

CPD's Pavithran assumes national leadership role

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Sachin Pavithran at the recent AUCD conference

The Association on University Centers on Disabilities has a new president-elect: one whose vision is to keep it moving on a path where younger, more diverse voices are included in its mission.

As president-elect of AUCD, Sachin Pavithran's responsibility will be to chair the AUCD conference in 2019. AUCD supports and promotes a network of interdisciplinary, university-based programs. The CPD is one of 133 network members.

Pavithran's latest appointment follows a year of service on the AUCD board, during which he emphasized diversity within the network. And while he still hopes for more, better and broader representation of all people with disabilities within AUCD, Pavithran said he has seen more diverse people and views come to the table since he began attending the conference 10 years ago.

"You have young professionals having important conversations," he said. "You have people with disabilities at the table, you have families, all sectors of the community, having the conversation."

The conference has also grown in size, from fewer than 600 participants to just under 1000. "I think the reason it's growing is more people feel like they have something to offer and what they offer is being received," he said. "There are a lot of places to be part of the conversation."

His vision of AUCD is larger than a conference. "AUCD can become the central point when it comes to research on cross-disability issues," Pavithran said. "We could be the central think tank for research and implementation."



Pavithran has set the example he wants young leaders to follow, serving in many positions on the state, local and national level. At this point in his career, he does not want to forget what it is like to be in the trenches, providing services to individuals. In fact, he spent the Thanksgiving holiday in Mexico, training teachers of students who are blind in a place that does not provide a lot of opportunities for special education.

He volunteers for METAS (Mentoring, Engaging and Teaching All Students), a nonprofit organization that trains skills to teachers of blind students and adults in Mexico so that they are better prepared to teach. While blind students are now entitled to an education in Mexico, the system is not well-equipped to meet their needs. The organization seeks to offer support to the schools and the families of students who are blind.

"I don't want to get to the point that I'm too high-level to do what matters," Pavithran said. "This is what keeps reminding me why I do what I do."

He also hopes that in the United States, disability and diversity issues move from being part of the conversation to action. "Accessibility isn't something that we need to discuss, it's something we need to do," he said.

When job seekers with disabilities don't face discrimination, when students with disabilities don't have to wait in line to get the services or technology they need for success, when people with disabilities are not treated as second-class citizens, Pavithran said his hopes for the disability field will be realized.

Until then, he will continue trying to make that world a reality.

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