



Mehnaz Afridi, PhD  
Distinguished Lasallian Educator  
2021-2022

It is my distinct pleasure and my great honor to present to you the Manhattan College Distinguished Lasallian Educator for 2021-2022, Dr. Mehnaz Afridi.

To be considered for the Distinguished Lasallian Educator award, a nominee must be exemplary in advancing and enlivening the Lasallian hallmarks that are part of the core identity of Manhattan College. We know them well as we find them in our College Mission Statement: Respect for Human Dignity, Reflection on Faith and its Relation to Reason, An Emphasis on Ethical Conduct, a Commitment to Social Justice and Excellence in Teaching. Mehnaz Afridi exhibits each of these five hallmarks in remarkable fashion.

Dr. Afridi came to Manhattan College in June of 2011 as a result of a national search for an expert in both Islam and the Holocaust who could join our faculty in Religious Studies and lead our Holocaust Center. Many in this community will recall that this was a bold step, audacious even, for a Muslim woman to teach in the School of Liberal Arts, and to lead the transformation of the well-respected Holocaust Resource Center into the renowned Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center it has become. From the very beginning, Mehnaz has been embraced by our diverse college community as well as by local, regional, and global communities as a true scholar of the Holocaust and an emissary of interfaith peace.

One colleague who worked closely with Mehnaz for ten years noted,  
“Since her arrival, she has worked with incredible energy, publishing, entering dialogs, engaging audiences, accepting awards, and including her students in service projects that embody and teach interfaith understanding. And somehow, while doing all of this, she has been a model teacher, as indicated by her receipt of the Brother Gabriel Costello, FSC Award for Excellence in Teaching, and she continued to build an exceptional record as a scholar, including the writing of the important book *Shoah through Muslim Eyes*.”

Another colleague and HGI Board member shared these insights about Mehnaz.  
“She is an inspiring teacher who brings out the very best in her students as she fosters the development of their God-given talents. She respects each student and colleague as a precious creation of the creator God. Her ability to manage group dynamics and simultaneously treat each student as if that student were the only one in the room is a talent that cannot be taught. . . . When Dr. Afridi’s students take active roles in HGI’s public events, there could be no better spokespersons for the effectiveness of Dr. Afridi’s pedagogical practices. Students have told me repeatedly that Dr. Afridi has transformed their lives, their education, and their goals.”

These words remind us of the words of Saint John Baptist de La Salle in his Meditation for the Feast of Saint Margaret of Scotland where he writes:

“regard the children whom God has entrusted to you as children of God. Have much more solicitude for their education and instruction than you would have for the children of a king.”

I beg the assembly's indulgence for a few words of my own. Years ago, Mehnaz invited me to go on a Jewish/Christian/Muslim interfaith retreat. In our final reflection, one of the leaders, an observant Jewish man, shared that he had gladly lived his life as such. But he was perfectly content to stand before God and find out that he had been wrong. I was overwhelmed because I identified so intensely with his words. That to me was an ultimate expression of faith – believing that there is a good and beneficent God who, in the end, will accept our faithful, faith-filled effort. I have Mehnaz to thank for that blessing.

The regard of colleagues is of course highly valued. But for Lasallian educators, the esteem of students is a priceless gem. According to one of Mehnaz's current students, "Dr. Afridi works day in and day out to create a more just world. A world where all are treated with dignity and respect. In the classroom, she teaches her students to find their voice to speak up and get involved to resolve injustices in today's society. As HGI director, Dr. Afridi preserves the stories of the victims of the genocidal events in the past ensuring that they are not forgotten. Dr. Afridi not only lectures about Lasallian values but she lives by them and inspires her students to do the same."

A former student of Mehnaz is now in grad school in Europe and was happy to report in:

"Dr. Mehnaz Afridi is not only the type of educator, but human who leaves a lasting impression on you. When I first met Dr. Afridi she helped bring my passions to life and find my place on campus. I was struggling as a freshman. Over the course of my four years I was able to experience and work with her as a professor, boss, and friend. The experiences I learned from her ranged from educational, to professional development, to how to exist as a kind human being in a difficult world. Dr. Afridi isn't afraid to stand up for what she believes and help those around her stand up for what they believe. Dr. Afridi makes Manhattan College a better place. I am a better student, learner, and friend because of her."

According to Br. John Johnston, FSC, Former Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools,

"Lasallians engaged in higher education are uniquely situated to help young people liberate themselves from all that holds them back from being the persons God wants them to be, to help them develop their God-given talents, to help them become persons—whatever their religious faith—committed to building a world where people can live as sons and daughters of God and as brothers and sisters."

Clearly both Brother John and the Founder would have endorsed Mehnaz Afridi for this award.

Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, in congratulating you on this award, we are profoundly thankful for your presence and your leadership as a Distinguished Lasallian Educator on our campus community, in the Bronx as well as with the national and global Lasallian network - and for all you mean to Manhattan College, your colleagues and our students.

For your many achievements, for your visionary leadership, your outstanding teaching and your commitment and dedication to every task you undertake, I am proud to call on President Brennan O'Donnell to present you with the award of Distinguished Lasallian Educator.

Citation authored and read by Lois Harr, adjunct instructor in Religious Studies at the Faculty Recognition Convocation, Tuesday, April 26, 2022, in the Chapel of De La Salle and His Brothers.