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RESEARCH SUCCESS STORY FOR Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation WEBSITE

Ontario Student Researcher Named Rhodes Scholar

A 2005 University of Guelph engineering graduate who worked as a researcher in a plant agriculture laboratory supported by Ontario government research programs has won a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. Arani Kajenthira credits her research experience with sparking a career interest in finding low-cost ways to remove contaminants from soil and drinking water here and in the developing world.

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A recent engineering graduate from the University of Guelph, Arani Kajenthira is one of two students from Ontario and 11 nationwide to receive a Rhodes Scholarship to pursue graduate studies at the University of Oxford beginning in fall 2006. Kajenthira worked the better part of three years as a research assistant in Dr. Manish Raizada's plant agriculture laboratory, which has received infrastructure and operating funds from Ontario government research programs.

"In the lab I learned about the research process and met some phenomenal people," she says. "I had a chance to interact with graduate students and faculty at a level few undergraduates are privileged to experience."

In her research she was exposed to the idea of using plants to remove contaminants from the environment. "This concept meshed my engineering background with my plant agriculture work and showed the importance of interdisciplinary research to deal with big environmental issues," she says. Kajenthira intends to focus her upcoming graduate studies on environmental sciences, which she considers a logical step from her previous efforts. She'll be specifically looking at the use of naturally occurring bacteria to clean up contaminated soil and groundwater at low cost, especially in the developing world.

"Provincial research funding helped me support Arani's work through salary, supplies and equipment," says Dr. Raizada. "She got interested in research in the lab and now she's going on to do a doctorate at Oxford. The Rhodes Scholarship will give her the stature to help change the world, which she will."