Guru Nanak Dev University was established at Amritsar on November 24, 1969 to mark the 500th birth anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. It is both a residential and an affiliating university. In conceiving the future course of the University, the objectives enshrined in the Guru Nanak Dev University Act 1969, emphasised that the new University would make provision for imparting education and promoting research in the humanities, learned professions, sciences, especially of applied nature and technology.

The University is successfully catering to twenty thousand students in various faculties at University Campuses and Constituent Colleges. Guru Nanak Dev University is the first University of the region which introduced on-line admissions to its courses, on-line counselling for State Level Admissions and Credit Based Evaluation System. All the results have been computerized and OMR (Optical Magnetic Recognition) system is being used to bring in more efficiency and transparency. It is again first for any University in the region to have computerized its examination and registration system. The students now have an all time access to their results through SMS service.

The University has risen to 16th rank in the top 50 universities of the country, as per recent survey conducted by 'India Today' and has achieved 11th Position, out of the 500 universities, in Publications in science. The University has won the highest sports Award in the country, the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Trophy, for a record of 21 times. The university has won National Championship in Inter-University Youth Festivals in the year 2012. The University has been National Champion for 8 times. The University has also won the North Zone Inter-University Cultural Championship for the 12 times this year. Studies and research on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak, in addition to working towards the promotion of Punjabi language and spreading education among educationally backward classes and communities were the other commitments. In consonance with these expectations, the University in its eventful history of 43 years has taken long strides in spreading the message of the Guru and promoting education in such fields as Science, Arts, Management, Information Technology, Industrial Technology, Environment, Planning and Architecture. To fulfill its commitment, the tuitions fee charged from the students of the departments of Guru Nanak Studies and the School of Punjabi Studies has been waived. This year, this University is declared University with Potential for Excellence by University Grants Commission, New Delhi to establish Centres of Advance Studies in Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Sciences and Comparative Literature. The University is accredited with a CGPA of 3.5 out of 4 with 'A’ Grade, highest for any University by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and Academic Staff College of the University placed at 12th rank by NAAC, Bengaluru.