone."

Finally, let me add, on a personal note, the enormously high regard and esteem in which I hold Swamy. We have had our share of vigorous exchanges of views, but that has never interfered with our excellent personal relationship and close friendship. And even when you don't agree with Swamy, in the finest Socratic tradition, his ingenuity and force of argument always cause you to question your own fundamental views and hence to formulate your own arguments more strongly.

7. CONCLUSION: PROVOST'S MEDAL

Grace, courage, integrity, leadership, passion: these are only a few of the words that apply to Dean Swamy. It is my distinct pleasure and honor to award Dean Kumble Subbaswamy the first Provost's Medal. Due to a host of circumstances, the medal is not yet available. This may be a thinly veiled attempt to keep Swamy here a bit longer.

The parchment reads: "Kumble Subbaswamy has been a remarkable leader of the Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences. Passionately committed to the campus and the institution, he has worked tirelessly to encourage achievement and distinction in research, teaching, and service. His vision, integrity, and leadership have garnered for the College far-reaching and long-lasting partnerships. Today, the College is well-situated to continue to pursue excellence in research and scholarship. His legacy will have an enduring impact for students and faculty for years to come."

Please join me in congratulating Swamy and wishing him and his family all the best in their years to come.