

Asian American Studies Congratulates ARPITA BISWAS as the 2012 HIRA JAIN SCHOLAR

Published on May, 15 2012 at 12:00am



Interested in understanding the synergy between poverty and disease, the second year Ph.D. student in Genetics came to UCONN in 2008 with a Master's of Science in Health Sciences from the "Oxford of the East," and immediately felt welcomed by her peers, professors, and members of the Asian American community.

Arpita Biswas's decision to advance her studies in the United States is part of a longer term plan to bring this state of the art research knowledge, techniques, and network back to India's Public Health system. "It has been a very rewarding four years but eventually, I owe it to myself and my country ... to go home and use this opportunity to teach." She is concerned not only with knowledge transfer but would also like to address the crucial link to material resources and infrastructure. Working with one of UCONN's top researchers, she is keenly aware of the tangible need for critical equipment and the rewards of mutually supportive colleagues.

Arpita is a valued member of and a Research Assistant in David J. Goldhamer's lab. He is Professor of Molecular and Cell Biology and Director of the Center for Regenerative Biology, as well as Associate Director of the UCONN Stem Cell Institute. One of her projects focuses on the origins of cells that affect skeletal muscle in patients with Muscular Dystrophy. Another project has resulted in a co-authored article in the *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research*, the top journal specializing in bone biology (accepted January, 2012) that is forthcoming. "As a result of

exceptionally hard work, Arpita made essential contributions to the identification and characterization of cells responsible for heterotopic ossification ... and [these findings] will surely be of very high significance to the field,” wrote Dr. Goldhamer in his letter of support.

A brief interlude on Heterotopic Ossification (HO) will illustrate further the significance of Arpita’s contribution. HO manifests as bony lesions in skeletal muscle and associated soft tissues, usually as a result of traumatic injury or surgery (even surgery to correct injury), and in some cases, bone forms progressively and shortens life expectancy. Her commitment to this work stems from its applicability to several disorders, specifically mentioning the potential to address injuries of war veterans, athletes, and specially those who suffer from genetic FOP, an extreme form of heterotopic ossification.

“I want to do work that means something to me – not only to find out how the body functions, but also to use that to benefit mankind ... Although my interest is in Biology, I have been exposed to experiences that makes me angry ... that blamed women ... I hope to build on past influences, but I definitely don’t want to sound holier than thou ... “

Catching herself, Arpita apologizes for her laudable vision and one easily sees why she is bound to achieve her goals with integrity and humility. And through her dedication and patience, there is also no doubt Arpita will continue to garner the kind of support she has enjoyed over the years, from her mentor at the University of Pune (Dr. Anita Kar) to her professors, lab mates and fellow students here at UCONN.

“There’s still a lot to do and learn. I’m in the midst of that process ... I really wanted this scholarship and that support is reassuring ... I am lucky and very grateful for the support.”

The Hira and Sunita Jain Endowment Fund Scholarship is awarded annually and made possible through the exemplary generosity of Dr. Hira and Mrs. Sunita Jain of Glastonbury, Connecticut, whose gift recognizes and supports demonstrated academic excellence by South Asian students at the University of Connecticut. This year’s award was \$1800. Both graduate and undergraduate students enrolled full-time are eligible.

CONTACT Ms. [Fe Delos-Santos](#), Program Specialist at AASI for complete eligibility requirements and updated deadlines.