



Interview with Dr. Nafisa Jadavji

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Dr. Jadavji with JYI

Dr. Jadavji serves as the chair of the board of directors for the Journal of Young Investigators. Her relationship with JYI, however, spans a decade into the past. As an undergraduate, Dr. Jadavji started off her relationship with JYI in the Research Department as the Associate Editor. From 2004-2008, Dr. Jadavji got promoted from Associate Editor to Research Editor to Senior Research Editor. After graduate school, she returned to JYI through an invite to join the Board of Directors (BoD) in 2011. She served as the BoD Vice Chair in 2013 and then transitioned into the BoD chair position in 2014. Through JYI, Dr. Jadavji formed a comprehensive understanding of the peer review process and had the opportunity to work with an international team. She improved her writing skills by submitting her work to the journal. As a professor, she encourages her students to publish through JYI as well in order to experience the peer review process. Dr. “With writing, you only get better with practice,” says Dr. Jadavji, “publications are the currency in academia.”

What Dr. Jadavji does now

Dr. Jadavji is an Assistant Professor of Biomedical Sciences at Midwestern University in Arizona and a Research Assistant Professor of Neuroscience at Carleton University in Canada. She recently started her first year of a tenure-track position, where she allocates her time into 30 percent teaching, 55 percent research, and 15 percent service.

Dr. Jadavji’s education and training

Dr. Jadavji completed her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in neuroscience at the University of Lethbridge. During her Master’s, Dr. Jadavji found that the science of getting data, analyzing it, and figuring out what it meant was appealing to her. She felt that at the end of her Master’s, she did not have the necessary knowledge of biochemistry and molecular biology techniques to apply to her research in neuroscience. To gain this background knowledge, she got in touch with researchers in eastern Canada to combine her skillset in behavioral neuroscience with theirs in biochemistry and molecular biology. Dr. Jadavji received her PhD in human genetics from McGill University before moving on to Chérit  Medical University to complete a post-doctorate in experimental neurology. She then completed a second post-doctorate in neuroscience at Carleton University. Dr. Jadavji stayed at the University of Ottawa for four years, where she taught undergraduates, mentored graduate students and postdocs, and conducted research. She was an Associate Scientist at



the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute for a year where she continued to research and to teach classes. These experiences taught her many skills that she found useful for her success in academia.

Academic activities during scientific career

Dr. Jadavji did research during all four years of her undergraduate education. As a researcher, she learned experimental techniques, wrote and published multiple peer-reviewed papers, and attended scientific meetings. She further continued her research experiences in graduate school and as a postdoctoral fellow. She was an active participant in many student clubs and societies. While completing her Master’s, Dr. Jadavji was the President of the Graduate Student Society as well as a member of the board of directors for the University of Lethbridge. She also volunteered in hospitals and as a mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, an organization that forges relationships with young people



in need of mentorship to ensure that their fullest potential is reached. She enjoyed the experiences she obtained through these opportunities and saw them as ways to understand what she really wanted to do with her career. Currently, Dr. Jadavji is the host of a blog that gives advice and tips to individuals pursuing a position in the academic job market. She has learned many valuable lessons in her academic career and wants to share them with others.

Careers in academia

Dr. Jadavji noted that there is a general misconception that all people who go into academia want to become professors. “There is this sort of outlook that people who want to go into academia want to become professors,” Dr. Jadavji comments, “but that’s not necessarily the case.” There are multiple avenues for working in academia without being a professor. Other non-professor careers include teaching faculty (lecturers and instructors), administration, and strictly research (staff scientists and lab managers). Trying different things that align with one’s goals and personality is the best way to go.

General advice for students looking to pursue a career in academia

Dr. Jadavji suggests that students find something that they are truly passionate about and would love to do. It is not necessary to be at the top of the class to be a successful researcher in academia. More important is an individual’s research ability, publications, and ability to network. Additionally, students do not necessarily have to go into research. There are many facets of academia that include administration and commercialization of research. She also reminds them that failure is common in academia and should not be seen as an endpoint. It is a part of the scientific process; experiments will not yield positive data all of the time. Dr. Jadavji says that resilience is a very important quality to maintain in academic careers and that resilient researchers will have the persistence to obtain good data. She also stresses the importance of networking in building business relationships to move one’s career in academia forward. The best way for undergraduates to start networking is to get involved with research at their institution through reaching out to scientists and researchers in the undergraduate’s field of interest. Dr. Jadavji says, “Read about the work they are doing, study and analyze their website and publications, and send an email directly to them rather than to direct blanket emails to a large number of professors.” Alumni associations are quite helpful for networking as well. Finally, Dr. Jadavji asserts that maintaining work-life balance is essential in continuing a career in academia. Finding hobbies and activities outside of work helps to prevent burnout in the fast-paced and goal-driven work of academia.

Check out Dr. Jadavji’s blog here: <https://www.jadavjilab.com/blogt>