



Dr. Syed Serajul Islam

At a gathering held at the Faculty Lounge in February, Dr. Syed Serajul Islam offered his ideas (suggestions, really) on how to be a good teacher.

"University teaching is a job unlike any other," said the recipient of Lakehead's most prestigious award for teaching. "There is an obligation to train the next generation and encourage them with hope, for they are the future builders of Canada."

And so his talk began, with the proviso that this was just one man's opinion – that of Dr. S.S. Islam, Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science, recipient of the Lakehead University SSHRC Distinguished Researcher Award in 2008, a Contribution to Teaching Award in 2005, and one of 38 semifinalists in TVO's 2008 Best Lecturer Competition.

Islam is a specialist in International Politics and International Law, South and Southeast Asian Politics, Foreign Policies of Japan, China, and India, Third World Politics, and International Political Economy. He has lived and worked in many countries around the world including the United States, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia.

Islam has a Master's degree from Dhaka University in Bangladesh and a Master's degree from Brock University in Canada. He completed a PhD from McGill University in 1983 and joined Lakehead University in 1999. Since then he has published numerous refereed journal articles and books such as *Introduction to Political Science* (2009), which is being used as a text book in university courses around the world. He has also delivered papers at international conferences, reviewed books, and given public lectures on a wide range of topics such as state terrorism, Islamic insurgency movements, and American foreign policy.

His students rave about him and he scores well above the average in Lakehead University's Student Satisfaction Survey.

This comment, written by a student, is typical: *"I am writing this letter to thank you for your dedication, expertise, and patience in the classroom. I have taken four classes with you that together have given my knowledge base and skill set a tremendous boost as I continue my university career. I believe what helped me most was your teaching style – the way that you build your lectures and drive us (students) to reach the answer ourselves, which creates a deeper, long-lasting understanding of the subject matter..."*

Dr. Islam shows empathy for his students and can be accommodating when life's pressures intrude on their ability to meet deadlines. At the same time, he is focused on making students responsible and accountable for their actions.

The teacher-student relationship is a two-way relationship, he says, where the teacher serves as a role model. Attitude is everything.

"It is important for students to learn an attitude to the material," he says, "The qualities of personhood are as important, if not more important, than scholarship."

Teaching is the Art of Getting Things Done (by the Students)
Ten Teaching Tips from Dr. Syed Serajul Islam

1

Give a clear and detailed course outline that does not change.

2

Don't list any irrelevant books just to make your course outline look impressive.

3

Write the main questions on the blackboard. This allows students to engage with the material and is effective when teaching large classes.

4

Find out the students' depth of knowledge on the subject and then target your lecture appropriately. Every lecture should have a clear direction. Ask yourself
"Have I explained the material well enough?"

5

Show students your passion for the subject. Use anecdotes and personal stories to illustrate your points. Humor provides students with a mental break.

6

Liking the subject is not enough. A good teacher must have command of the subject.

7

Focus on learner outcomes in every lecture. Ask yourself, "What will students remember 10 years from now?" Chances are they will remember about 20% of the material and whether their teacher inspired them.

8

Engage students in discussion. Encourage them tactfully. Involve students in every aspect of teaching.

9

In three-hour classes, lecture for the first hour and use the rest of the time for discussion and student presentations. Ensure that all students have read the material before class begins by asking one student, at random, to summarize the assigned reading.

10

PowerPoint presentations should be used only if it benefits the students (i.e. to show visual materials such as maps, charts, and illustrations) and only when they know the material well. Generally, students don't listen well when they are reading PowerPoint slides.