

**Dr. Varun Soni, USC Dean of Religious Life and
Vice Provost of Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention,
Named Recipient of the South Asian Studies Association's
*2018 Exemplar Award for Community Service***



Dr. Varun Soni
Dean of Religious Life
Vice Provost of Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Pasadena, California – March 5, 2018: The South Asian Studies Association (SASA), an alliance of international scholars, academicians, business and civic leaders, today announced that its *2018 Exemplar Award for Community Service* will be presented to Dr. Varun Soni, Dean of Religious Life and Vice Provost of Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention, at the University of Southern California. The announcement was made on behalf of SASA's Board of Directors by Ken Silverman, SASA Chairman & CEO.

In making today's announcement, Mr. Silverman stated, "For Varun Soni providing benefit to others has been a central theme of his life. He is a remarkably unique, diverse, and accomplished example of what true community service means. In Varun's case, his multifaceted roles and initiatives serve and uplift multiple communities. As USC's Dean of Religious Life --- the first Hindu to serve as the chief religious or spiritual leader of an American university --- Varun develops and implements programs that benefit not only the tens of thousands of students and faculty who annually comprise the USC community, but also the much wider rainbow of communities that comprise Southern California. His works and record of achievement in embracing, supporting, and collaborating with all of this vast and diversified region's ethnic and religious communities may be unmatched anywhere."

In acknowledging his selection, Dr. Soni stated, "I've been an admirer of SASA's mission and works since my early days at USC, and we were delighted to host the SASA annual conference here in 2012. Over the years I have watched them grow in size, in areas of focus, and in impact, and I am very proud to have now been chosen by SASA's Board of Directors to receive this year's *Exemplar Award for Community Service*." The award will be bestowed to Dr. Soni at the *SASA 2018 Conference*, to be held at Claremont McKenna College, during the weekend of March 24-25, 2018. The Conference, with attendees and speakers from across the US, South Asia, and elsewhere, will feature 18 individual panel sessions. Additionally, three major plenary sessions will focus separately on South Asia's higher education cross-border alliances, NGOs and philanthropy, and business & entrepreneurship.

Headquartered in Pasadena, California, SASA (www.SAsia.org) was founded in 2007, by university scholars engaged in this field of study. Its mission has been to build recognition and expansion of South Asian studies amongst universities and colleges worldwide. More recently its scope has widened to include the realms of business and nonprofit initiatives across South Asia. To date, SASA has presented conferences across the U.S. and in India. It has published six authoritative books and five editions of the scholarly journal *Exemplar*. Its annual *Exemplar Award* has been made to distinguished individuals in academia, in fields of community service, and most recently for business leadership. Outside of his role as Board Chair of SASA, Mr. Silverman is Head of North America for Sannam S4 Group, the leading global market-entry organization which represents US and other international universities, corporations, and nonprofit organizations in India and elsewhere.

In 2017, Dr. Soni, in addition to serving as USC's Dean of Religious Life, was named to the critical position of Vice Provost of Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention. He is additionally an Adjunct Professor of Religion at USC and a University Fellow at the Annenberg Center on Public Diplomacy. Earlier he earned his B.A. degree in Religion from Tufts University, an M.T.S. degree from Harvard Divinity School, and an M.A. degree at UC Santa Barbara. He additionally received a J.D. and his PhD degree from UCLA. As an undergraduate, Dr. Soni spent a semester living in a Buddhist monastery in Bodh Gaya, India through Antioch University's Buddhist Studies Program, and he subsequently spent months doing field research in South Asia through UCSB's Center for Sikh and Punjab Studies. He is also a prolific public speaker, writer, and commentator whose works and words appear in media across the US and globally

The 2018 SASA *Exemplar Award for Academic Achievement* will be presented to Dr. Christopher Chapple, the Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology at Loyola Marymount University, and the 2018 SASA *Exemplar Award for Business Leadership* will be presented to Dr. Mukesh Aghi, President of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum. The *SASA 2018 Conference* is made possible in part via grants from Pratima and Navin Doshi, and from Sannam S4 Group (www.SannamS4.com). Information about the South Asian Studies Association, and the SASA 2018 Conference, can be found on SASA's website, www.SAsia.org.

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Contact:

For South Asian Studies Association:

Ken Silverman / KSilverman@SAsia.org