Former TA Turns Notes into Book

By Eva Moy

Feature

When Zoher Z. Karu G was the head teaching assistant for Signals and Systems (6.003) in Fall 1992, he wrote review notes for his students before the midterm. Two years later, he has finished writing — and the result is a self-published book.

Signals and Systems Made Ridiculously Simple is designed to be both a study guide and a reference for review. "Traditional textbooks in this field often leave the reader to guess what's important and what's not, often losing track of the big picture," Karu wrote in the preface of the book.

The book "cuts through the unnecessary information and tells students what they need to know," concentrating on explanations rather than problem solving or theory, Karu said.

In addition, the appendix contains "mathematical concepts that professors often view as assumed knowledge, but students can't seem to find written down anywhere," Karu wrote in the preface.

Karu described himself as "always interested in teaching ... finding better ways to teach things," he said.

"He was an extremely effective head TA," said William M. Siebert '46, professor of electrical engineering and computer science, who was the lecturer at the time Karu was head TA. "He got so excited in the learning process ... he wanted to formalize it.

Book is useful for others classes

The book covers signal processing and linear system theory. Although it was written for 6.003 students in mind, Karu suggested that it may also be useful for students taking Introduction to Communication, Control, and Signal Processing (6.011), Discrete-Time Signal Processing (6.341), and Biomedical Signal and Image Processing (6.525).

Siebert explained that instructors want to "provide a language, a set of metaphors by which you can talk about a set of complex things." Although Karu's book reflects the notation and style of the material covered in 6.003, students should still participate in the review process instead of relying on the notes, he said.

Karu said that he has received support from Siebert and his faculty adviser, professor of EECS Louis D. Brads '69. "I don't think I'm stepping on anybody's shoes" by publishing this book, Karu said.

After a year of writing and additional time of editing and rewriting, Karu's efforts finally paid off. In the week that he sold books in front of Room 34-101, the main EECS lecture hall, Karu sold 240 copies, more than breaking even.

Undergraduates, graduate students taking qualifying exams for their doctoral programs, and professors have all bought copies. "People from around the country have also begun to inquire about the book," he said. Karu hopes to expand his market to other universities.

When one person asked, "What other books does your firm have in this series?" Karu answered, "Well, the firm is me, the book is three weeks old, and this is the only book I've written."

FEATURE

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