

Margaret Anne Feliciano Pelayo (biologist and researcher)



Margaret Anne Feliciano Pelayo is a Research Fellow (Postdoc) at the Department of Genetics at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. She works in Professor Frank Wellmer's Laboratory where she studies the fundamental aspects of flower development and plant response to environmental stress. She received her BS degree in Biology from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2011, MS in Biology from Ghent University in Belgium in 2017 and her PhD in Biological Science from Nara Institute of Science and Technology in 2021.

Her science journey began when Margaret Anne was born in Manila in 1989. She is the daughter of Valentin and Felicitas Pelayo. She has an older sister Angela who works at the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Central Bank of the Philippines). Her father was a bank manager, and her mother was a chemist at Malacañang Clinic for more than 40 years. She and her sister both graduated from Miriam College High School (MCHS) in Quezon City, Philippines. This girl's high school is known for its holistic college preparatory program. It takes pride in a student-centered curriculum marked by academic excellence. The high school is part of Miriam College which is a Catholic educational institution founded by the Maryknoll Sisters of



New York in 1926. Miriam College High School offers a college-preparatory



academic program that features the interaction of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, arts and humanities, social sciences, and business and trades. Marge, as she is known to family and friends, graduated with a BS degree in Biology from Ateneo de Manila University in 2011. She majored in biology because she initially wanted to go to medical school. She became a plant doctor instead! Ateneo de Manila University is a

private, Catholic, teaching and research university located in Quezon City, Philippines. It was founded in 1859 by the Jesuits and is among the oldest Jesuit-administered institutions of higher education in Asia.

In 2016, she went to Belgium and received her MS in Biology from Ghent University, a public research university in Ghent. It is the second largest Belgian University. After Belgium she went back to the Philippines and taught in the Department of Biology of the Ateneo de Manila University. She taught undergraduate Botany, Biotechnology, Cell & Molecular Biology, and Developmental Biology courses. She taught from 2017-2018 then was given an opportunity to get her PhD at Nara Institute of Science and Technology in Japan.

WORK AFTER COLLEGE



After graduation from college, she worked as a researcher for molecular biology and genetics at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), an international agricultural research and training organization in Los Banos, Laguna,

Philippines. She enjoyed working at IRRI, everyone was kind and accommodating! An opportunity came in 2018 and she was able to go to graduate school in Japan. She got good advice from a colleague who did her PhD in the



same university. Her colleague told her to work hard and do her best because this is how your sensei (professor/mentor) will have your back. That advice stayed with her throughout her time in Japan. She learned a lot about discipline and showing up every day from her senseis and colleagues in Japan. At graduate school in Japan, she was able to publish her PhD work in the Plant Cell Journal in 2023. Plant Cell is a top tier plant science journal, and it was her dream to have her work published in this journal. The study is about how the MADS domain transcription factor AGAMOUS (AG) regulates various target genes via cell cycle.

<https://academic.oup.com/plcell/article/35/8/2821/7152953>.

She credits her senseis, Professor Toshiro Ito and Associate Professor Nobutoshi Yamaguchi for working on getting the project published even after she went back to the Philippines.

After finishing her PhD in Japan in September 2021, she transitioned to a Postdoc position in the same laboratory of Professor Ito. After three months, she was able to get a Postdoc position in the United States, but the laboratory had some funding issues and was not able to accommodate her. Fortunately, a Postdoc position opened at Trinity College in Dublin and she was able to get a job at Professor Wellmer's laboratory. In her current position she was able to publish a feature for the Journal of Experimental Botany.



This one is about the novel role CUC genes play in sex determination in cucurbits or the gourd family. She is enjoying her work in Ireland! The experiments are very challenging, but she is gradually getting into the swing of things. It takes a while to settle in a new place and this has a big impact on her work. Her supervisors and colleagues are all very supportive and Marge is very grateful that she can still do benchwork in the lab and work on a topic she is passionate about.

Marge said it has been a constant challenge to balance work and personal life. For a long time, she has just been concentrating on her education and career, but now she has started to do her hobbies again. Her hobbies include baking, reading, photography, listening to music and watching movies. Recently she started listening to K-Pop (Korean Pop Music).

She is very supportive of women in science courses. She had a chance to mentor her former undergrad female students -some went to medical school and some went to research. As the postdoc in her laboratory in Ireland, she helps the two PhD students who are both females. She had the chance to discuss her education and career with senior high school female students.

Currently, her career goal is to keep going and learn as much as she can with her current project in Ireland. She's trying to pick up as many skills as she can both inside and outside the laboratory that might be useful for future opportunities. She loves doing research, but she realized how difficult it is to stay in academia. She's trying to make the most of her current position and remains positive that there will be great opportunities out there in the future whether in academia, industry or other fields.

Her advice to new graduates is to always be curious and eager to learn (not only in the context of getting a degree). Learning doesn't stop outside of the school/university! Develop a good work ethic and be respectful of all your colleagues (both those above and below your position/designation). If you can, try to cultivate your personal interests as well. She said that she found it most helpful to not compare herself with others! Everyone is on different paths and timelines so one should just go at her own pace. And try to get to know yourself too and be honest with the things you want (and what you're willing to do for these) so you can gradually take steps towards your goals. And she recommends finding great mentors, colleagues, and friends along the way. It makes the journey worthwhile!

Marge thinks that it would be amazing if young girls could be supported to pursue the sciences as early as possible in their life, especially if they express an interest in pursuing science at a young age. A supportive environment could certainly be nurtured in their home life, school, and community. If there are resources and services that young girls and their families can avail themselves of to support

budding scientific interest, these would be incredibly helpful too. This blog is one of those resources available to young girls. The blog/website was written for middle school girls!

HER SCIENCE JOURNEY

1989- Margaret Anne was born in Manila, Philippines

2007- Received her high school diploma from Miriam College High School (MCHS)

2011- Graduated from Ateneo de Manila University with a B.S. in Biology
First job as a researcher for molecular biology and genetics at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) at Los Banos, Philippines

2016- Received her MS in Biology from Ghent University in Belgium

2017-2018 -Taught at Ateneo De Manila University

2021 -Received her PhD in Biological Science from Nara Institute of Science and Technology in 2021. Transitioned to a Postdoc in the same laboratory

2022-Accepted a Postdoc position in the United States but due to funding problems the position was cancelled

2023-Started her current job as a Research Fellow (Postdoc) at the Department of Genetics at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland