Patna University was established in the year 1917 and it functioned as affiliating and examining body for over 30 years. On January 2, 1952 it was converted into a purely teaching -cum-residential University with the territorial jurisdiction over Metropolitan Patna. It is one of the oldest Universities in the Country. In Bihar it is the first, and in the subcontinent, it is the seventh oldest University. The University buildings are located on the bank of River Ganges and in the second Campus i.e. Saidpur Campus.

The Patna University has 31 postgraduate departments in the faculties of Science, Social Sciences, Humanities, Education, Commerce, Law and 10 constituent colleges, apart from Patna Medical College and Patna Dental College in the Faculty of Medicine whose management and control are with the State Government. There are 4 Institutes maintained by the University e.g. Institute of Psychological Research & Services, Institute of Public Administration, Institute of Music, and Institute of Library and Information Science. College of Arts & Crafts is fully devoted to the course of fine arts and has been imparting teaching in painting, sculptures etc. A Faculty of Fine Arts has also been started and is located on the campus of College of Arts & Crafts. Directorate of Distance Education (DDE) is a separate unit catering to the needs of large number of students who are unable to get admission as regular students in Colleges or are in service in some institutions. The University is eager to start e-learning.

The University is also running the Master of Business Administration Course in the Department of Applied Economics and Commerce, the Department of Personal Management and Industrial Relation is having post-graduate Diploma courses in Industrial Safety Management and Rural Management and Welfare Administration. These are self-financed courses. The Population Research Centre is working in the Department of Statistics with the assistance of Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Government of India. It is a Centre for Population Studies & Publication Health.

The Patna University Computer Centre has conducted Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Application (PGDCA) course from the session 2008-09. P.G. Diploma in Bio-Informatics course at the Centre is likely to be started from the next session. Master in Computer Application (MCA) started after the approval of Hon'ble Chancellor in the Department of Statistics, Patna University. The Central Library is catering to the needs of the students and teachers, research scholars etc. and is located in the centre of the campus. The Library has been connected to internet and steps are being taken to computerize the working.