

TU DELTA

14-10-2010 | 11.19 | Dhariyash Rathod

Chameleon in the classroom

Professor Wouter Serdijn is one of TU Delft's bright young guns in the professorial ranks. The two-time winner of his faculty's 'Best Teacher Award' shares his views on internationalization, successful teaching and his passion for music.



Professor Wouter Serdijn (44) graduated from TU Delft in 1994 with a PhD in

Professor Wouter Serdijn: "Dutch students have integrated their studies more into the rest of their personal lives." (Photo: Hans Stakelbeek/FMAX)

microelectronics. Since 1994 he has been professor at the faculty of Electrical Engineering, where he was awarded the best teacher award in 2001 and 2004. His research activities have focused on developing design methodologies and proof-of-concepts of low-power analog integrated circuits for wearable and implantable biomedical devices. He is also Chief Technology Officer at 3UB Innovative Wireless Systems B.V.

Why did you choose for a career in academia instead of the corporate sector after graduating?

"After finishing my MSc, I wasn't really sure about jobs. Meanwhile my professor offered me a PhD position, which wasn't common during that time. My PhD topic was very interesting and I wanted to continue in that direction. During my PhD studies, I got involved in a second-year course in analog electronics for industrial design engineering. I liked it very much and apparently did well. I guess I also need the academic freedom. Finally, my horizon is longer than that of many companies."

Having been awarded two best teacher awards, what's the 'secret' of being a great teacher?

"I always try to stay open to the student's personal learning needs. Students are never the same, so I try to understand the needs of the individual student. I always lower my threshold so students can approach me very easily. I think teachers should organize their courses in a well-structured way. Always be flexible, but fair, and always try to encourage or motivate the students."

Is teaching an art or a skill?

"I think it's a combination of both. Teaching requires inspiration and creativity, which is associated with art, and it's also a technique which ultimately needs practice and brings skills. I always try to learn from other good teachers around me and try to adopt that in my teaching."

Which do you prefer, teaching or research?

"My dream job has the best of both worlds - teaching and research. The most important thing for me is the triangle or combination of teaching, education and people. This can only be found in a university, and so I'd like to continue this as long as I can."

The majority of your post-docs and PhDs are internationals, not Dutch. Why don't more Dutch students pursue post-graduate education?

"For quite some time in the Netherlands there has been a declining interest towards science, technology and engineering. This very much depends on the image of engineering in Dutch society, but it also depends on a lack of proper teaching skills among quite a

few high school teachers. Dutch students are also very much interested in the societal relevance of their prospective professions. It was quite interesting to see that as soon as I started a large project on wearable and implantable medical devices, I started to attract relatively more Dutch students than international students."

Are there also more international post-grads at TU Delft because international students are generally better students than the Dutch?

"No, generally, international students have different interests and motivations, as they come from different cultures and societies. But it isn't easy to generalize. For me, every student is a person, with his or her own individual interests, talents, skills and experience.

Do Dutch or Western European educated students have any advantages or disadvantages compared to international students? And vice versa?

"TU Delft's international students have been selected more rigorously. Often, international students have left almost everything behind, so they're inclined to make the best of their stay in Delft. Conversely, Dutch students and, to some extent, also other EU students, have integrated their studies more into the rest of their personal lives. This makes them less dependent on their studies, which has its own advantages and disadvantages."

Do you change your teaching style for international students, in order to be more effective in reaching and engaging them?

"As a teacher you must make connections with your students as best you can. Of course one has his own style and way of teaching, but it's the connection that eventually leads to the learning results. I guess I'm bit like a chameleon when it comes to teaching, albeit still with a personal colour."

How do you feel about TU Delft's drive to internationalize?

"TU Delft is ambitious in its international visibility. Moreover, the university has a very good reputation internationally, which attracts bright students from around the world. Especially in my area, electrical engineering, there has been a big influx of international students, which is quite good. So, the drive to internationalize has been successful, and now let us try to make it even more successful."

What do international students bring to the university?

"They bring fresh minds, good motivation, fascinating backgrounds, and also a broader understanding of global needs."

What tips do you have for international readers interested in building careers in Dutch academia or with NL-based companies?

"Basically, Dutch culture - university or industry - always appreciates when an individual is creative. This is also what we try to teach at TU Delft. I'd like to say that we always stimulate the students to be original, creative and motivated, and to know what is actually expected from them when they're in any job."

Music is your hobby and passion. What kind of music do you like?

"I grew up during the 1980s and like lots of 'New Wave' bands from the 80s. I play in a self-organizing band, named 'Three', where we compose music ourselves. I like 80s pop and rock and my favourite bands include Blondie, The Cure, Depeche Mode, and new bands like Muse, Interpol and The Editors."

If you could choose between being a world famous rock star or world famous scientist, which would it be?

"I started playing the piano when I was 9 and took piano lessons until I was 18 years old. I then had to choose between going to music academy or TU Delft. I chose TU Delft. I decided to study electrical engineering here, thinking that electrical engineering would be a great profession and music a great hobby. Actually, there's good balance between my hobby and profession. I play keys, which has electronics in it, and when I'm a teacher I'm on stage, and performing on stage helps me to be a teacher."

three-music.nl

elca.et.tudelft.nl/~wout/