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People in research: How olive oil led her to a biology career with Dr. Leroy Hood

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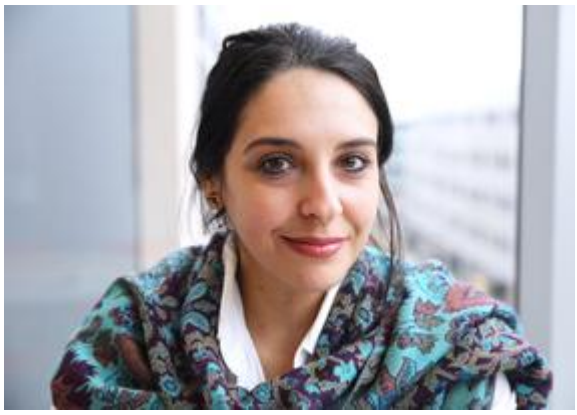
People in Research

Name: Dr. Kalliopi Trachana
Age: 34
Job: Postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Systems Biology
Education: University of Crete in Greece, master's degree in biomedicine and molecular biology in 2007; European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Germany, Ph.D. in computational biology in 2012



COURTESY OF ISB

Dr. Kalliopi Trachana is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Systems Biology in Seattle. She is originally from Greece and came here to study under Lee Hood.

When Dr. Kalliopi Trachana was finishing her Ph.D. in computational science in Germany, her mentor told her the place she had to go for her postdoctoral research was

Seattle.

In Seattle, her interest in biology and doing academic research could then be translated into practical therapies or technologies used in the medical field. To Trachana's mentor, it was clear she needed to work at the Institute for Systems Biology alongside Dr. Leroy Hood.

While she also applied and was accepted for fellowships at some universities, Trachana said she knew she wanted to work with Hood because his company is the best place to grow and to make an impact in biology.

"(Hood) is so open minded about giving young people opportunities," she said. "Biology is about when, how and why, and what is often missing is the why things are happening...that is what ISB is really good with."

Trachana has worked at the ISB for three-and-a-half years and was no stranger to making a home in a new place when she arrived. She became interested in food biochemistry at a young age because her family worked in the olive oil industry in Greece. But after a research internship in France, she was hooked on traveling and learning new cultures. She then attended graduate school in Germany.

At the ISB, she has continued her research in computational science and evolutionary biology and has been working with three other researchers to try and understand how and why specific stem cells make decisions. Her and her team have been developing a novel analytical platform to figure this out for induced pluripotent stem cells, which are derived from adult blood cells rather than embryonic stem cells, and have the potential to regenerate any cell type in the human body.

Knowing why cells make the decisions the do – how they become carcinogenic, for example – is the first step in using human cells to develop therapies for people who have cancer, diabetes, a spinal

cord injury or cardiomyopathy, Trachana said.

"We have all these technologies here that can help us understand your body in completely new ways and with more granularity," Trachana said. "We want to see what we can learn and how we can revolutionize essentially how medicine is done."

Coral Garnick
Staff Writer
Puget Sound Business Journal