Teaching award winners share commitment to students

December 4, 2017



Assistant Professor of Accounting Paddy Sivadasan was honored with the 2017 Dean's Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award.

Paddy Sivadasan’s students still like to talk about the time he walked out on their class.

Sivadasan, an assistant professor of accounting, was in his first semester at the Freeman School when he arrived in class one morning to teach Auditing, a demanding undergraduate course for which he required students to read the week’s chapter in advance of class. On that particular morning, however, he quickly realized he had a problem.

“Not a single student had read the material,” Sivadasan recalls. “If there were one or two students who had read the chapter, who could answer the questions, we could

have kept going, but there weren't, and I realized there was no way I could explain it. Five minutes into class, I said, 'Hey, nothing's going to happen.' And I just walked away."

It may not have been his intention, but Sivadasan got his point across. Within minutes, his inbox began to fill up with apologetic emails from students. The next time they met, his students had read all the material, and Sivadasan never again had a problem with the class.

"And you know, I probably got the best student evaluations I ever got from that class," he says with a laugh. "I think they understood that I care. As long as you can get that message through, you've won half the battle. It's the most important thing."

In October, Sivadasan's commitment to his students was recognized with the 2017 Dean's Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award, the Freeman School's highest accolade for classroom teaching. Also honored was Assistant Professor of Finance Xuhui "Nick" Pan, who received the 2017 Dean's Excellence in Graduate Teaching Award.

"Teaching is perhaps the most important thing we do, and Paddy and Nick represent the best of Freeman teaching," says Dean Ira Solomon. "I'm very pleased to recognize their accomplishments with this year's dean's teaching awards."

Freeman School Senior Associate Dean Paul Spindt, who recommended Sivadasan for the award, says he deserves credit for earning glowing evaluations from students despite teaching one of the BSM/MACCT program's most difficult courses.

"Students recognize that even though they're working very hard, they're getting a lot of value from it," Spindt says.

"The thing that set him apart from any other professor I've had was how much time he set aside for questions and secondary explanation during class," says Jacob Lustrin (BSM/MACCT '18). "He sees the quality of his students' knowledge as a reflection on himself, and he works hard to ensure they don't feel left behind."

> The referenced media source is missing and needs to be re-embedded. Assistant Professor of Finance Xuhui "Nick" Pan received this year's Dean's Excellence in Teaching Award for the graduate level.

Pan, recipient of the graduate teaching award, has also earned a reputation for outstanding student evaluations despite teaching difficult courses. Like Sivadasan, Pan says the secret to teaching difficult material is to make sure his students know that he's committed to their success.

“I really enjoy teaching, and I sincerely care about every student,” says Pan, who credits Freeman colleagues Spindt, Sheri Tice, Ted Fee and Venkat Subramaniam with helping him to improve his teaching. “I try to encourage everyone to participate in class discussions, and I encourage them to raise their hands and ask questions whenever they feel uncomfortable or confused.”

“As a professor, he’s patient and diligent and also cares about his students,” says former student Chen Zhang (MFIN ’16). “I remember before the mid-term exam, he told us we could provide any suggestions on the exam paper, so he could work on that and improve the class experience. That really impressed me.”

Pan’s dedication to helping everyone in class succeed has an added resonance with students in the Master of Finance program, many of whom are international students. To help them adapt to life at Freeman, Pan often shares stories about his own experiences as an international doctoral student.

“I didn’t do well in my first semester when I was in graduate school in Canada, but I kept working hard and whenever I had a question, I would ask the professor,” Pan says. “Very soon, I caught up and became the top student in the entire class. I share my personal story with them to encourage them to keep working hard because, eventually, their hard work will pay off.”