



Interview with IAFNS Summer Research Opportunity Fellow Pabasara Weerarathne

This Transcript has been edited for clarity and length.

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Thank you for joining us today. Tell us a bit about yourself and your education.

Pabasara Weerarathne

My name is Pabasara Weerarathne and I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University where I'm pursuing my Ph.D. in the biomedical sciences division.

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Can you tell us a little bit about your goals for your summer Scientific Integrity project, and how you're going about developing it?

Pabasara Weerarathne

My project is based on a framework for student training in the scientific conduct of research. So the goal is to provide training in how to do research properly, and then, to reinforce critical decision making skills that will help students navigate the complexity that arises during their research. It also aims to help them make responsible choices.

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What is your target audience?

Pabasara Weerarathne

Primarily graduate students, but we also tried to cater to our undergrads and grads and other researchers in general as well.

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What do you think they need to know about scientific integrity?

Pabasara Weerarathne

When we conduct research, there are several aspects to consider including how to avoid taking shortcuts. So, we are trying to make them appealing like a series of shows, but they can watch whatever videos they prefer in whatever sequence. We have different topics, such as an introductory video to talk about what scientific research and integrity is and then we ease into management topics. Under that, we cover data analysis, data storage, sharing and open access. We also address science communication and funding. So, if they want to watch all of them, I'm making it sequential in a way, but if they want to focus on one particular topic and watch just that video, they can. And, we are trying to reach out to various groups and also industry to encourage their staff and students to watch these videos and learn from them.

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What was the focus of the videos?

Pabasara Weerarathne

We tried to focus on food and nutrition sciences and give examples related to that because of our target audiences. It's more like what kind of issues and what kind of challenges you might face in the food and beverage sector. We tried to go through what's already available out there and find out the gaps so we can better cast light for researchers in food and nutrition sciences. Because of you all at IAFNS, NIH and other research organizations, they do have information on research integrity and scientific conduct, but we wanted to focus on the gaps related to food and nutritional sciences and address those.

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What impact would you hope to have down the road?

Pabasara Weerarathne

Hopefully, like, if you go into NIH, you may hear about a recent research misconduct or a study that had been done improperly. Maybe tools like this will help us as the science community adhere to those scientific rules and regulations. And also it helps inform viewers about the resources available. I, myself, learned a lot from this project about the resources out there, and how to use them, and what the regulations are.

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What was it like working with an organization briefly over the summer that has tripartite representation from government, industry and academia?

Pabasara Weerarathne

I found it was a welcoming community — everybody's been very helpful. As this was a part-time and remote opportunity, it helped me to continue with my own project while still being involved in this new one on Scientific Integrity. And I had opportunities to be involved in the Annual Summer Science Symposium that was held and learn from those presentations. I received input from industry and other professionals outside academia, which was valuable to me.

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What advice would you have for future summer fellows at IAFNS?

Pabasara Weerarathne

Well, I was hesitant at first. Unsure about how I'm going to manage my time. But the IAFNS members have been so helpful and welcoming. And it's been a great experience for me. They made sure that I got something out of the experience, creating connections, and also allowing me to interact with government, academic and industry personnel.

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Thank you Pabasara. We are thrilled to have worked with you this summer. And we wish you all the best.