

NOV. 30, 2020 - WESTMAN READERS' CHOICE 2021 - LEARN MORE.

BU prof looking to accomplish big things as Canada Research Chair

By: Kyle Darbyson

Posted: 12/24/2020 3:00 AM



Brandon University biology professor Mousumi Majumder poses for a photo in her lab on Monday afternoon. Last week, Majumder became the university's fourth active Canada Research Chair following an announcement from Navdeep Bains, Canada's Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. (Kyle Darbyson/The Brandon Sun)

True to her hardworking nature, Dr. Mousumi Majumder was locked in a laboratory on Oct. 20 when word came out that she would be the latest Brandon University professor to join the Canada Research Chairs Program.

When Majumder finally got the chance to check her emails later that day, she found that the inbox was full of congratulatory messages from her BU colleagues, alongside the official confirmation from the federal government.

"It was overwhelming," she told the Sun on Monday. "But at the same time, of course I was happy knowing that there is some recognition at a national level."

The public eventually found out about Majumder's new role last week, when government officials unveiled their latest lineup of 259 new and renewed Canada Research Chairs on Dec. 16.

As a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in genotoxicology, Majumder secured a federal research grant worth \$600,000, which will allow her to better study early indicators of breast cancer throughout the next five years.

Of course, Majumder has been pursuing this kind of research for over a decade, having received her PhD in oral cancer genetics and epidemiology from the Indian Statistical Institute and Jadavpur University in 2009.

Majumder got seriously involved in cell biology work during her post-doctoral training at Western University, helping develop a drug that is currently awaiting approval as a method of treating breast cancer.

This work piqued Majumder's interest in studying tiny molecules known as microRNAs, and their potential to serve as biomarkers that can help spot the development of breast cancer in its early stages.

While Majumder has been continuing this kind of research since joining BU in 2016, she said our ability to spot this disease early on is important now more than ever, since so many cancer screenings have been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The next devastating news that is coming up is that the prevalence of chronic diseases is going to be really, really high," she said.

"Because those are all going undetected right now."

With this new \$600,000 grant in her pocket, including a boost in infrastructure backing from the John R. Evans Leaders Fund, Majumder revealed she is planning to expand the scope of her current research, with an increased focus on how breast cancer diagnoses affect rural Manitobans.

With that being said, the BU biology professor and her fellow researchers will also have to deal with the current public health orders, which restrict access to laboratory facilities

on campus.

"But we are still doing research, we are following all those health rules and protocols. Only two people, at the same time, can work in a big space, keeping physical distance," she said.

Plus, Majumder will also have to contend with the added responsibility of being a Canada Research Chair, which involves regularly consulting members of Parliament on matters related to scientific research and policy development.

However, the biology professor said she is up to the challenge of balancing all these new roles, especially since BU has cultivated a very supportive, collegial atmosphere amongst its staff.

In fact, Majumder revealed that two of the university's current Canada Research Chairs — Sarah Plosker (quantum information theory) and Rachel Herron (rural and remote mental health) — played a pivotal role in helping her apply for this position over the last two years.

Moving forward, Majumder is excited about what her future will hold as a Canada Research Chair, and encourages her fellow professors to undergo the same application process, even if this procedure takes years to complete.

"It's going to be lengthy, it's going to be long, but stay focused and keep your passion high," she said. "Do not give up in the middle and do not compromise with your passion."

Overall, federal government officials announced on Dec. 16 that they will be investing around \$195 million to support the latest crop of Canada Research Chairs, who are working at 47 institutions across the country.

» kdarbyson@brandonsun.com

» Twitter: @KyleDarbyson

We need your support!
Local journalism needs your support!