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Love of Teaching Drives Daley Professor



AWARD WINNER—Dr. M. Vali Siadat, a professor at Daley College, received the 2001 Excellence in College Teaching Award.

(News-Herald Photo by Brian Reidy)

By **MATT GOLAS**

As Dr. M. Vali Siadat scurries about in his office at Daley College, he displays the focus he demands of his students in the classroom.

The winner of the 2001 Excellence in College Teaching Award knows exactly where newspaper clippings, classroom workbooks and handouts are from his nearly three decades of teaching and pulls them from files without a second of hesitation.

Now, the man who instituted the nationally-recognized Keystone Method of Teaching is seeing the widespread acceptance of his practices and couldn't be happier with their results.

Siadat credits Daley College's willingness to test new ideas as a major reason for the project's existence and said he relishes the freedom that the college affords him.

"The Keystone Project was pioneered at Daley in 1993 and we've seen excellent re-

sults, not only in math, but in reading comprehension," Siadat said. "It teaches students how to concentrate and through cooperative learning, precision teaching, dynamic assessment of the student.

"It teaches them how to focus better and some important study skills like how to block meandering thoughts."

Timed tests and daily quizzes help students set their minds to the task at hand and Siadat makes sure quiz problems that give the students trouble keep coming up until the class as a whole can get it right.

The project's name as well as its guiding philosophy are firmly grounded in the teachings of Plato, who suggested students proficient in math would also be quicker to take to other subjects as well.

With mathematics serving as the figurative "keystone" that holds everything in place,

continued on page 4

Daley College Professor

continued from page 1

Siadat is proving Plato right as students not only show improvement in Algebra, but also reading comprehension and test-taking skills.

Now Siadat and University of Illinois-Chicago professor Yoram Sagher stand at the forefront of this bold new school of teaching and are being rewarded for their work.

Siadat's most recent award comes from the Illinois Council of Teachers of Mathematics for his work with the Keystone Project as well as his time spent with younger students.

Leading the charge as director of such programs as the Project to Access, sponsored by NASA and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and the Chicago Pre-freshman Engineering Program, Siadat takes promising young students from 70 of the city's public schools and gives them a strong grounding in the hard sciences many time before they set foot in a high school. All of this is a dream come true for Siadat, who speaks of the programs like a proud father.

"I'm happy to be contributing to their educations," he said. "I was thinking the other day about how many students I've taught

through the years and it came out to nearly 10,000 students. I just want to see them successful and to help open their futures."

Siadat is the first in his family to serve as an educator, but he didn't see his path as clearly in his days as an undergraduate student at the University of California, Berkeley.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science in 1967, he worked in the engineering field until he began teaching at the Chicago Technical College in 1974. With stops in Chicago, his home of Tehran, Iran, and various schools in California, including the University of Southern California in the early '90s, he's finally settled in at Daley, but serves as an adjunct professor at Loyola University.

But it's the kids at Daley that keep Siadat on the Southwest Side, even if more prestigious universities beckon. The most recent award is given based on innovation in the classroom, and that's where Siadat excels.

"I'm quite pleased with the college because they value excellence," Siadat said. "They allow more opportunity for professional growth and they

encourage you."

Siadat's laser-sharp focus softens a bit as he speaks of his students and the opportunities he hopes to open for them every time he enters the classroom. Stressing the fact that many are there of their own volition, versus some schools where parental or community pressure force students into college classrooms, he smiles slightly as he reveals the biggest reason he's been teaching since 1974.

"It's the personal interaction," Siadat said. "It's being able to empower someone with knowledge. It's being able to impart that that's a very rewarding thing. To take those human beings and move them all along to a common goal and elevate the level of every student is the best part of it all."