

PhD candidate in the spotlight:

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My name is Sofia Papadimitriou and I come from Greece. At the moment, I am in the 2nd year of my PhD under the guidance of Tom Lenaerts and Ann Nowé, and I am working at the Interuniversity Institute of Bioinformatics in Brussels, an interdisciplinary research institute that joins researchers from the VUB and ULB.

My research project is about oligogenic diseases, *i.e.* genetic diseases caused by mutations at multiple genes, such as hereditary deafness and Hirschsprung disease, and the application of machine learning methods to understand their genetic architecture. We have already developed a clinical computational tool that is able to predict whether mutations at two genes can be implicated in a digenic disease (e.g. Bardet-Biedl syndrome), the simplest form of oligogenic diseases. We are now in the process of further expanding this technology to the more complex cases of neurodevelopmental diseases, like autism and intellectual disability.

Do you have a healthy work-life balance? If so, could you share the secret ingredient(s)?

To retain a good work-life balance I believe that time efficiency is really important: keeping an updated calendar and organizing and prioritizing to-do tasks so that there is no need for spending extra time working. I also try to restrict my working activities at the office as much as I can, even though I am only using my computer so sometimes it is tempting to bring work at home. I personally prefer staying a couple of hours more in the office if necessary, but knowing that going out of the office means relaxing and doing activities I like, like spending time with friends, cooking or watching movies. I always recommend to keep Saturdays and Sundays free from work to recharge the batteries, unless a really important deadline is ahead.

According to you, what's an important lesson (..) every PhD student should keep in mind.

A very important thing to keep in mind is that as PhD students we are still in a learning process (although learning never actually ends) and that making mistakes during our research is something normal and nothing to be ashamed of. What we should do every time is to take advantage of these mistakes and try to learn from them, as this procedure helps us evolve and become better researchers.

How did working on your PhD influenced your personal life in a positive way?

I believe that, so far, working on my PhD has positively influenced my personal life. I find that I have become a more independent person. It has also helped me become more critical and think of any problem I face in my personal life from different angles and perspectives. It has also greatly helped me evolve my communicational and networking skills: I have learned to be more confident when I talk in public and during my work here and my participation in conferences and workshops I have met interesting people from around the world and made great friends.

What career plans do you have after your PhD?

In general, I would like to continue working in research even after I finish my PhD as I find the fact of discovering new knowledge very intriguing. However, I am also curious about the private sector, so I would also like to switch to a company for a couple of years and work as a researcher or data analyst, so that I can experience the working environment there.