

Andhra Community Calls for UC Berkeley Telugu Classes

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Fifty Telugu language enthusiasts gathered at the Milpitas Public Library to discuss the idea of their favorite language being taught at UC Berkeley. Dubbed the "Telugu Initiative" by proponents, the aim is to have Telugu classes up and running at UC Berkeley by the fall of 2007.

The initiative comes on the heels of a strong student interest in Telugu at UC Berkeley. An email sent out by the university's Center for South Asia Studies, asking students if they were interested in learning the language, received 32 responses in one day. Professor Raka Ray, the center's chair, told **India-West**, "One of the things I found when I started the Bengali Initiative was that when children are young, they don't want to learn their language; they want to be like everybody else. People go off to college and start to search for their identity."

The July 16 Telugu Initiative gathering was composed of representatives from various Telugu cultural organizations,

including, the Bay Area Telugu Association, Silicon Andhra, the Sacramento Telugu Association, and the Telugu Association of North America. There was unanimous support for the initiative, attendee Rao Vemuri, a professor of computer science at UC Davis, told **India-West**. Those gathered also voiced a commitment to raising the \$1 million necessary to endow a Telugu program at Cal.

Ray told **India-West** that the interest yielded by the endowment will pay the salary of one Telugu instructor, who will hold at least a master's degree in the language and will have some degree of teaching experience.

In order for Telugu classes to begin in the fall semester of 2007, supporters of the initiative must raise the first \$200,000 of the endowment by Dec. 31, 2006. Once this fundraising goal has been met, further funds can be raised in parallel to program planning.

Attendees of the first Telugu Initiative meeting contributed nearly \$20,000 to the cause. Vemuri told **India-West** that he is in the process of planning additional informational meetings



Telugu language buffs gathered at the Milpitas Public Library earlier this month to hash out a proposal for Telugu classes at UC Berkeley. (Rao Vemuri photo)

of this sort in Sacramento and southern California for the month of August, as well as a fundraiser dinner.

While the formal fundraising goal for the initiative is \$1 million, Ray pointed out that community organizers should aim a little higher. "To teach the language, we need to raise \$1 million," she said. "I think our goal is bigger than that. We want to make available Telugu culture

through visiting scholars, poets, writers, and cultural personalities." The goal of the initiative, Ray said, is not only to educate students, but also to raise the profile of Telugu culture in the U.S.

UC Berkeley language initiatives are driven by community support. The university, which already teaches Hindu, Urdu, Sanskrit, and Tamil, recently added Punjabi and Bengali lan-

guage instruction to its course catalog because of demand from the student body and overwhelming support from the Bengali- and Punjabi-speaking communities.

"It all depends on how enthusiastic the community is," Ray told **India-West**. "If the community wants Malayalam or Marathi classes, then we'll keep going. If they really want it, it will happen."