



# Brandeis University

Mugdha Deshpande, PhD  
Blazeman Foundation for ALS Research Postdoctoral Fellow  
Biology Department and Rosenstiel Basic Medical Sciences Research Center  
415 South Street, Mailstop 029  
Waltham, Massachusetts 02454-9110

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Dear Mr. and Mrs. Blais, and the Blazeman Warriors,

I am writing to express my deep gratitude for your generous support and the opportunity to work as the Blazeman Foundation for ALS Research Post-doctoral Fellow at Brandeis University over the last five years.

As you are probably aware, I made a big leap from my PhD research to my ALS postdoctoral research. During my PhD I was trained as a neuroscientist in a lab that studied song learning in zebra finches. Although this was a great way to learn about how complex nervous systems work, these types of experiments are not very amenable as a model for neurological diseases. As I began the search for post-doctoral positions towards the end of my PhD, my goal was to take the training I had received in molecular biology and experimental design, to a system where I could study the basic cell biology underlying neurodegenerative diseases and make a contribution to these devastating conditions. I wanted to build a foundation, both in terms of experimental techniques and a deeper understanding of the scientific literature in the field of neurodegeneration. Opportunities to make this kind of transition are extremely hard to come by. I am so grateful for the generous support from your foundation for making this rewarding experience possible. The novel and unexpected discoveries that I made as a postdoc, and in my future career as a scientist studying neurodegenerative diseases, would not have been possible if you hadn't taken a bet on me.

My experience as a post-doc at Brandeis has been defined by the freedom to collaborate and explore multiple dimensions of this problem. One of first the things that drew me towards this project was that I could work with the fly and rodent neurons in parallel. Scientifically, testing ideas from both models and applying the insights from our experiments and literature in fly neurons to mammalian system has shaped our progress and I think put us in a really unique position in the field. When you are working towards an answer from multiple angles, and get to a common solution, you can feel more confident that you are chasing a really promising lead. Personally, it has allowed me to interact with two talented sets of scientists in Avi Rodal and Suzanne Paradis' labs and get their input on my ideas. Also, I have been able to learn a variety of different techniques to manipulate these models and get a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, enhancing my ability as a scientist to ask critical questions and derive meaningful answers from my experiments. Lastly, it has taught me how to convey my science to different audiences in the most effective way.

I also wanted to let you know that your support of my postdoctoral position drew in a much larger group of researchers to work on ALS. I've worked with and helped mentor graduate students Zach Feiger (Rodal lab) and Josiah Herzog (Paradis lab), both of whom are continuing to work in their post-graduate careers towards cures for disease. I've also mentored a number of terrific Brandeis undergraduates in the lab. who contributed as authors to our papers, and who have gone on to medical and graduate schools with a new appreciation and awareness of the challenges and promise in ALS research. I know that both Sue and Avi feel that your support helped solidify their collaboration for years to come. So, your support extended far beyond just me and touched many young as well as more established scientists, both personally with your dedication to an ALS cure and professionally by leading them (and bringing their expertise) to a new field.

All the things that I have learnt here are going to be essential in the next step of my career, where I plan to look for industry positions that will allow me to continue the research into the cure for neurodegenerative diseases. I consider it my honor to be a part of your and Jon's mission to end this devastating disease.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Deshpande".

Mugdha Deshpande,  
Blazeman Postdoctoral Fellow for ALS Research