

VISION 2035

ST XAVIER'S UNIVERSITY SETS TARGET OF 10,000 STUDENTS

Plans are underway to launch School of Design, School of Nursing and School of Engineering and Technology

OUR CORRESPONDENT

St Xavier's University started operations in February 2017 in Kolkata. Rev Dr J Felix Raj, SJ, Vice-Chancellor, remembers that the institute had only 400 students at the time. Today, it has grown to 4,000 and the educationist believes that by 2035, the number will increase to 10,000. His ambitious roadmap for Vision 2035 also includes plans to start a School of Design, School of Nursing, and another School of Engineering and Technology. For the V-C, it is important to expand the institute not just academically but also in terms of infrastructure so that the students of West Bengal don't migrate to other states for quality education. *Millennium Post* chats with the V-C on expansion plans, Vision 2035, and more.

What goals did you set when the university was established in 2017 and how have those goals transformed as the institution has grown?

Our mission then was to reach out to as many students as possible. In fact, our St Xavier's College in Park Street, Kolkata, had around 9,000-10,000 students and it was overloaded. So, we said we must start expanding. Expansion is for reaching out to as many students as possible, keeping in view our own charisma. Right now, St Xavier's University has grown both academically and in terms of infrastructure. We started with 400 students. Today, we are 4,000. Any institution that wants to serve has to grow, or it dies out. But since the beginning, the Government of West Bengal, our stakeholders, and mainly our alumni have been good to us, and it helped us grow. I want to thank the alumni as I often cite this university as a case study for exemplary



alumni association participation.

So, what's Vision 2035 for the Institute?

By 2035, we would like at least a minimum of 10,000 students. We already have the School of Business and School of Law. Next year, we are starting our School

of Engineering and Technology with AI-focused courses, besides the regular courses. We also want to start a School of Design very soon in collaboration with IIT Kharagpur. We are also planning to start a School of Nursing in Kolkata. I have asked the faculty members to think

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We also aim to collaborate with other private universities, because our focus is to ensure that students from West Bengal do not feel the need to migrate to other states in search of quality education

— Father Felix Raj, founder
V-C of St Xavier's
University, Kolkata

aloud, to be creative.

I understand that an institution's reputation is often linked to student placements and salary packages. While placement is certainly important, I believe we need to think beyond that. Can we train our students to become job creators instead of job seekers? Entrepreneurship is the need of the hour.

With AI and skill-based certifications reshaping the job market, many are questioning the value of a traditional degree. Do you think degrees are becoming outdated, or can we strike a balance between academic education and skill development?

No, it goes hand in hand. The UGC has also emphasised this. With the introduction of the NEP 2020 and various



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other initiatives, we now have an entirely new curriculum that places strong emphasis on internships, placements and entrepreneurship. This is supported by a restructured credit system that includes value-added courses, skill enhancement programmes, core subjects and minor subjects. All of these are shaping a more holistic and future-ready education model, including optional subjects as well.

Today, university and college education must go hand in hand with skill development. In the past, our students were often found to be unfit for roles in industries and business houses because academic training followed one orientation, while industry expectations followed another. To bridge this gap, the industry-academia interface must now be prioritised. As that interface strengthens, institutions must also take responsibility for skill formation. Activities like business summits (St Xavier's University recently held a business summit, Strat - X: The Strategic Mind Forum) and industry engagement are crucial in narrowing the divide. What is being proposed, and rightly so, is that skill enhancement and value-added courses should be built directly into the curriculum. It's not about degrees versus skills. It's about degrees along with skills.

With AI increasingly impacting all

sectors, how is St Xavier's University preparing its faculty to adapt to this technological shift?

AI won't take over... it can't take over. But we have to accept the fact that AI is smarter, more perfect, and very accurate. For instance, a doctor can operate only 3-4 times, but AI can operate any number of times. That is the advantage. But AI will never take over human intelligence. We have introduced an AI-based Learning Management System here, where the teachers are going through orientation.

You've requested an additional 10 acres of land from the West Bengal government for campus expansion.

Yes, we have requested an additional 10 acres of land. The land is available, and I am actively pursuing the matter. I have already identified the plot and have spoken to officials in the West Bengal Government. I remain hopeful that the government will be considerate. They had earlier granted us 17 acres, and I believe they will continue to extend their support for our expansion, especially as we plan to serve between 10,000 and 20,000 students as the university grows. We also aim to collaborate with other private universities, because our focus is to ensure that students from West Bengal do not feel the need to migrate to other states in search of quality education.