

A summer at MIT for Heer

■ RAMANDEEP KAUR | NT KURIOCITY

Heer Joisher, a fourth year undergraduate at BITS Pilani, K K Birla Goa Campus has been awarded the Khorana Scholarship 2018 sponsored by the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and WINStep Forward. The Khorana Scholarship aims to provide a platform for students from Indian universities to pursue a summer research project in the United States, in fields related to biological sciences.



Originally from Mumbai, she is pursuing a dual major in Biological Sciences (MSc) and Electrical and Electronics Engineering (BE). She will also be completing a minor in Finance. The Khorana Scholarship which began on May 21 will end on August 11. As a part of this programme, Heer will be pursuing a two-month summer research project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MA, and USA. "I will be working under the mentorship of professor Graham Walker at the Department of Biology, MIT on a project involving expressing antimicrobial peptides and peptides related to symbiosis from various sub cellular compartments of the cell," she adds.

Heer further says that she feels extremely blessed to have got the opportunity to be a part of this programme. She says: "The Khorana family is a very well knit society of like-minded, passion-driven researchers. It is a privilege to be a part of this society. I believe that this research opportunity will go a long way in shaping my career in the field of biological sciences."

She came to know about the scholarship through one of the seniors at college, Aditya Chindhade who was a Khorana Scholar in 2016. With his help and guidance from the faculty members of the Department of Biological Sciences, BITS Goa, she applied for the scholarship. "I believe that the selection of around 50 students from the country was maybe based on a number of factors including, but not limited to, Letters of Recommendation, CGPA, Statement of Purpose, and past research experiences," opines Heer.

On why she chose BITS Goa, she says biology was always something that keenly intrigued her. One of the major reasons behind choosing BITS Pilani, Goa was the option to pursue a dual degree in biology along with an engineering branch. She adds: "Moreover, I knew from a few seniors from junior college that the campus culture and environment at BITS Pilani, Goa was extremely fertile for overall development."

Her other achievements include Felicitation Award (Technical Category) by the Council for Student Affairs, BITS Pilani, Goa. She is also the recipient of the Mantra Award for Outstanding Leadership by the BITS Alumni Affairs Division and was also one of the 150 students selected from across the country to attend the first Nobel Prize Series in India, as a part of the Vibrant Gujarat Initiative.

Heer hopes to pursue a PhD in the field of biological sciences. After the summer internship, she will be rejoining professor Alfred Golberg's lab at Harvard Medical School, to continue her summer project from last year. "I wish to contribute towards the improvement of quality and longevity of life in India," concludes Heer.