

# Inspiration in India

## Three students' trip became a tribute to their mentor, Dr. Satu Somani.

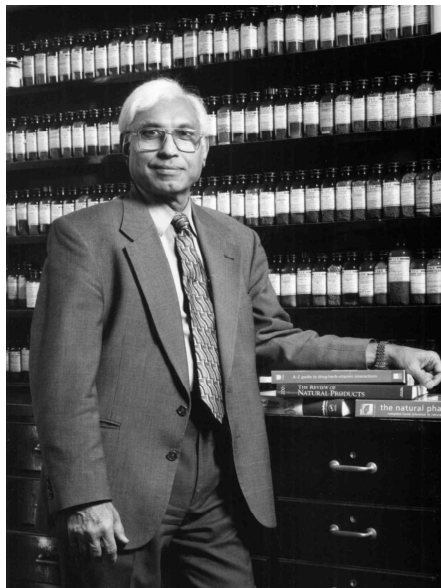
Satu Somani, Ph.D., SIU professor of pharmacology and toxicology, was just days away from a visit to his native India, a trip delayed by a year because of last Sept. 11. It was a trip he had taken numerous times with medical students, and three were eager to go: Haneme Idrizi, Leah Delfinado and Amanda Mulch (all MSIV).

The group met in late October, just before Dr. Somani was going ahead to India. He planned to meet the students there a few weeks later. "He was so excited about the trip," Haneme recalls. That was the last time they would see Dr. Somani, who fell ill that evening and died a week later.

Though greatly saddened at losing their mentor, the trio honored his memory by taking the trip, and they gained an experience of a lifetime.

Their purpose was to inform Indian medical students about problem-based learning, a concept new to most Indian medical schools but the core philosophy of SIU medical school training. Some Indian medical schools have implemented PBL, in part due to Dr. Somani's previous trips and workshops.

G. Sham Sunder, M.D., vice chancellor of the University of Health Sciences in Andhra Pradesh, India, and a friend of Dr. Somani, was among those hosting the students. SIU faculty Vickram Ramkumar, Ph.D., associate professor of molecular pharmacology, Louis Premkumar, Ph.D., assistant professor of pharmacology, and Akshay



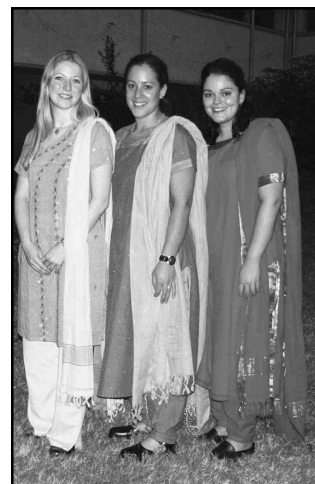
*Dr. Somani*

Sood, M.D., assistant professor of internal medicine, also attended.

Visiting six Indian cities and rural areas in two weeks, Haneme, Leah and Amanda presented PBL to the local medical students. At first, the group noted that the Indian students were shy about using principles of PBL to defend their medical opinions. "You can't be deferential to your faculty member in a PBL session," Leah notes. "You have to stand up for what you're saying and tell the tutor he or she is talking too much. The students were shocked at the idea of student-led groups, but after a while, they were standing up and defending their views. PBL definitely can work there."

Of great impact to the students was their visits to local hospitals. "We saw things we'd only seen in the medical books," says Leah. At every hospital, the students were encouraged to interact with the patients. Amanda brought toys to a children's hospital and quickly became very popular with its patients.

Leah was struck by the extreme poverty all around them. "People



*Amanda, Leah and Haneme pose in salwarkameez, a traditional Indian dress.*

were sleeping in rows on the streets. At the state-funded hospitals they visited, they saw India's poorest citizens. "Dr. Somani warned us about the poverty, but it was still shocking," Leah says. "I've been to Peru and Bolivia, and I've seen nothing like the poverty in India."

The SIU group was impressed with the intelligence and skill of the Indian physicians working in such poor conditions. "There weren't any patient rooms," Leah says. "Just large rooms, stone floors, with patients squeezed anywhere there was space."

The students enjoyed visiting Dr. Somani's homeland and will always remember the inspiration Dr. Somani brought to them. "The fact that we went says a lot about the work he did," Haneme says. "He was a real lover of Indian people and the culture."

"Dr. Somani was impassioned about exposing people to other cultures, particularly his culture," Leah adds. "I think he really got a kick out of us becoming passionate about what he had a passion for." ■