

Vote Roach for the next AND the next teaching award

By Yanet Chernet
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When you ask students at the medical school in Education city who James Roach is, you'll most likely be met with puzzled looks as they try to guess who that person might be. It's not because they don't know him. In fact, they know him so well, that to them, he has another name. A second passes, and a grin lights up their faces, "Jimmy!?! Is that who you mean?"

His name is Jimmy. But if you're meeting him for the first time, you'll probably want to call him Professor Roach or even Dr. James Roach. Roach is one of the best professors in the chemistry department at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q), whose main dedication lies in helping and challenging his undergraduates to become better students.

Roach, 50, is originally from Duncan, a small town in Oklahoma. He's got a friendly face, wide grin, answers emails with a 'Howdy', calls his mother and father "Mama" and "Daddy" and has a Southern warmth that coats his accent and that exudes from him when he speaks to you.

"He has a very kind heart and life is never dull when he is around! His loud, crazy laugh makes my heart happy," said Sarah Roach, Roach's wife.

When asked why he decided to become a teacher, Roach recounts a time in the last two years of his graduate studies at the University of Oklahoma when he was recruited as a teaching assistant. "I liked it. I liked teaching and interacting with other students," Roach said.

When he was about to receive his doctorate in chemistry, Roach received offers of employments from many companies in the United States, including Clorox company, a large

American manufacturer and retailer of consumer products. He also had an offer to become a teacher at the University of Kentucky.

“I had about two weeks to decide between the two offers. It changed every 20 minutes. Back and forth, back and forth and I decided on that job in Kentucky. And I’ve been in academia ever since,” said Roach.

Since then, Roach has expanded his teaching activities to other universities in the United States and to universities in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. He has also published many articles in respected journals, including a report on a novel research he has conducted on filtering uranium. When asked about his most significant accomplishment however, Roach talks about his students.

“When I was in the U.S., I felt as though I made a very meaningful contribution. I’ve taught teachers, who are now teaching others to do chemistry. I felt as though they’re doing this because I’m the one who’s teaching them,” said Roach.

Roach’s students are also the most important aspect of his academic life in Qatar. He meets with them six days a week and constantly pushes them to achieve higher standards. He has twice won the Excellence in Teaching award at WCM-Q. He even tailors his research so that his students can participate. He has this unique way of connecting with his students by using humor. In fact, he even uses his last name, Roach, to create funny pranks so that he is more approachable to students. Roach’s humor, cheerful attitude and easygoing manner help students transition smoothly to the challenging curriculum at WCM-Q.

Al Anoud Al Athba, who took Roach’s foundation chemistry class as a freshman, said “Dr. Roach takes the time to build bonds with his students. No matter how bad my day gets, his attitude and personality cheer me up.”

Sheila Qureshi, a chemistry professor at WCM-Q who has worked with Roach for 10 years, said he is “definitely a Yes-man in terms of being helpful to colleagues and students.

There is a saying, ‘We work to live’, but he lives to work.”

Roach’s contribution to the Cornell community is astounding not only in his capacity as a colleague and a teacher but also as a human being.

“He contributes to the students, to chemistry and to the college,” said Qureshi. “James Roach *is* the contribution.”

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Sources:

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