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Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des associations des professeurs des universités de l'Ontario

2022-2023 OCUFA Teaching Award

Citation for Ali Arya

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Ali Arya is an associate professor in the School of Information Technology at Carlton University, located on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. Ali's beliefs in educational leadership are based on creating a learning environment that nurtures and empowers both students and faculty. His teaching style is centred on building students' motivation and exploration, providing support and guidance, and creating trust-based relationships. Coupled with his drive for innovation, Ali also brings new and exciting teaching activities to his classroom and extends the invitation to learn to his colleagues across campus.

Ali's peers and students describe him as someone who "nurtures motivation and inspires innovation." Ali was the first in the School of Information Technology at Carlton University to incorporate reflective activities in his courses. Not typically demonstrated in STEM courses, Ali actively encourages his students to think deeply about the tasks they are conducting in his courses, and more importantly, to reflect on how they felt about their experiences and how to improve for next time. Through this innovative approach, his students become invested in what they are learning, and motivated to grow and develop.

Ali's innovation also comes in the form of 3D virtual environments, augmented and virtual reality, and gamification. In addition to supervising the creation of the original Carleton University's 3D environment, Ali also uses his experience in both game design and education to engage his students in activities that are valuable to their learning while also being personal and entertaining. Working at their own pace, students build a sense of exploration and discovery through these activities, thus keeping them engaged in what they are learning. In addition, Ali also implements open work times and student-selected projects as part of the exploratory process, giving his students the ability to make active decisions in their learning. Throughout this process, Ali also provides guidance and encouragement to tackle more challenging subjects. Moreover, providing feedback on submissions within 48 hours, replying to emails within 24 hours, extending his office hours, and communicating through multiple online platforms further demonstrates Ali's strong mentorship of students and his commitment to their success.

As one of Ali's students writes, "Professor Arya is a fabulous teacher and tremendous mentor. His laid-back disposition, inclusive discussion style and insightful questioning help students create their own insights ... which is the highest form of teaching ... where art and science meet."

Ali's commitment to both learning and inclusivity also occurs outside the classroom. He has been involved in projects with the Carleton Centre for Indigenous Research, Culture, Language and Ethics (CIRCLE) and collaborated with colleagues from Indigenous communities on a series of projects. These include the Virtual Pow-wow, which was the first of its kind at Carlton University, the IIMMP, which is a multimedia training program for Indigenous youth, and InuitGame, an educational game to improve cultural knowledge and community connections in northern communities.

Ali's commitment to building impactful and trustful relationships also extends to his colleagues and his role as an educational leader. As his nominator states: "Ali's approach to his colleagues is focused on fostering a sense of collegiality and collaboration. He sees his role as a leader to encourage everyone's participation, build trust, allow for vulnerability, and challenge dominant discourses and frames of thought."

Congratulations to Ali Arya, recipient of the 2022-2023 OCUFA Teaching Award.

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