

Professional Support and Personal Success via the MASS AWIS Member Scholarship

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The MASS AWIS Member Scholarship Fund was established in 2014 utilizing the donations for the Association of Women in Science Massachusetts Chapter's (MASS AWIS) 10th anniversary celebration. The scholarship aims to support women in science during times of hardship and professional transition. It also provides financial assistance for recipients to obtain a one-year membership to AWIS and to the Massachusetts chapter, as well as a discretionary fund toward attendance fees for AWIS-sponsored events. However, past awardees continue to emphasize that the benefits of the MASS AWIS Scholarship extend well beyond monetary value.

The main reasons for women to apply for the MASS AWIS Member Scholarship are networking opportunities and the ability to attend job-related workshops and seminars. In addition to attending MASS AWIS events, scholarship awardees are encouraged to volunteer on different programming committees and to take part in the popular MASS AWIS Mentoring Circles Program.

Dr. Sweta Gupta, who received a scholarship in 2015, said that she applied for a MASS AWIS Member Scholarship expecting to meet new people, uncover hidden skills and talents and – last but not least – to have fun. Sweta now volunteers on the scholarship committee with MASS AWIS, which she feels is both teaching her how to use her time more efficiently and building her self-confidence. She believes that MASS AWIS is an excellent platform for uniting people that come from diverse background and bringing them together to make positive connections within the scientific community.



Dr. Supraja Narasimhan, another awardee, applied for the scholarship during her transition from a career in breast cancer research to one in clinical research. At that time, her goal was to network with people who were going through a similar path or who were already gainfully employed in a clinical research position. Supraja praised MASS AWIS as a place where there are a vast number of women in science who are generously willing to offer career advice. She has personally taken advantage of AWIS webinars, as well as attended MASS



AWIS career development workshops. Speed networking, for example, allowed her to speak with recruiters and professionals and to contact them about potential job openings following the event. Together, these experiences have helped her evolve into someone who is comfortable speaking to people who are more senior and more experienced than her. Supraja believes that this feeling of empowerment provided by MASS AWIS membership has been a significant factor toward advancing her career.

Dr. Ann Liu, a trained biochemist and a 2015 scholarship recipient, is currently seeking employment in the field of biotechnology. Ann says that she recognized the benefits of AWIS membership almost immediately during the interview process, and explained that jobs advertised by AWIS had a much higher response rate than jobs advertised in outlets accessible to the general public. She also remains very interested in joining one of AWIS' mentoring circles, confident that women with similar goals and interests will help to keep her spirits high through this difficult period. Similar to Sweta and Supraja, Ann also feels strongly that the scholarship has given her the sense of self-accomplishment needed to confidently and successfully apply to jobs.

The MASS AWIS Scholarship Fund was created based on the belief that all motivated scientists deserve the opportunity to sustain and advance their careers regardless of financial situation. MASS AWIS has proudly granted 25 scholarships to date and will continue to offer these awards to unemployed or underemployed women by soliciting applications three times a year. Past recipients serve as genuine examples of talented women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics who have benefitted from the scholarship both personally and professionally. MASS AWIS would like to continue this tradition by encouraging all eligible women to apply. Eligibility criteria and further details for the MASS AWIS Member Scholarship application can be found on the MASS AWIS website: mass-awis.org.

Elif Sikoglu, PhD, is currently a principal scientist at PAREXEL. She provides medical and scientific leadership for clinical trials where imaging data is utilized. Prior to her current role, Elif was Post-doctoral Associate at Center for Comparative Neuroimaging, Massachusetts Medical School Psychiatry Department. Elif received her BS in electrical engineering from Isik University, Istanbul, Turkey and her PhD in biomedical engineering from Boston University. She has been taking part in MASS AWIS mentoring circles since 2011 and involved in organizing events around Worcester area since 2012.