Outreach Gives Learning Meaning

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“Working with Science Engagement and Visions of Science gave me a more retrospective vision on the possibilities available to me after finishing my education”, says Suleiman Furmli, who was enrolled in UTSC’s new Science Engagement “Outreach” course over the Summer 2007 semester. Outreach is a service-learning course in which students bring concepts and approaches taught in the academic classroom to science-interested organizations within the community, allowing the students to become active learners. Suleiman worked with Visions of Science, an organization dedicated to bringing science to the forefront for children of lower socio-economic backgrounds who otherwise may not have the chance to be exposed to science role models.

The [Science Engagement] students were engaged …they were motivated and tried new things. They were creative and innovative”, says Francis Jeffers, founder of Visions of Science and also an alumnus of University of Toronto Scarborough. Jeffers involved four UTSC students in experiential learning placements with him over the summer. “It is really the only way of learning”, says Jeffers, “you can have all the book knowledge, but you really learn by working with people”.

“Working outside the [university] gave me the opportunity to work with people both much younger and much older than me, and gave me the opportunity to work in communities outside of Scarborough”, states Suleiman, who was initially attracted by VofS’s mandate of helping under-privileged children.

He spent his time “creating modules for the children… experiments or activities that facilitators could do with the children to bring about a certain theme or aspect of science”.

Outreach students are also required to carry out critical self-reflection through which they continually monitor and assess how their service enhances their own scholarship.

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Story by Tarif Rahman