JAFFNA MATHIAPARANAM

Seeing Biocore through the eyes of The Observer

A beautiful new mural now graces the Biocore corridor of Noland Hall, painted in summer 2019 by Jaffna Mathiaparanam ('17 Neurobiology with Biocore). "I was really excited for the opportunity to paint a mural reflecting on my learning experiences in Biocore, combining my love of science and art."

On the surface, the mural represents many of the concepts taught in Biocore; ecology, physiology, evolution, cell biology, and genetics. But in Jaffna's mind "it's really the way that these facets of biology interact and influence each other that makes the process of discovering science an exciting field to pursue". From the Biocore Prairie to the molecular components of living cells The Observer integrates the wonder and curiosity of biology with "how we know what we know" - Biocore style.

Beyond her Biocore coursework, Jaffna was a Biocore Peer Mentor, Biocore Prairie intern, undergraduate TA, and Biocore Outreach Ambassador. All of these co-curricular activities have influenced her lens as an observer and scientist. Jaffna began graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania in fall 2019 to pursue a PhD in neuroscience.

See this video on how Jaffna created The Observer and stop by third floor Noland Hall to check out the mural in person!
Greetings from BioCore! We are thrilled to connect with you and to share some recent news.

In Fall 2020, we offered a taste of BioCore’s ‘how we know what we know’ to first year students through a new Freshman Interest Group (FIG) course called Becoming a Scientist. It has been exciting to expand our learning and friendship to a growing BioCore community- from freshman to seniors.

The BioCore walls of Noland Hall were paid a serious upgrade this summer with the painting of a beautiful mural entitled The Observer by Jaffna Mathiaparanam ('17 Neurobiology with BioCore). What an appropriate gift and recognition of the curiosity and learning mindset we aspire to daily. On your next trip to Madison, please come by to visit The Observer.

With much news on the importance of technical skills training for STEM majors, BioCore continues to emphasize scientific reasoning and integrative learning first, combined with science communication and a healthy dose of group learning- all supported and guided by caring and dedicated instructors. These skills will never become outdated and are, in our estimation, the most valuable skills students can learn during their undergraduate Wisconsin Experience.

BioCore’s vision and mission of excellence and quality in undergraduate biology education depends on our committed UW Madison community, and your friendship and generosity. We appreciate your help and support!

Janet Batzi, BioCore Director and the entire BioCore Team

Contact us to connect with students through Alumni networking or Give to Biocore @ biocore.wisc.edu
The Biocore Peer Advisors program started in 2017, to serve as a bridge for prospective students to Biocore. Trained peer advisors are current Biocore students, who connect with interested first year students through in-person meet & greets, information sessions, summer SOAR, and resource fairs.

The peer advisors portray how Biocore fosters integrative learning, scientific communication, and research-based thinking over four semesters of rigorous college courses. In addition, they highlight the critical thinking skills and community aspects that Biocore provides while taking a deep dive into the fundamentals of biology. Their unique perspective also allows them to share how these skills personally prepared them for upper-level coursework, undergraduate research, and life beyond college.

The Biocore Peer Advisors, like other co-curricular opportunities within Biocore, extend students’ learning, leadership, and communication skills beyond the classroom. Our three peer advisor co-chairs state that they wanted to be peer advisor leaders due to “Biocore’s influential impact” and “the program’s contribution to our critical analysis skills in any discipline.” They add on, “For this reason, we wanted to serve as peer advisors to portray our experience as students in the program and why others willing to challenge themselves would value Biocore.”

The Biocore Outreach Ambassadors (BOA) continue to work towards enhancing rural science education. The Ambassadors bring an inquiry-based learning approach to a K-12 audience, using the critical thinking and scientific reasoning learned in their Biocore courses.

This year, new classroom visits began in the Poynette School District for 1st and 5th graders. In one project, BOA volunteers helped 5th graders ask questions about plant growth by manipulating factors such as light, nutrients, and temperature. Through experiments like this, Ambassadors help students practice authentic science skills such as posing testable hypotheses, implementing experimental design principles, and making data based conclusions.

BOA, in addition to events at the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery and bimonthly After School Science Club, continues to put on two Family Science Nights each semester. Each of these Science Nights are led by 35 Ambassadors for 500+ children and their families. BOA’s last Science Night of 2019 took place December 6th in McFarland. Towards the end of the event, kids were exclaiming "I'm going to be a scientist now!" Parents also commented that it was "an amazing effort to bring science to kids". "I came for 20 minutes, but stayed for the whole two hours."