

OMAR HODA '93

AFTER BENEFITING FROM MENTORS' HELP, HODA GIVES BACK

BY KATHARINE WEBSTER

Omar Hoda '93 was born in Pakistan, but his father worked in the airline business, and his family migrated among countries.

Hoda has also migrated between careers, from software engineering to management consulting at Deloitte, where he is a partner. It's been a gratifying journey, thanks to mentors at UMass Lowell and beyond.

When Hoda was a child, his family moved to Malaysia and then to Malta, as his parents were searching for better economic opportunities for their three children. His older sister came to New England for college, and Hoda followed suit. His younger sister wasn't far behind.

"As an international student, you choose a college in the U.S. by saying, 'where is someone I know?' And then you draw a radius around that," he says.

UMass Lowell was "affordable and accessible" and had a strong computer science department, Hoda says. He stretched his college budget further by sharing an inexpensive off-campus apartment with two other students and getting a job washing dishes at



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a campus cafeteria. "I was like, 'They pay me and I get free food?'" he says. "Free food was a win."

Hoda threw himself into his studies and graduated in three years. At first, though, he struggled in an educational system that was so different from what he'd known. One computer science professor, Jesse Heines, would give a flawless assignment a 90%; to rate an A, a student had to earn "style points" for innovation or creativity, Hoda says.

"As a foreign student, I wanted to be told what to do. And Prof. Heines wanted me to think about how to get from 'You did what I told you' to 'Wow!'" Hoda says. "That was a foundational lesson for me."

Hoda soon became one of the founding officers of the campus chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery. Jim Canning, then professor and chair of computer science, mentored the students and helped them find money to host coding competitions. Hoda says the communication and leadership skills he developed at the time got him where he is today.

After graduation, Hoda took a job with a startup networking company. Within a couple of years, he began studying for his master's degree in computer science at Boston University at night. He also got a promotion to manager—and realized he wanted to hone his leadership skills.

Shortly after Hoda obtained his green card, he married, and he and his wife both returned to school. She earned a law degree; Hoda studied for an MBA at Babson College. While there, he got a business consulting internship at Booz Allen and loved it.

Degree in hand, Hoda took a consulting job with Adventis for a couple of years and then moved to Monitor Group, a strategy consultancy based in Cambridge. Soon after Deloitte Consulting acquired Monitor Group in 2013, Hoda rose to partner.

Hoda focused on the industrial and manufacturing sectors, and he now specializes in the automotive industry. His computer science background has proved invaluable as he helps manufacturers navigate rapidly evolving technologies, including the transition to the autonomous and electric vehicles.

On his 50th birthday, Hoda decided it was time to look back on his journey—and to give back. For the past two years, he has served on the executive board of the Automotive Hall of Fame. At UMass Lowell, he donates to the Strive Food Pantry because he's aware of how much he would have struggled without his campus dishwashing job. He also serves on the Kennedy College of Sciences advisory board, aiming to help a school that was critical to his success.

"I reflect on where I am now, and it's just a world away from where I started. I'm so grateful for my time at UMass Lowell and the lessons that I still carry with me," he says.



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