As Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculties at IUPUI (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis), Uday Sukhatme strives to create and maintain exceptional educational programs that will not only benefit students today but also prepare them with the skills for a bright future. His work stresses the improvement of retention and graduation rates. "There are three main issues of importance in the undergraduate experience: providing a smooth initial orientation, offering the students a rich range of curricular as well as co-curricular activities, and timely graduation," Sukhatme believes.

After graduating from the University of Delhi, India, with a bachelor of science honors degree in mathematics, Sukhatme headed to the U.S. for graduate education in physics. He completed his doctorate degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with a specialization in theoretical physics. "MIT was a very intense but rewarding experience," he said. "There was a lot of competition among the students and this drove them to exceed their own expectations."

The biggest transitional challenge came in the form of examinations. Most universities in India have only one annual exam in which the students must do well in order to continue their education. In the American education system, each academic year typically has several semesters, each with quizzes, midterms, and a final exam, and students are expected to participate in class. "I liked the frequency of feedback on student progress – it is a very good part of the American education system," Sukhatme said.

When Sukhatme came to the US, his elder brother had just completed his doctorate at MIT, "and when you have support in the day-to-day activities, you can focus better on the academics," Sukhatme said. Sukhatme comes from a very academic family that places high emphasis and significance on education. With that in mind Sukhatme appreciates the difficulty students might encounter if there is inadequate family support.

At IUPUI, support and guidance often comes from University College. This academic unit’s role is to provide students with a smooth transition to college. He believes that University College should also serve students by channeling their talents and strengths and by promoting what IUPUI has to offer as well as guiding students to discover what options best match their interests and personalities.

Sukhatme feels that it is a great thing when an institution like IUPUI has a multitude of choices available in undergraduate education. However, if the large number of choices creates confusion and becomes a stumbling block, University College can provide appropriate guidance. "We want people to succeed and giving them a path to follow is the first step."

University College promotes IUPUI’s six principles of undergraduate education. These are essential for students’ educational success as well as their future careers. Sukhatme also believes that students have to do their part in their education and become “good at problem-solving and innovation. You can’t take everything at face value - you have to think about material, reflect and analyze,” Sukhatme said.

As a result of the success of University College programs and other factors, the reputation of IUPUI on the whole is on the rise, particularly in academics. In the last four years, 25 new bachelor’s degrees have been created “all of which are based upon faculty strength and the application to the community” such as in the area of motorsports, Sukhatme emphasized.

The progress of students and IUPUI as an institution goes hand in hand with the success of the surrounding community, especially Indianapolis. According to Sukhatme, IUPUI is among the top three to five institutions in the country with regard to its robust connection to the community. The close connection between the school and the community also results in service opportunities and experiences that Sukhatme feels students should take full advantage of.

There is always room for improvement, and Sukhatme believes that the need of Indiana and the U.S. as a whole is to have more students and more graduates. "The biggest contribution we can make is to improve our retention and graduation rates,” he stated.

IUPUI is in the right spot, Sukhatme believes, to make that contribution as the school is ideally located in an educational hub. This allows for involvement in many different areas such as high school education, medicine, and the arts, allowing IUPUI to have diversity through offering many courses and degrees in many different schools. Compared to other higher education institutions that find themselves removed from the public sector, IUPUI is a natural fit with the city, and together, they have made and will continue to make a strong impact.