

Kara De Leon, Microbiology

Kara is a PhD student in microbiology who has been at MSU for about three years. She earned her bachelor's degree in biology/chemistry from Northwest Nazarene University in her hometown of Nampa, Idaho. She worked at the university after graduation as a research technician in a cancer biology lab. For fun, she likes to hike, snowboard, play the piano, play soccer, read, watch movies, and go camping.



Kara's lab group taking samples in Heart Lake in Yellowstone. L to R: Kristen Brileya, Dr. Matthew Fields, Kelly O'Shea, Chiachi Hwang, and Kara De Leon

Tell us what your MSU research is like. I work primarily in Hanford, Washington at the nuclear reactor site. I work in a chromium contaminated area doing microbial community analysis to try to understand the organisms present during bioremediation. Also, I do community analysis at Heart Lake in Yellowstone where we backpack in for 4-5 days each summer to take samples for analysis and/or isolation of microbes. I love the fieldwork that I do because it shows that science is not just people sitting in a lab with labcoats on; science is out in the real world.

What do you enjoy most about field research? Being outside, enjoying nature whether that be desert as in Hanford, WA or forests and hot springs as in Yellowstone.

What influenced you to become a scientist? In my junior year of high school I had excellent teachers in biology and chemistry. They showed me that science isn't just reading a textbook, it is asking questions and then trying to find the answers in a hands-on manner. I wanted to be a science teacher to encourage students to appreciate science just as my teachers did for me.

What advice would you give to girls who are interested in science? Women are becoming more and more prominent in science and the stereotypes against women in science is disappearing. It's the perfect time to become a scientist as a woman.

What else should we know about you? I play, hike, or go backpacking for a living. In my opinion, that's not really work, that's fun. It is important to find something that you love to do so that it doesn't really feel like work.

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