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LU Grad, University of Michigan Researcher Discusses Role of Biomolecular “Conversations”

Posted on: November 10th, 2004 by Rick Peterson

University of Michigan postdoctoral researcher Rebecca Whelan will discuss the challenges of understanding the biological signals that occur within the human body and how those signals are communicated in a Lawrence University Science Hall Colloquium.

Whelan, a 1996 Lawrence graduate, presents “Eavesdropping on Biomolecular Conversations” Monday, Nov. 15 at 4:15 p.m. in Science Hall, Room 102. The event is free and open to the public.

Whelan will detail two strategies she is utilizing in her research with biological molecules, particularly proteins, to better understand how molecules communicate with each other and how they ultimately process the information that enables people to see, hear, digest food and even fend off microscopic invaders.

In the treatment of diseases, many therapeutic drugs act by specifically helping biological molecules communicate with one another or by preventing unwanted molecular “conversations” from occurring. Proteins play a critical role in human health and Whelan’s research is helping unravel questions about how proteins function in the body and shed more light on which drugs might be most effective in treating diseases.

After graduating summa cum laude from Lawrence with a degree in chemistry and English, Whelan earned her Ph.D. in chemistry at Stanford University in 2003. She joined the University of Michigan’s chemistry department as a postdoctoral fellow that same year. In January, Whelan will join the faculty of Oberlin College as an assistant professor of chemistry.