

"How will living through a pandemic while gaining an international education help me make a difference in the world"

I would like to start by saying, there isn't a single person on this earth who wasn't impacted by the pandemic. If anything, this has been one constant across continents that challenged everyone. My personal experience with this pandemic was multi-fold due to my unique situation.

As an international student from world's largest democracy, studying in world's largest economy I could draw some parallels on the scale this pandemic impacted my life. My parents who are living in India and my brother who lives in Canada felt stranded in the time of crisis. Due to the forced isolation since March, I was living in my room and this limited my opportunities to interact with my peers, mentors and friends. It was challenging to learn and gain the laboratory experience without the interactions I would have with my teachers.

In addition to the psychological burden of limiting social interaction, this was a challenge to my education alongside all the students in the world who were forced to distance themselves from their teachers and learn on a screen. In the list of missed opportunities I would like to add fellowship I couldn't attend at the Cleveland clinic.

Despite all these challenges, I was able to pave my way to continue my growth as a researcher. I quickly obtained an internship with a microbiology laboratory. This was a continuation of my efforts to gain fundamental research and laboratory skills. In Spring 2019, working with Dr. Fagan I had learned how we can find antibodies that could bind to the Staph. bacteria in order to treat the infection, a result of 1.5 years of hard work.

Currently I am working in a project with Dr. Jack Min where I work on RNA sequencing of potato plant using Linux. Amidst my research-work, I got accepted into the AHEC National Scholars program where I gain an invaluable experience and understanding about numerous social and cultural factors that influence an individual's overall health and their ability to access quality care. It gives me hands-on training and didactics and consists of 160 hours of work alongside my full-time student status. This combined with industry laboratory exposure helped me learn fundamentals of research.

As a budding micro-biology researcher and an ambitious woman, I am saddened by the recent inefficiency of public support to the field of science. I would like to take an active role in the infectious disease research. My recently gained laboratory skills and lineage of educators in my family have inspired me to build keen interest in vaccination research. My unique perspective of growing up in India and having lived through the impact of OPV- oral polio vaccine, I would like to join the researchers studying personalized vaccine/treatment for rare disease. I strongly believe that the recent experiences have prepared me well to study microbiology and its applications in the field of RNA vaccine development.

As an international student, I believe my life experiences, education, cultural competency and sheer compassion to help humanity makes me a great candidate for the opportunity to receive this scholarship.