2013 AAAS Pitts Family Minority Science Writers Intern

Nisha Giridharan

Degree: Undergraduate Senior, Neuroscience & Behavioral Biology and Journalism
School: Emory University
Sponsor: Pitts Family Foundation
Media Site: Science Magazine

Research Focus: Structural basis of an E.coli antitoxin-toxin interaction

Translation: Toxin-antitoxin systems are found in bacteria and allow them to adapt and respond to environmental stress, and ultimately aid in their survival. I modeled the three-dimensional structure of an antitoxin-toxin protein complex in E.coli to understand more about how its structure aids in its function. This research, down the road, could help identify new targets for antibiotic treatment.

What are your goals for the summer?
While writing for Science magazine, I hope to learn how to convey the important, overall message of a science story without losing too many of the details that highlight the uniqueness of a discovery. My goal is also to learn better interviewing technique, so that I can get the interesting insights and quotes that add color to the story.

What are you most excited about?
I'm most excited to meet all of the great writers at Science magazine. I hope to learn from their experience and also get a better sense of what it's like to be a science writer.

Why are you passionate about science communication?
As a member of a research lab, I have had the opportunity to witness amazing discoveries and meet world-renowned scientists. However, not everyone has the chance to see scientific innovation taking place in the lab every day. Good science writing takes people through the process of discovery and allows them to feel excited about new scientific breakthroughs and what impact this can have on their immediate or distant future. As new advances are made, better communication between the science community and the public is needed to encourage people to continue to fund science research.

Who is your favorite science communicator?
I have admired Dr. Sanjay Gupta's work since I first became interested in journalism. I think his most impressive work is not his pre-packaged segments, but his live commentary on breaking health/science news. When he reports on a complicated health issue, he focuses on the big concepts but also points out a nuance that makes a particular case interesting or unique. (Plus, he's also a great fiction writer!)

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Do you have a link to an article you'd like to share?
http://www.myajc.com/news/business/wanted-ceos-who-understand-both-business-and-scien/nXNn8/

Describe your dream job.
Medical correspondent for a major news network (i.e. Sanjay Gupta, Nancy Snyderman, Richard Besser).

Tell us about something you do outside of the lab.
I love to dance. I was trained in Indian classical dance and I'm on a fusion dance team at Emory. I enjoy choreographing routines and performing with my team at local events and competitions.

Anything else you'd like to share?
My favorite dessert is cheesecake.

Last summer, I worked in a research lab at the University of Cambridge. My mentor was Italian and loved to cook, so he invited me and some other lab members over to his home for dinner one night. After a couple of minutes, the doorbell rang and I was so surprised. Dr. Ramakrishnan, the 2009 Nobel Laureate in chemistry, had stopped by for dinner. We all had a lively discussion on future biomedical research and Dr. Ramakrishnan even gave me some tips on the best places to eat in Paris for my upcoming trip. It was one of my most memorable experiences from being abroad.