

Tangled Up in Science: Bringing a Fresh Perspective to LFC Department of Biology

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Dr Sarita Lagalwar, Assistant Professor of Biology at Lake Forest College.

Dr. Sarita Lagalwar, a current full-time professor in biology, always felt drawn to the scientific field because of her father's passion for medicine. Wanting to find her own path, however, Dr. Lagalwar expanded her scope of learning throughout high school and college by taking a wide range of classes. In fact, she graduated college with a major in political science with the hope of becoming a public defender.

Though having previously considered a career in law, Dr. Lagalwar decided to follow a different route after considering her experiences of working in a hospital, both her junior and senior years in college, as well as in an Alzheimer's Center. While working at the Alzheimer's Center, she participated in research at both the cellular and molecular level and helped with brain autopsies on previously-diagnosed individuals. Dr. Lagalwar's work there exposed her to different avenues of study, including the role of pathological proteins in the disease, a topic that incited her profound interest in the brain.

Having once again found herself tangled up in the mysteries of science and medicine, Dr. Lagalwar decided to expand upon her previous work in Alzheimer's research. As a graduate student in the Department of Cellular and Molecular Biology at Northwestern University, she independently studied the molecular changes that occur as neurofibrillary tangles evolve throughout disease progression in Alzheimer's. Specifically, she looked at Tau proteins and the kinase that enzymatically modifies Tau and how these proteins are sequestered during disease to prevent immediate cell death.

In addition to research, Dr. Lagalwar joined the Preparing Future Faculty at the end of her fourth year at Northwestern, having realized her appreciation and love of learning. It was through her experiences in PFF and her attendance at talks by current professors, that she realized her own passion to share with others her knowledge through pursuing a career in teaching. Influenced by Dr. DebBurman, Associated Professor of Biology, and his philosophy toward teaching, Dr. Lagalwar came to Lake Forest College to student teach

during her sixth year of graduate school under his guidance. Having the experience of student teaching a range of Dr. DebBurman's biology major classes, left her excited to enter into the intimate setting of a small, undergraduate liberal arts college.

Having completed her doctoral work and graduated this past January from Northwestern University, Dr. Lagalwar has chosen to spend her first year of teaching full-time at Lake Forest College. During the fall semester Dr. Lagalwar remains close to the aspect of biology she loves best – the brain – in teaching a non-majors' course Exploring the Brain, as well as majors' course Mechanisms of Neurodegeneration. This spring semester she will teach Cell and Molecular Biology while Dr. DebBurman is on sabbatical. As she relates her experiences in teaching thus far, she comments that "one of the things I love about teaching is being able to pass on my knowledge to students. But I am also finding that I am able to learn from students as well: what works and what doesn't work in a classroom, which enables me to further develop my own teaching strategies and philosophies." During this year at Lake Forest College, Dr. Lagalwar hopes to contribute to the biology department by helping students gain a greater understanding of the brain and cell biology, while fostering in students the skills necessary to think critically in the field of biology through a series of independent projects.

This coming summer, Dr. Lagalwar will begin her post-doc research. Ultimately, she wants to work at a small undergraduate college much like Lake Forest College teaching and running her own research lab, in which zebra fish would serve as a model organism for neurodegenerative diseases, such as SCA.

Having Dr. Lagalwar join the Biology Department for the 2007-2008 school year, provides students with a fresh perspective on a range of biological topics helping students to grow intellectually, while allowing Dr. Lagalwar to further her experiences as a professor.

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