



**Vezen Wu**

**Science Talent Search Finalist 1996  
Faculty Member, Information Technology Programs,  
Columbia University**

Vezen Wu's childhood fascinations with carnivorous plants and computer programming have led him down an unlikely but intriguing path to the emerging field of bioinformatics. He is part of an interdisciplinary team of engineers and scientists at Columbia University working to address global public health issues through a new software technology. The software, known as MedfoLink, is an integrated technology that uses medical language processing and the medical language database developed by the National Institutes of Health to enable a computer to accurately record and interpret patient records. According to Wu, the ability to generate real-time statistics on patient populations "will enable the monitoring of global health just like we monitor the global stock markets. The faster we can detect an outbreak, the faster we can assemble the resources to prevent that outbreak from spreading."

Wu's introduction to computer technology began when he was just three years old and his father brought home their first personal computer. His father nurtured Wu's computing and programming skills while his mother incited an interest in biology and medicine through an introduction to insect-eating plants. "My parents cultivated my fervent curiosity in the world, and made sure I had the resources to explore my diverse interests." Wu began building an extensive collection of carnivorous plants, and when he learned that native tribes used extracts of tropical pitcher plants to treat infections, he began to research their drug potential.

During seventh grade, Wu discovered a new anti-bacterial agent in one of his carnivorous plants. He spent the next few years doing further analysis and was ultimately selected as a Top 10 winner at the 1996 Science Talent Search for his project, "Potent Antibiotics in Carnivorous Plants."

Wu credits much of his future success with being a Science Talent Search finalist. "The Science Talent Search forever changed the course of my life...It made everything possible" from undergraduate scholarships and fellowships, to opportunities to travel abroad, to impressing the leading investment firm that employs him today as an equity analyst specializing in international trade.

Following his Science Talent Search experience, Wu attended New York University, majored in molecular biology, graduated *summa cum laude*. Exposure to powerful relational database applications during his early college years led him to the Computer Technology and Applications program at Columbia. After completing the program, Wu was asked to join the faculty and, at age 25, is their youngest instructor. In addition to teaching web applications development, he continues to do research, and even takes time out to speak to middle school students to encourage early interest in scientific research. "Research teaches skills that are crucial to success during school and in future careers."