

STRONG START

FRESHMAN TASMIA RAHMAN GETS A BOOST FROM ALUMNI

By Sheree Rogers

Eight thousand miles from Appleton in the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, the friends and family members of Tasmia Rahman '11 are asking questions about her "liberal arts university." In their country, the bright, young economics whiz would be pursuing a business education that puts her on the track to a career in the corporate world.

"Liberal arts is unheard of in Bangladesh," says Rahman. "There are people saying, 'How does that work? You were so good in economics, why are you now studying art?' I have to explain to everyone that liberal arts includes everything — even economics."

Having grown up in one of the largest and most densely populated cities in the world, Dhaka's pollution, congestion, poverty, and crime helped shape the young woman, resulting in her decision to study in a community that is, quite literally, a world away.

"In Bangladesh, you have huge buildings on one side of the street and slums on the other," she says. "In Appleton, it's safe to walk on the street."

Rahman's mother and father, Samia and Matiar, have gradually grown to appreciate the idea of a liberal arts education and the haven their daughter has found at Lawrence. Once wary of the thousands of miles between them, today the Rahman's enthusiastically support Tasmia's move to Wisconsin.



A CALL TO SERVE OTHERS

Embedded in the 20-year-old's enthusiastic and outgoing persona are the altruistic ideals of a young woman whose connection with women and children in poverty led to a strong sense of purpose. Rahman worked at a non-profit organization helping educate homeless children while attending high school and discovered that, for her, it was impossible to ignore their predicament. "When you come from a country like Bangladesh, poverty is something you always see. It's in your head and once you've worked with these children it's hard to get that out," she says.

"When you just hear about poverty, it might seem like there isn't much you can do. But when you see poverty every day you see there are some people who are making a difference. Even if it's something really small, you can contribute somehow." Rahman speaks passionately about young children with no access to schools and how quickly they learn when given the opportunity, and also of women who face a difficult future. As part of a United Nations development program, Rahman also worked to encourage gender sensitivity among Bangladeshi police. "In some parts of the country women have no rights at all. I know people who are affected by that and hope that I can do something to change it."

Understanding that, as a freshman, there is much yet to be discovered, Rahman admits her life plan is subject to change. However, she is sure that whether it's professionally or as a volunteer, she will someday work to provide greater opportunity for the poor women and children of her homeland.

UNEXPECTED SUPPORT

Almost immediately upon her arrival at Lawrence, Rahman learned that she was being considered as the inaugural recipient of the David C. Mulford Scholarship. Established in 2006 with a gift from Nana Baffour '94, the scholarship is intended to support students interested in public service and commerce, and also connects those who receive the scholarship with Lawrence alumni mentors who know a thing or two about achieving their goals.

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Rahman met Mulford and Baffour in October after learning she had been selected to receive the scholarship. The meeting also opened the door to a new friendship, introducing Rahman to Baffour's sister, Zenabu Abubakari '11, also in her first year at Lawrence.

Honored to have been chosen for the scholarship, Rahman looks forward to the wise counsel of distinguished alumni. She says, "Ambassador Mulford has probably done it all and I know that whatever I do, he'll have some advice to give me. That's amazing." And, even though the first-year student has difficulty envisioning the day when she might mentor a future Lawrentian, she believes in "paying forward" the mentoring requirement of the scholarship. "That would be really nice. I hope I can get there someday, not just for my sake, but also for the scholarship."

LIFE AT LAWRENCE

Rahman first learned about Lawrence University when taking the SAT tests in Dhaka. At the test site, another student couldn't stop talking about the school her brother was attending in Appleton, Wis.

After doing her own research, Rahman agreed the description of Lawrence fit her to a tee. Not only was she interested in a small, liberal arts college where she could pursue her interest in economics, other social sciences, and philosophy, but she also liked the diversity of the campus and was surprised to learn that the small, Midwestern college was home to seven other students from Bangladesh. (Imagine her surprise when, on the first day of an economics class, Suryadipta Roy, visiting professor assistant of economics, greeted Rahman in her native language.)

TASMIA'S HOMETOWN: Dhaka, Bangladesh

AKA: "City of Mosques"

Population: 6,724,976 (37,834.5/sq. mi.)

Primary industries: Clothing and cotton textiles, jute products, newsprint, and chemical fertilizers

Independence Day: Dec. 17, 1971 (End of the Bangladesh Liberation War with Pakistan)



In the Fall Term, juggling a full class schedule and a job in Dining Service left little time for community volunteering, something Rahman hopes she can squeeze into her schedule later this year.

As she begins the Winter Term it's more Freshman Studies, where she has already learned about psychology (interesting), music (would like to study more), and physics (she'd prefer to leave that subject to others). "The reading list was very good and the class was satisfying, even if I didn't do as well as I wanted to."

When Rahman has a little down time, she and her friends are busy exploring the Appleton community on foot, feeling safe and finding local business owners surprisingly easy to talk to. Snow, which she'd never seen before and is in good supply this winter, makes the exploration even more appealing.

And, Rahman is laying the groundwork for a family member to consider Lawrence. Her younger brother, Farraz, is in ninth grade hoping to become a musician. "He is obsessed with his guitar and tells me that, after I graduate, I should pay for his education so he can study music. That's actually an unheard of thing in Bangladesh." ■

PAYING IT FORWARD

The David C. Mulford Scholarship Fund was established in 2006 by a Lawrence alumnus who knows, perhaps as well as anyone, the value of a strong mentor. Trying to break into the intensely competitive world of investment banking soon after graduating from business school in 1999, Nana Baffour '94 wrote a letter that changed his life.

Noting that Mulford '59 was a prominent Lawrence alumnus and also chairman international of Credit Suisse First Boston, one of the world's top investment banking firms, Baffour wrote Mulford a letter — one Lawrence alumnus to another — seeking advice regarding a career in investment banking.

To Baffour's surprise, Mulford telephoned two weeks later, inviting him to a meeting at Mulford's New York office.

Arrangements were made for Baffour to meet with senior executives at Credit Suisse that, he says, never would have opened their doors if Mulford had not asked them to do so. Later that summer Baffour joined Credit Suisse. Today he is the co-founder and a managing principal of Knox Lawrence International, LLC, a private equity firm in New York City.

"There is clearly something to be said about a small school that engenders the kind of feeling that a person like David Mulford, at the level of success he accomplished, wanted to reach out to somebody like me," he says.

Baffour and Mulford stayed in touch over the years and both returned to campus in October 2007 to formally award the inaugural David C. Mulford Scholarship to Tasmia Rahman '11. The scholarship provides students interested in public service and commerce with funding for their education, and also connects Mulford scholars with Lawrence alumni who agree to mentor the students during and after their years at Lawrence.

TOP: Tasmia Rahman '11, meets her mentors in October 2007 when Mulford visits Lawrence as a convocation speaker. Left to right, Nana Baffour '94, Rahman '11, and David C. Mulford '59

BOTTOM: Rahman and Mulford

Mulford and Baffour have signed on as Rahman's mentors and Rahman, in accepting the scholarship, agrees that she will mentor future generations of Mulford Scholars.

In a world that is increasingly specialized, both Mulford and Baffour dismiss the notion that Lawrence's liberally educated students aren't well prepared for careers in business. Mulford, now the U.S. ambassador to India says, "It enables you to build a foundation of personal security which accepts that change is a normal part of life, that it shouldn't be feared. In fact, change can be enjoyed and taken advantage of in a career sense, providing you are willing to change jobs and have the confidence to try new things."

By paying it forward to students like Rahman, Baffour hopes more Lawrence students will consider the full range of possibilities, including potential careers in commerce.

"It is my hope that this small act can begin the dialog about what we ought to be doing for young Lawrence graduates, about how they look at commerce, public service, and their role in society," he said.

