Super Teacher Lalit

Lalit, a teacher by chance, has won 15 teaching awards since he joined NTU 14 years ago. Why did he win over and over again? What special qualities does he have? Lalit shares his interesting views in his typically clear manner.

Assoc Prof Lalit Goel prefers to be called Lalit. He has received 2 teaching awards from NTU and 6 teaching awards from EEE. Similarly, EEE Club has added 7 more teaching awards with interesting titles like “most interesting and charismatic lecturer.” One wonders how many other professors in NTU have won so many teaching awards. Despite winning so many past awards, Lalit is still excited about winning his latest award, the EEE Teaching Excellence Award for Year 2 for Academic Year 2005/06. He said:

“Winning an award — regardless of how many you have won before — is such a wonderful recognition accorded, and I just want to bask in its glory. This year’s award is the MOST SPECIAL to me as I was heavily overloaded with major new administrative responsibilities as a ‘new’ Head of Division while teaching EE2001: Circuit Analysis. It is a fantastic feeling, one that can be felt but not easily expressed!”

Lalit is a teacher by chance. He wanted to live in Canada when he completed his PhD in 1991, but his wife found Canada too cold and needless to say he chose to stay with his wife over living in Canada! That said, he has absolutely no regrets as he fell in love with teaching the minute he stepped into the classroom at NTU!

What are the superteacher’s teaching methods? Lalit again:

“My teaching method is very simple: (1) prepare well-organized notes with clearly stated concepts and illustrations (interestingly to this day I prepare my notes using my own handwriting — for me the material and its delivery is much more important than the “beautification” of the notes), (2) deliver the material in the class in a clear, lucid and enthusiastic manner, making the students interested in the subject matter, and (3) strike an excellent rapport with the students inside as well as outside the classroom. My students always tell me that my voice is loud and clear. They also seem to enjoy my sense of humor although from my perspective I do not crack any jokes!

I prefer to use overhead transparencies as opposed to powerpoint slides as I strongly believe that transparencies allow me better control and flexibility in lectures. In fact if I could just use the whiteboard it would be even better, but this is almost unthinkable given that the class size I teach is 300+ for a particular group. The total class size for the cohort is typically 900 to 1,000 students. Many times I just take a blank transparency and try to show the more difficult concepts and numerical examples by writing on this transparency (even though the same material is already in the lecture notes, and each student has a copy of it) on the spot — this obviously requires more time for that concept to be explained but it is well worth it as I know full well that a majority of students would not understand it unless I spend more

time and effort on it. How clearly you explain an idea is very vital to the students, and one has to make an effort to be recognized. The students are looking for someone who cares, and actions speak louder than words!

I just go to the classroom and enjoy myself to the fullest, and luckily for me the students also enjoy learning from me. I guess it is the clarity, enthusiasm, approachability, and/or overall persona that the students possibly like about me.”

Although Lalit does not consider himself to be a “guru” on teaching, his views on the qualities of a good teacher are worth noting:

“The basic tenets of good teaching are clarity, loudness, enthusiasm, self-belief, and empathy towards students. A good teacher must not think that his job is over once he leaves the classroom — quite on the contrary, his job has just begun! One has to be passionate about teaching, knowledgeable in the subject areas, and always there for the student. Humility and patience are also essential virtues of an excellent teacher. I personally believe that outstanding communication skills will always set one apart from the rest.”

On the other side of the coin, what are the qualities of a good student-learner?

“A good learner needs to enjoy his lessons, attend his lectures and supplementary tutorials, read textbooks and not just class notes provided by the lecturers, work on tutorial questions himself / herself rather than wait for the tutor to “show the solutions” in the tutorial sessions, get his/her doubts clarified during tutorials

(continued on page 26)