

Tara Krishna Works to Amplify Voices by Telling Individuals 'I See You' and 'You Matter'; Honored with 2022 Pride Award

Tara Krishna, a 2022 graduate of Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) and the Rutgers Honors College, was raised with the value of making a difference by helping others. 

The Livingston Alumni Association (LAA) of Rutgers University-New Brunswick has honored Krishna as one of two recipients of the Riki Jacobs Livingston Pride Award for 2022.

Krishna, of Scotch Plains, New Jersey, is a student at Rutgers' New Jersey Medical School, where she is studying to be a medical doctor specializing in infectious diseases. At SAS, she majored in cell biology and neuroscience, and minored in psychology and in women's and gender studies.

She has been active in clinical and volunteer work in medicine. These experiences include:

- Serving as a volunteer emergency medical technician with the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad since 2016.
- Working as an intern in the infectious diseases department at Eric B. Chandler Health Center in New Brunswick, NJ, servicing patients with HIV.
- Developing content for an app and a podcast to promote the physical and mental health of mothers, at the Robert Wood Johnson Women's Health Institute in New Brunswick.

Krishna's extensive volunteer work includes:

- Activism with Amnesty International.
- Serving as an ambassador for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), facilitating skill-building workshops for undergraduate women and non-binary students.
- Mentoring Honors College students in research, volunteering, clinical, and academic opportunities on- and off-campus.
- Tutoring students in general chemistry and teaching chemistry lab.
- Helping refugees learn English.
- Working to promote cross-cultural competency in collaboration with students and staff at the Honors College.

She has researched sex differences in drug addiction and addiction recovery. She presented her research on *Finding Feminism in Addiction Recovery*, at the Rutgers Undergraduate Writing Center in 2022. She is a co-author of another study, in preparation, on the mechanisms of biological sex differences in cocaine addiction.

“Stigmatization’s power to harm well-being is highly underestimated, yet meeting unique people with different life experiences defined outside a one-dimensional label ‘underserved’ informed my ability to interact as an ally. I am happy to also educate others outside the realm of healthcare on HIV, too,” Krishna wrote in her Pride Award essay. “Witnessing the stigmatization of substance abuse and gender identity affect patient quality of life and recovery efficiency, I resolved to investigate addiction humanely.”

“Teaching conversational English to refugees of war in the Middle East, I realized I was still affected by implicit biases, and had a lot to learn from my own students. I had been avoiding possible traumas to ensure a safe environment for my Syrian students facing vast disruptions to their education. Yet, I was attempting to speak for my students without consulting their perspectives beforehand,” she wrote.

Her students opened up, she said, when she stopped teaching English through discussions of food but instead talked about the real issues of stereotypes and personal bias. “My students who lived vastly different lives than I – some fled Syria, and some sought master’s degrees, while others pursued dreams in the arts – taught me a lot about this clear need to learn from one another.”

“Aligning oneself with a community is an honor when you truly learn from your neighbor; it is a service done to genuinely forge connections to improve lives, amplify voices, and recognize an individual by giving them the grace to simply say ‘I see you’ when institutions do not.”

One of Krishna’s “proudest achievements” at Rutgers was her work within the True Inclusion program at Rutgers’ Honors College.

“... I soon learned how many underrepresented students within my Honors College community felt their voices went unheard; I also learned more about microaggressions and traumas that other marginalized identities faced,” she wrote. “I constantly educated myself on microaggressions while pitching to executive deans every other week about the importance of requiring cultural competency within each school to better promote hundreds of self-aware, culturally competent young professionals. This encourages the recognition of inequities to promote student engagement in overlooked communities and beyond. Unlike my activism and direct aid in underfunded school systems aiding a handful, saying ‘You matter’ when institutions forgo doing so, here I actively changed structures to ensure the institution itself listened to all who needed it.”

Riki E. Jacobs (1957-2009) was the director of the Hyacinth Foundation, an AIDS

support organization, among many roles she fulfilled to assist vulnerable populations. She also was one of LAA's first Livingston College Distinguished Alumni, honored in 2000.