

# SIUE School of Pharmacy continues to grow



## Gireesh Gupchup.

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This week, SIUE Interim Chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD, welcomes Gireesh Gupchup, PhD and dean of the SIUE School of Pharmacy (SOP), to the Segue studio.

The final interview to conclude Hansen's "Deans Discussions" series, Gupchup jokes with Hansen, saying, "I thought you saved the best for last?"

Gupchup begins the conversation by explaining the academic and professional path which led him to pursuing a career in academia at SIUE. A native of India, Gupchup holds a master's in industrial pharmacy and a master's in pharmacy practice, each from the University of Toledo, as well as a PhD in pharmacy practice from Purdue University. He joined the SIUE SOP at the program's birth in 2004, having previously served as a pharmacy professor at the University of New Mexico.

"I was either the second or third person hired in the SIUE School of Pharmacy," Gupchup explains. "When I came in, we had two rooms in the Engineering Annex in University Park. Then we got our own building, and now we're spread across several buildings. So, it's been a wonderful journey.

"It was daunting and scary at first, because you're coming to start a new school. But I did a lot of research on SIUE and the community, and it all turned out to be true. This is quite a genuine place, and it's because of the community – at SIUE and the pharmacy community in the area – that we've been able to be so successful."

At a School that trains students to pursue highly competitive career fields, Gupchup emphasizes the SOP's unique strongpoints, which set it aside from others across the U.S. Among those qualities are features such as 18-week semesters, which include three weeks of experiential learning, a joint PharmD/MBA program, direct student engagement with nationally recognized research faculty and interprofessional educational opportunities.

Gupchup stresses the importance of interprofessional education opportunities by adding, "When you learn with other health professionals, you learn to respect and understand what other health professionals know, and you learn to rely on their expertise. You become like Wayne Gretzky (NHL Hall of Fame player) – you learn to anticipate and work together as a team."

With one of the premier pharmacy schools in the country under their supervision, the scholars discuss the academic aspects that make SIUE pharmacists the cream of the crop. Unlike most

pharmacy schools, Gupchup explains that the SIUE SOP has a holistic admission process, analyzing 11 different admission components – only two of which are based on academic performance.

“The way I explain this to students is, ‘You have to have the grade-point average (GPA) and the Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT) score to be in the pack of horses, but then we look for the unicorns among horses,’” says Gupchup. “Those other aspects are the ‘horns’ of the unicorn. So you can’t just hang your hat on the academics – you have to work to grow that horn.”

A program that has consistently been in high demand since being founded 12 years ago, the SIUE SOP annually receives between 300 and 350 student applications. Further, entry to the School is competitive, as only 80 students are admitted each year.

While the numbers may seem daunting, Gupchup explains the outstanding outcomes achieved only in the SIUE SOP. “Our graduates get jobs, and our Boards pass-rates have been outstanding – they’ve consistently been higher than the state average, as well as the national average,” he says. “Further, we don’t have the concept of teaching assistants (TAs) or instructors – it is the same faculty members who are getting on the cutting edge of research and getting these national grants that are teaching these students.”

Curriculum enrichment, academic program additions, further development of clinical sites, enhanced global experiences and community service initiatives are among the future planning topics discussed by Hansen and Gupchup.

Gupchup returns for a curtain call, concluding the interview by sharing a little-known talent he possesses.

Tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM every Sunday at 9 a.m. as weekly guests discuss issues on SIUE’s campus.

*By Logan Cameron, SIUE Marketing & Communications*