

Dr. Niranjala Tillakaratne is currently an Emeritus Research Professor at UCLA. She received her PhD from the Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology Department at UCLA and studied neurotransmitters involved in few neurological diseases where she cloned a set of genes of the GABA neurotransmitter system.

Dr. Tillakaratne joined the faculty at the Department of Integrative Biology and Physiology and Brain Research Institute at UCLA in the late 1980s, and for the next three decades, she taught both undergraduates and graduate students. She conducted research on spinal cord injuries and received research grants and was the Principal Investigator for multitude of research projects. She has published many peer reviewed research articles and has given presentations at many scientific conferences.

Dr. Tillakaratne received her BSc Special from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (SJU), Sri Lanka in Biology. At SJU, she was a Student Council member and field hockey Team Captain and was also a student athlete for track and field and basketball. She was an Assistant Lecturer in the SJU Biology Department and conducted research at the Colombo Medical Research Institute on beta thalassemia, a blood disease.

Dr. Tillakaratne strongly encourages young people to participate in extracurricular activities and volunteer in their communities, and not focus solely on academics. Beside her academic achievements, for the last four decades, she has continuously helped rural communities and educational institutions in Sri Lanka by donating books, eyeglasses, computers, laboratory equipment, and giving scholarships to needy students. Dr. Tillakaratne has also served the Sri Lankan community in Southern California as the Editor and Committee Member for Sri Lanka America Association of Southern California, and a Board Member of the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara.

She was the Principal of the Dharma Vijaya Sunday School for more than 10 years in the 1990s. She developed a Buddhist and Sinhala curriculum and launched the inaugural Bhakthi Gee program led by Sunday School students, which has now developed into an amazing program.

Since her retirement in 2016, she was elected to the Mission Hills Neighborhood Council (MHNC), a part of the Los Angeles City government. For the past four years, she has volunteered in MHNC as a Board of Governors Member, Treasurer, Chair of the Financial Committee, and the Chair of the Beautification and Cultural Affairs Committee (BCA). In 2017 and 2019, for her contributions to the MHNC BCA Committee, she won awards from the Los Angeles City Council.