

# Lorraine Wiley

## Professor of Biology

*When Lorraine Wiley was nine years old her father brought home a magazine called Science Fiction Plus. She had never liked science, but to appease her father, she read a story about some people living on another planet. "I remember it so clearly," says Wiley. "The planet had purple vegetation everywhere. I thought, Wow! I want to be an astronomer! I want to go to those other planets! My parents couldn't do a thing with me after that."*

*According to Wiley, she took every science class offered in junior high and high school and her grades jumped from low C's to A's. "If I were asked to write an English composition, it would be about something in science," she says.*

*Today Wiley teaches plant physiology and botany in the CSU, Fresno Biology Department. She is also an adviser for the Health Career Opportunity Program (HCOP). The program, which is funded by a Department of Health and Human Services grant, is designed to increase the number of health care professionals in the San Joaquin Valley rural areas.*

*"We encourage young people, especially minority students, to pursue a career in health care," explains Wiley. "We offer them academic support throughout their undergraduate studies and make sure that they take the courses required for entrance to medical schools. On occasion, we've had the opportunity to visit groups in local high schools, the Black communities, and the Chicano communities to talk to students and make presentations. We try to get the students motivated early so they can successfully make the transition from high school to preprofessional studies at the university."*



**Q: When you encourage high school students to pursue a career in health care, what is their response?**

**A:** Some of them don't even realize that they can do it. They think science is too difficult. The program sparks an interest and I am able to be a role model. I tell them, "I did it, you can too!"

**Q: Did you have a role model?**

**A:** I didn't have any women role models. I just had really nice teachers. My father was also a great influence. He was an avid reader and he was extremely talented in many ways, but he never had a formal education. It was very important to him for my brother and me to get a good education and go as far as possible in our chosen fields.

**Q: How did you get from astronomy to botany?**

**A:** The more I studied astronomy, the more I realized that I just wasn't that interested in stars. I began to get more curious about things that grew and things that moved. I liked biology and chemistry so when I entered the local state college in Sacramento, I searched through the catalog to find a practical career opportunity that combined the two. Medical technology appeared to be the answer. I wanted to help people and it looked interesting so I declared it as my major. Then I went to my first big college class. It was called Life Science, and the professor was an entomologist. Well, this "bug expert" started to talk about plants, of all things, and he made them sound so fascinating that I immediately decided I had to study botany!