



Sayeed Mehmood (1969-Present)

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"We in the forestry discipline have to find a way to reach people of diverse backgrounds." Sayeed Mehmood, 2006.

Early Life

Growing up in Bangladesh—a tiny nation with the world’s eighth largest population—Sayeed Mehmood received an early education about natural resource economics. “Forests have disappeared, and there are a variety of environmental and sustainability issues,” he says. “When I was in school, this was becoming a very big issue.” Mehmood was introduced to the science of forestry by a relative who encouraged him to study natural resources while in high school. He went on to get his Bachelor of Science from the Institute of Forestry in Bangladesh in 1993. He did his graduate work in the United States, earning his master’s degree in forest economics from the University of Maine in 1995, and his doctorate in forest economics and policy from Auburn University in 1999.

Career

Mehmood’s work in forestry incorporates both social and scientific dimensions. As a post-doctoral research fellow at Auburn, he examined forest landowner’s perceptions of the Endangered Species Act, focusing on specific components like the Safe Harbor Program, cost share programs, and technical assistance for forest landowners. He moved on to a faculty position at the University of Arkansas in 2001, where he has remained ever since. He describes his position as consisting of 40 percent teaching, including courses on natural resource policy, statistics, and advanced forest economics; and 60 percent research, including a grant-funded collaborative project with the University of Florida, examining bio-energy and its possible implications for the Southeast’s forests. “It might be quite feasible to use wood-based bio-energy in the South, provided gasoline prices don’t go below a certain point,” Mehmood says. He also studies landowner response to the threat of pest insects with much of his work focusing on forest management impacts of an insect that kills red oak trees in Arkansas. “What are the long term implications of their actions on the Ozark mountains?” Mehmood asks. “How do landowners respond to threats and uncertainties? Do they change their forest management behaviors? These are the kind of questions I ask in my research.”

Importance of Mentoring to Career

Mehmood says his career success stems from his ability to build continually on his previous research and positions. He credits his major professors as early mentors who helped establish his initial interest in forestry. His master's advisor, Dr. Dave Field, offered him a research assistantship backed up by technical and personal support; and his doctoral advisor, Daowei Zhang, helped guide his career toward what Mehmood says are the field's "hot topics." Mehmood notes the opportunity to publish in notable scientific journals, and participate in cutting-edge research, as career highlights; he says he has also been fortunate not to have an identifiable low point during the course of his career.

Highlights

Mehmood notes that his niche of the environmental field, which combines forestry and natural resources with economics and policy, is still relatively small one but is rapidly growing in importance. "Many of these problems that I study are now beginning to attract attention, and they are very important issues," he says. "Natural resources professionals are just realizing how important the political process is. It decides the fate of the environment, and the future." Mehmood serves as a formal and informal advisor to a number of undergraduate and graduate students, and is currently a member of the Society of American Foresters Cultural Diversity Committee. Mehmood hopes that these efforts will help bring more students of color into the environmental field. When asked to provide advice for minority students interested in the environmental field, Mehmood simply says "Come on in. Diversity is a lingering issue in this field. We have had many problems attracting women and minorities to the field. We are used to looking at forestry issues through a traditional lens. We have to find a way to reach people of diverse backgrounds."

For More Information

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