

IN PROFILE: NEW FACULTY

Helping robots develop personal touch

By JULIE ACHILLES

As a young boy growing up in Iran, Mehrdad Kermani dreamed of becoming a pilot.

His father was a pilot for the Iranian air force and would teach his son about different kinds of airplanes and models and even the basic instructions of how to fly a helicopter.

But Kermani's life took off in another direction.

Kermani never knew why, but his parents urged him not to become a pilot. As a young student entering high school, Kermani knew he was strong in math and decided to apply those skills towards a career in engineering.

Today, Kermani, 36, is an assistant professor in the department of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Western Ontario.

Kermani came to Western from Iran in 2001 as a PhD student in the electrical and computer engineering-robotics program. Before moving to Canada, he was a senior automation engineer at a company in Iran from 1997 to 2001.

But he longed to see other parts of the world. "One way was immigration," he said. "But at the same time I was interested in studying, too." After looking into different universities, Kermani chose to continue his studies at Western.

Kermani still remembers arriving in Canada. He says he was lucky to have a friend, Shahram Naghibi, help him settle into the new foreign city. Naghibi remembers how Kermani didn't know anyone and spoke little English. "I told him, 'If you want to learn the language you need to socialize with the people,'" Naghibi said. Within a week of living in London, Kermani was socializing.

His social life, however, didn't interfere with his studies. While

Name: Mehrdad Kermani
Born: Tehran, Iran, in 1970
Department: Electrical and computer engineering
Academic background:
 ■ B.Sc. electrical and computer engineering, Isfahan University of Technology, 1994
 ■ M.Sc. electrical and computer engineering, Iran University of Science and Technology, 1997
 ■ PhD electrical and computer engineering-robotics, University of Western Ontario, 2005
Book: Applied Vibration Suppression Using Piezoelectric Materials, Nova Science Publishers, N.Y., in press
Enjoys: Tennis, skiing and Turtles chocolates

working towards a PhD, Kermani was a visiting worker at the Integrated Manufacturing Technologies Institute of the National Research Council of Canada. He was also a postdoctoral fellow for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and associate researcher at the Canadian Surgical Technologies and Advanced Robotics in 2005.

"He's an exceptionally bright person," said Rajni Patel, a professor and chair in the department of electrical and computer engineering, who supervised Kermani during PhD studies. "He's quick to learn and not afraid to try new things, which is what you need in a grad student."

Currently, Kermani is researching how to make robots more human-friendly – one of his major life goals. Kermani says most of the research he does with robotics focuses on improving the overall quality of life for humans by replacing jobs that are too difficult or too tiring.

Kermani is conducting his research with his close friend, Khlid Habib, whom he met during his PhD studies. Habib describes



Paul Mayne, Western News

Electrical and Computer Engineering Professor Mehrdad Kermani uses the CRS F-3 Robot in teaching robotics courses.

Kermani as a diligent worker. "I don't know how to describe how hardworking he is," he said. "You can't pull him off a job if it has to be done."

Although Kermani's career doesn't leave him a lot of free time, he does enjoy playing tennis. Habib says he and Kermani became tennis partners shortly after becoming friends. "He's very competitive. He will trash talk even if you're beating him."

Aside from tennis, Kermani enjoys time spent with his family.

He has a close relationship with his older sister who lives near Boston, Mass., and while his parents and younger sister still live in Iran, he's in contact with them regularly. His parents have yet to meet his fiancée whom he met as a Western student.

So far, Kermani appears to be doing well as a professor. He sensed he was on the right track after receiving positive feedback from students during his first semester teaching. "A few of them approached me to thank

me in person, and also a few of them actually chose to do graduate studies with me."

Kermani says being a professor is more peaceful than working in the engineering industry, but he is still uncertain where his landing in life will be and if he'll remain a professor or return to the industry.

"Hopefully in two years, I'll have a better picture as to which one I will eventually go to."

The writer is a graduate student in the Journalism program.



SOCIAL JUSTICE and PEACE STUDIES/ RELIGIOUS STUDIES

King's University College, a Catholic Liberal Arts College affiliated with The University of Western Ontario, invites applications for a two-year, limited-term cross-appointment in Social Justice and Peace Studies and Religious Studies at the rank of Assistant Professor, effective July 1, 2007, subject to budgetary approval. Candidates should have a Ph.D. in a related discipline with expertise in one or more of Social Justice Issues, Peace Studies, and/or Catholic social teaching and the challenges involved in devising strategies for conflict resolution in multi-cultural and/or inter-religious contexts. A strong classroom presence and excellent teaching skills are required. Candidates are expected to have an active research program, academic publications, the ability to inspire student engagement in progressive community and global change, and a willingness to participate in the College community. Applications, including a curriculum vitae, teaching dossier and three letters of reference, should be sent to **Dr. Bernie Hammond, Coordinator Social Justice and Peace Studies, King's University College, 266 Epworth Ave., London, Ontario, N6A 2M3, by December 1, 2006.** Salary will be commensurate with qualifications and experience. Sponsored by the Roman Catholic Diocese of London, King's is committed to advancing the Catholic intellectual tradition and welcomes faculty and students from all faiths and backgrounds. All qualified candidates are encouraged to apply. However, Canadians and permanent residents will be given priority. The King's website is <http://www.uwo.ca/kings>.



Time's running out ...

2006/07
 Cut-off Date
 Winter Term: Nov. 3

We accept orders year round!



Room 78, UCC Building • Phone: 519-661-3578 or Fax: 519-661-3816
 E-mail: inprint.coursepacks@uwo.ca • Website: www.coursepack.org