

## **\$1 MILLION GIFT ESTABLISHES JAIN STUDIES PROFESSORSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN, USA**

**Houston, Texas, USA (July 28, 2025)** — The Academic Liaison Committee (ALC) of the Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA) has partnered with the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) to establish permanently The *Tirthankar Sumatinath Distinguished Professorship in Jain Studies*.

This newly endowed position — the 24th professorship established by the ALC Donors — will reside in the Department of Asian Studies within the College of Liberal Arts at UT-Austin. Located in Texas's capital, the UT-Austin campus is home to nearly 55,000 students and represents a diverse academic community. The city of Austin also hosts a vibrant Jain community; founded in 1995 by 70 families which has now grown to over 250 families.

The ALC formally announced the professorship at a celebratory event on Saturday, July 19, at the Jain Vishwa Bharati (JVB) Center in Houston. Attended by six UT-Austin faculty members and more than 100 Jain community members — including donors, diplomats, civic officials, Jain nuns, interfaith and Jain leaders from Houston, Dallas, Austin, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Ann Arbor, MI and beyond — the event marked a significant milestone in Jain academic initiatives in North America.



The program opened with a soulful recitation of the *Navkar Mahamantra* (Jainism's core prayer) by four Samanijis (Jain nuns) from the JVB centers in Houston and Miami. Dr. Swatantra Jain, Chairman of JVB Houston, recognized all major donors whose combined contributions of \$1 million funded this permanent professorship. The establishment of this chair completes the ALC's vision of honoring the sacred lineage of the 24 Tirthankaras — divine spiritual reformers central to Jain philosophy.

Philanthropists Dr. Jasvant of Los Angeles, President of the Vardhaman Charitable Foundation and lead benefactor of the many professorships, spoke about the evolution of the Jain diaspora: "From building temples to now building centers of learning, the community is investing in peace,

nurturing compassionate global citizens, and shaping resilient communities for generations to come.”



Dr. Jasvant Modi at the celebration

Dr. Sulekh C. Jain, ALC Founder and Past Chairman (and co-founder of JVB Houston), reflected on the journey leading to this milestone, thanking Professor Donald R. Davis of UT-Austin for his early involvement and interest in Jainism. Dr. Jain noted that Jain teachings — which deeply influenced figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela — are increasingly being studied at universities worldwide.

"Jainism's timeless values such as *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Anekantavada* (respect for multiple perspectives), and *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness and sustainable living) are not only relevant today but essential for addressing global challenges," said Dr. Jain.

Since 2010, the ALC has been advancing Jain studies globally. In 2025 alone, it has funded new programs at Claremont School of Theology, Arihanta Institute (an online Jain university), and the University of Arizona in Tucson. Recently, it signed an agreement to support two new Ph.D. programs and a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Oxford (UK), with discussions underway at leading institutions in Washington, D.C., and Japan. Today, nearly 55 Universities in 13 countries offer teaching and studies in Jainism regularly.

Twenty years ago, it partnered with the International School for Jain Studies (ISJS) in Pune, India, which has helped train over 1,200 students and scholars from more than 40 universities in 26 countries — building a pipeline of well-equipped educators, researchers, and future leaders in Jain Studies.

At UT-Austin, the new professorship will report to Professor Donald R. Davis, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies. The position will support year-round courses and research non-violence, ethics, environmental sustainability, wellness, interfaith dialogue, and peace studies.



Prof. Donald Davis of UT Austin sharing the vision for Jain Studies

UT-Austin faculty, including College of Liberal Arts Dean Dr. David Sosa, Professor Akbar Hyder of the South Asia Institute, and Professor Davis, highlighted the importance of this philanthropic gift. They emphasized that it will not only enhance academic programming but also expand outreach to local high schools, community colleges, and interfaith organizations.

In his remarks, Hon. D.C. Manjunatha, Consul General of India in Houston, congratulated the UT-Austin and Jain communities, recalling the influence of Jain teachings in his upbringing in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. He also referenced India's recent celebration of *Navkar Mahamantra Divas* (April 9, 2025), during which Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on global citizens to embrace Jain values for sustainable living.

Houston City Councilwoman Tiffany D. Thomas (District F) applauded the collaborative efforts to promote non-violence, truth, and compassion. She also presented a certificate of recognition to JVB Houston for its ongoing contributions to civic life and interfaith harmony.

Dr. Manish Mehta, Vice-Chair of the ALC, added that Jainism's ancient philosophy — dating back nearly 5,000 years — offers students a deeply relevant, science-based framework for ethical living and environmental stewardship.





Samani jis, donors, officers of UT Austin and Hon DC Manjunath, Consul General of India

Mr. Gaurav Jhaveri, President of JVB Houston, concluded the celebration with a vote of thanks to attendees and supporters.

**Watch highlights from the celebration and presentation excerpts in this short video:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYbZGVbgeI0>