

News Release

SMART Centre Names Professor Rohan Abeyaratne as new Director



Singapore, 10 Mar 2009 - The Governing Board of the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (SMART) Centre has appointed MIT Professor Rohan Abeyaratne as its new Director effective March 1, 2009.

Professor Abeyaratne said that both Singapore and MIT have proud histories of forging ahead and that “SMART’s goal is to lead the way in creating the model for globalised research collaborations. I am honoured and excited to be part of this venture which could shape how multinational interdisciplinary research is carried out in the future”.

SMART is a major new research centre in Singapore established by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the National Research Foundation of Singapore (NRF). It is MIT’s largest international research centre and is also the first entity in NRF’s bold new initiative for the Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE). “I envision SMART as a hub for international research collaborations, not only between MIT and Singapore, but also involving researchers from the region and beyond”, stated Professor Abeyaratne.

Elaborating further on SMART’s initiatives, he continued, “We are creating five large interdisciplinary teams of MIT faculty members, researchers and doctoral students, with collaborators from universities and other research institutions in Singapore, and indeed around the world. Each team will focus on some major problem of societal importance. In this way, SMART would become a magnet that attracts and anchors excellent researchers, while simultaneously instilling and promoting a culture of translational research and entrepreneurship in Singapore.” The first three of these teams have been chosen and they are focused on problems in infectious diseases, the environment, and the mechanics of small biological systems.

Professor Abeyaratne succeeds Professor Thomas L. Magnanti, the founding Director of SMART. “Tom Magnanti was instrumental in conceiving and establishing SMART. The Centre is currently in a strong position thanks to Tom’s expert leadership”, praised Professor Abeyaratne.

Prior to this, Professor Abeyaratne was the Head of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at MIT from 2001-2008. In this role Professor Abeyaratne spearheaded many significant and substantial endeavours that ensured that the department moved forward with the times and continued to be ranked the number one Mechanical Engineering Department in the world. During his tenure the Department experienced a dramatic increase in the number of undergraduate student enrollments, making it one of MIT’s largest academic departments. Key initiatives under his leadership, such as the development of a completely new strategic plan and organizational structure for the department, the recruitment of over 20 new faculty and the merger with Ocean Engineering, helped broaden and diversify the academic and research portfolio of the department. He successfully orchestrated a US\$50 million investment in MIT by the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Saudi Arabia to create the Centre for Clean Water & Clean Energy in the Mechanical Engineering Department. He also instituted an educational initiative on innovative new teaching and learning methods.

Professor Abeyaratne’s research interest is in the field of theoretical mechanics. He has published extensively, including two books, the “Evolution of Phase Transitions” and “The Mechanics of Elastic Solids: Volume 1”. In his research, he is particularly known for his work on the dynamics of phase transitions where he co-developed the basic theory and models for this phenomenon. Professor Abeyaratne has served on the editorial boards of four international journals, is a member of the scientific advisory boards for many universities, including the Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences, as well as being the Chair of the Dean’s advisory committee for Mechanical Engineering at Georgia Tech. Furthermore, he recently completed serving a two-year term as President of the American Academy of Mechanics.

Professor Abeyaratne is the recipient of a MacVicar Fellowship, MIT’s highest award for education. He believes in the importance of fostering mentorship in the education of future generations of scientific and engineering leaders. “In my career, whether as a researcher, teacher or administrator,” noted Professor Abeyaratne, “it has been my privilege to nurture and educate curious young minds. I look forward to continuing to play this role as SMART works to attract and mentor talented young researchers from around the world.”

Professor Abeyaratne received his B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Ceylon (1975), and his M.Sc. (1976) as well as Ph.D (1979) degrees from the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). He is currently MIT’s Quentin Berg Professor of Mechanics.

Professor Abeyaratne is currently resident in Singapore.

About the SMART Centre

The SMART Centre is a major new research enterprise established by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in partnership with the National Research Foundation of Singapore (NRF) in 2007. It is the first entity in the Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE) being developed by NRF.

The SMART Centre serves as an intellectual hub for research interactions between MIT and Singapore. Cutting-edge research projects in areas of interest to both Singapore and MIT are undertaken at the SMART Centre. The facility also allows faculty teams with an opportunity to perform interdisciplinary, experimental, computational and translational research. Three Interdisciplinary Research Groups (IRG) have been established to date: they are BioSystems and Micromechanics (BioSyM), Center for Environmental Sensing and Modeling (CENSAM) and Infectious Diseases (ID). Two more IRGs, as well as an Innovation Centre will be established at SMART Centre in the near future.

Media Contact:

Ms Jocelyn Sales

Tel: +65 6516-3126

Email: jsales@mit.edu