

Dear Readers,

On behalf of the editorial board of *Eukaryon*, I write to you with the deepest wishes for you to enjoy our 20th anniversary of celebrating the best scientific scholarship at Lake Forest College. This year, *Eukaryon* is commemorating the 20th edition with your continued support. We are also celebrating the re-establishment of the physical copies of the journal after years of discontinuation. This big achievement goes hand in hand with the accomplishments of this editorial board. I am inspired by surrounding myself with such a diligent and hardworking team that exceeded expectations. I also treasure the leadership of the chairs of those boards. Their leadership and guidance allow *Eukaryon*'s mission, which has always been to showcase the hard work students put in to produce thought-provoking and intriguing scholarship, to be smoothly met. This year's theme, Inspire and Empower, was influenced by witnessing the numerous ways diverse cultural backgrounds came together to empower each other towards liberation and inspire one another to grow, create, and develop.

Inspire and Empower is not just a theme for *Eukaryon*; it's a guiding principle reflected in every aspect of our journal. From the selection of articles that highlight groundbreaking research and innovative ideas to the inclusive environment we foster for contributors from all backgrounds, our aim is to inspire readers to engage deeply with scientific inquiry and empower them to pursue their own scholarly journeys. Through the diverse perspectives and voices featured in *Eukaryon*, we hope to inspire a new generation of scientists who are committed to making a positive and intersectional impact on the world.

In the sciences, the theme of Inspire and Empower is evident in the collaborative nature of research and the sharing of knowledge. Science thrives on the exchange of ideas and the collective effort of researchers working towards common goals. By empowering individuals to contribute their unique insights and perspectives, we can inspire new approaches to solving complex problems and advancing our understanding of the natural world. Thus, as we continue to push the boundaries of scientific discovery, it is essential that we nurture an environment that inspires curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.

This year, we are honoured to welcome Dr. Camila Pizano, a recent addition to the Biology department who exemplifies this year's theme. Dr. Pizano is an Assistant Professor at Lake Forest College. She is a Colombian biologist with a Ph.D. in tropical ecology from the University of Florida (USA). Her expertise spans across plant ecology, plant-soil interactions, and scientific illustration. Dr. Pizano's passion for art and science is deeply rooted in her family background, with multiple generations of artists preceding her. She pursued her education in Scientific Illustration at Cornell University at a remarkably young age of 17, showcasing her early dedication to blending art and science seamlessly. Dr. Pizano's research interests lie in exploring the intricate relationships between plants and soil organisms, particularly mycorrhizal fungi, and their impact on plant functional traits, survival, and growth across various ecosystems. Through her extensive field and greenhouse experiments, she aims to understand how different soil organisms influence plant species under varying environmental conditions, including those affected by climate change. Furthermore, Dr. Pizano actively participates in collaborative efforts such as the Colombian Tropical Dry Forest Research Network, contributing significantly to the conservation and restoration of threatened forest ecosystems. Her multidisciplinary approach to research and dedication to conservation reflect her commitment to inspiring and empowering both students and fellow researchers alike. *Eukaryon*'s editorial board eagerly anticipate Dr. Pizano's seminar, where she will undoubtedly share her wealth of knowledge and passion for science with our community.

This journal is made with the love and commitment of its people. At the forefront is Dr. Flavia Barbosa, who served as the journal advisor for several years, and has gifted this journal with a warm soul, a dedicated spirit, and an endless amount of passion. Under her guidance, this journal has experienced a

revival that is marked by numerous achievements and accomplishments. I would like to thank Dr. Barbosa for her unwavering support, invaluable guidance, insightful advice, and endless resourcefulness. Next, I would like to acknowledge the tireless effort that my fellow Eukaryon members have put into each step of the process. This work is possible because of you. A special appreciation goes to Ian Schappe, website specialist at Lake Forest College Marketing and Communication Office, for his priceless assistance with setting up the website and providing technical guidance when needed. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Shubhik DebBurman for his continued enthusiasm and support whenever approached. We are grateful for Lake Forest College's continued investment in our journal. Finally, I would like to thank all the faculty and students who submitted their fine scholarships to *Eukaryon*. *Eukaryon* is alive through your submissions. Thank you for granting us the opportunity to publish and enjoy your exceptional work. I hope you enjoy this year's edition.

Sincerely,

Raneem Samman

Eukaryon Editor-in-chief 2023-2024