

Features

DR. AHMED SAMATAR: CONFRONTING CHANGE AT SLU

By Tim Larrison

Dr. Ahmed Samatar is a visiting professor of Government at St. Lawrence and a native of Gabileh, Somalia. He received a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin, and holds an M.A. and a doctorate in International Studies from the University of Denver. He is currently awaiting the publication of his book Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality sometime in the upcoming year.

Dr. Samatar has continually been an outspoken member of the faculty, and has spent much of his time at St. Lawrence lobbying for the establishment of an international studies department at the University.

He was fundamental in the creation of the African studies minor, has recently become the faculty coordinator for the Kenya abroad program, and is a member of this year's Steinman Committee.

Recently THN had an opportunity to speak with Dr. Samatar regarding his involvement on campus, and his views on the direction of St. Lawrence.

Q: Over the next two years the University is planning to invest a great deal of money into renovating Carnegie Hall and turning it into an international education center. What are your views on the importance of international education at St. Lawrence?

A: The definition of a liberal arts education not only includes increasing an individual's sensitivity and understanding of immediate reality, but also a reach for the world beyond.

International relations should have a central place in the completion and the consummation of an excellent liberal arts education. It is an antidote against parochialism; it helps in the process of knowing yourself and knowing others around you.

It empowers one to appreciate the problems and promises of an interdependent world.

Q: So you feel international studies will enhance the students' interest and awareness of the outside world, forcing them to ask more questions?

A: Certainly, it is simply the best medicine against insularity and simple mindedness. International studies could play a major role in cutting down incidents of student apathy.

Q: As faculty coordinator of the Kenya program would you elaborate on the importance of the abroad programs and the role of these programs in the growth of St. Lawrence as a liberal arts institution?

A: St. Lawrence University is a good school but that isn't really enough. This college has the capacity to be an excellent institution.

One of the ways that we can reach for this is through preserving what is good about our tradition, and then building on this to meet the challenges ahead. We must take optimum advantage of our international connections so that the students and faculty can then integrate those experiences into the intellectual work that is done here at the college.

The Kenya program has shown that this type of education is very possible. I have not met a single student who has come back from Kenya and did not feel the stimulus to remake their intellect and personality. When they come back they are ready to go and "run with it" in terms of their ideas and curiosity.

I often find it difficult to hold these students back so that they don't leave behind others who have not had the experience.

My suggestion is that all of the abroad programs that we have, Kenya, Spain, England, etc., are pregnant with educational opportunities. If properly and creatively used, these could give St. Lawrence that extra academic sheen necessary to stand out from the competition.

Q: What are your thoughts on the Freshmen Program as a vehicle for change here at St. Lawrence?

A: Conceptually, the Freshmen Program is quite attractive. Its

time has come. My hope is that it is not a gimmick to give the University superficial visibility. Rather, that it represents a very conscious and deeply felt need on the part of this college to reach for academic excellence.

Q: What are your views on the new President, Dr. Peterson, in terms of change at St. Lawrence?

A: Dr. Peterson is new. This is her first year so she deserves time to produce a vision for the college.

In the few moments I have seen her in action, I sense that she is imaginative, empathetic, and bold. She could be just the kind of a leader that the College needs.

Dr. Peterson's appreciation of international education, changes in the curriculum, and her commitment to the overall improvement of St. Lawrence, give me hope.

Q: You have expressed enthusiasm for progress and diversification at St. Lawrence. Nationally, we are in the midst of a conservative swing exemplified in education by Secretary of Education William J. Bennett and the best selling book by Alan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind. Where does St. Lawrence fit into the national scheme, and do you feel this will affect change at the University?

A: I can only speak in terms of my limited experiences here, so I cannot be definitive. If I under-

See SAMATAR, page 9



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