SPEA Student from India Wins Yoon Memorial Scholarship

Indiana University is united in deploving the hatred and intolerance that caused this senseless tragedy and is committed to the principles and ideals that make this university a place where people from all walks of life and from all nations and regions can join together in pursuit of knowledge and mutual respect.

—Won-Jon Yoon Scholarship Guidelines

On July 4, 1999, Won-Joon Yoon, a newly admitted IU Bloomington student from South Korea, was shot and killed, the victim of a two-state shooting spree by a white supremacist. IU’s then President Myles Brand established the Won-Joon Yoon Memorial Scholarship to honor Yoon’s memory and to promote tolerance and respect for diversity on the Bloomington campus. Each year, the Won-Joon Yoon Memorial Scholarship provides financial support for IUB students who have shown exemplary tolerance and understanding through their commitment to the values of diversity and academic achievement. Since 1999, the endowment has grown and includes additional contributions from the Yoon family and others.

On the sixth anniversary of Yoon’s death, the Office of International Programs announced the 2005 winner of the scholarship. Tanvi Lal is a second-year student from Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India, pursuing a master’s in environmental science in the School for Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA). Even before moving to Bloomington, she had read about Yoon’s death, so it was especially meaningful for her to have won the $2,500 scholarship and to carry on Yoon’s memory in that very special way.

“I feel very honored, actually,” she said. “It was a great honor to receive that scholarship as opposed to any other.”

Lal has been an active member and leader of SPEA’s Rutledge Project Diversity—named after SPEA professor emeritus Philip Rutledge—a student organization started in the fall of 2003 that combines programming and social research to foster diversity within the SPEA graduate community. The project serves as a clearinghouse of information regarding diversity issues, IU’s cultural centers, and community events. It sponsors open discussions on topics such as racial discrimination in the United States, social and interpersonal difficulties faced by international students in adapting to U.S. culture, an understanding of the caste system in India, etc. It also hosts a movie series on diversity featuring art as well as documentary films, followed by discussions with the audience.

Lal has taught several undergraduate courses in SPEA as an associate instructor and teaching assistant and welcomes the opportunity to interact with students from various countries and cultures. She has also worked at IU’s Kelley School of Business as a research associate at several labs and as a graduate counselor.

This summer, Lal is enhancing her teaching and leadership skills by participating in an internship of the Global Young Leaders Conference, a part of the Congressional Youth Leadership Council, which offers global leadership development programs for outstanding 17- to 18-year-olds nominated nationwide. The conference takes place in both Washington, D.C., and New York City, where participants get to learn from and exchange ideas with business leaders, policy officials, human rights activists, journalists, diplomats, and academics.

On her return to IU in the fall, Lal will be teaching a course on learning strategies for math in the School of Education. She expects to graduate in December 2005. Of her work in promoting an atmosphere for racial, ethnic, and cultural tolerance and diversity even in the face of adversity and hate crimes that may occur, she says, “I choose to remain positive. You have to believe that you can fix things, and you must never give up that belief.”

—RMN

For more information, see:
www.indiana.edu/~speagrad/diversity.html