



## Sowmya Mitra (1970-Present)

Associate Professor of Plant Science  
**California State Polytechnic University, Pomona**

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*"Keep yourself focused on doing a wonderful job, and you will be recognized." Sowmya Mitra, 2006.*

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### Early Life and Career

Sowmya Mitra is the younger of two children born to Sachin, a mining engineer, and Madhurika, a homemaker. Due to Sachin's career as a miner, the family lived in many parts of India throughout Mitra's childhood, and Mitra believes his father's career influenced his decision to pursue a career in the environmental sciences.

### Education

Mitra attended the Agricultural University of West Bengal (B.C.K.V.) near Calcutta, where he received a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering with a minor in soil science. As an undergraduate, Mitra worked with pesticides; he saw firsthand the damage they could cause, and became determined to reduce their usage. Mitra then moved to the United States, where he attended graduate school at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, ultimately receiving a master's degree in agronomy and weed science, and a doctorate in environmental soil chemistry. After receiving his doctorate, Mitra began working in industry as a product manager. He soon became involved in product development in the research and development sector, where he worked with microbials to reduce plant diseases and promote growth.

### Career

Mitra joined the faculty at Cal State-Pomona as an assistant professor in 2001. He received an early promotion within two years and was granted early tenure in 2006. Mitra splits his time between teaching and research. His largest current project focuses on developing water conservation solutions for urban landscapes; he also studies heavy metals and mapping their distribution in urban environments, and continues to be involved in product development for major agrochemical corporations like Monsanto, Syngenta, BASF, Dow AgroSciences, and Bayer Environmental Sciences. Mitra also studies irrigation efficiency and participates in the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program.

## **Importance of Mentoring to Career**

Mitra credits his graduate advisor, Dr. Prasanta Bhowmik, for helping develop him into the professional he is today. Bhowmik has mentored him since graduate school and Mitra continues to turn to him for advice. In return for the guidance, Mitra mentors his own graduate students and helps develop their careers. Mitra says that these mentoring opportunities, in addition to the satisfaction that comes with seeing how his work benefits the environment, have kept him in the environmental field.

## **Highlights**

Mitra says his single most significant achievement has been developing into a good teacher as recognized by his students and colleagues. He also cites getting early promotion and tenure as a highlight. “I’ve been able to achieve many things relatively quickly,” Mitra acknowledges, “and I’ve received a few awards which have been really great.” Two of those awards include the Outstanding Young Scientist award from the American Chemical Society’s Division of Agrochemicals, and the Excellence and Innovative Design in Agricultural Engineering award from the European Society of Agricultural Engineers.

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

For minorities considering a career in the environmental field, Mitra has this advice: “Keep yourself focused on doing a wonderful job, and you will be recognized.”

## **For More Information**

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