

Rachel Luu

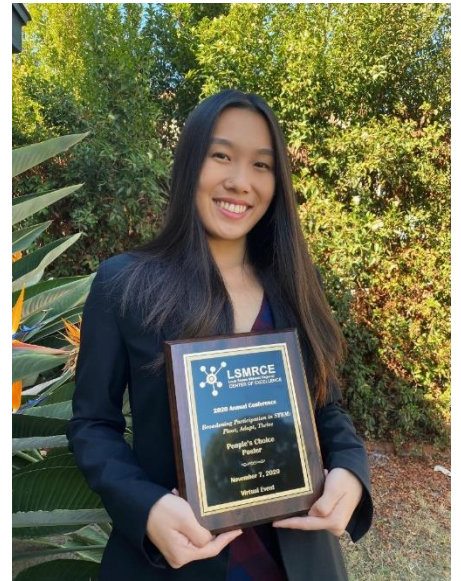
*IDEA Center's Spotlight on UCSD's
ACES Scholars*

Quick Facts

Grade: 3rd Year (undergrad)

Major: Mechanical Engineering (Specialization in Mechanics of Materials)

Outside interests: Going to concerts, collecting vinyl records, taking photos, and playing video games



Questions about your experiences:

Could you share with us your experiences as an ACES Scholar? How has this program helped you and how has it allowed you to help others?

Being an ACES Scholar has completely changed my college experience in such a positive way. From attending the Summer Engineering Institute to later being a part of the tight knit ACES cohort, I have been able to meet some of my greatest friends and supporters through the program! Being an ACES Scholar meant that I was able to feel a sense of community and belonging which was incredibly important to me in terms of building my confidence as an engineering student. For a year and a half, I was an intern for the ACES Program where I was able to design workshops, industry tours, socials, and also interface with and mentor other ACES Scholars. Knowing how much support I received during my first year, I knew I wanted to pay it forward by providing current and incoming ACES Scholars with a foundation of support and community that I also once encountered and cherished.

How has participating in the Chancellor's Scholar Alliance program benefited you? How have you benefited others through this program?

The Chancellor's Scholarship was what enabled me to be able to attend UCSD! Moreso, the scholarship program and student run organization associated with the scholarship has allowed me to deeply engage with the 1st generation student community at UCSD. Upon entering leadership in the student org, Chancellor's Scholars Alliance, I was able to develop a strong skill set in leading groups, public speaking, and of course making some life-long friendships. As an organization, we provide both academic and non-academic support for 1st generation scholars while also providing opportunities for educational outreach and volunteering beyond the UCSD community.



Why did you get into research? What advice would you give to students who want to become involved in research?

I actually knew very little about research when first starting at UCSD. However, after being encouraged by my mentors to give it a shot, I spent the summer of my first year trying out lab research for the first time. Since then, I participated in the GEAR Program and then later met my graduate student mentor, Ben, who I work alongside with on this NSF-funded bioinspired materials science project. What I love most about research is the environment -- everyone is so supportive and driven by their passions and the pursuit of knowledge. I love research because it is so challenging yet so intellectually stimulating and rewarding.

For students who want to become involved in research, I recommend reaching out and being willing to meet new people. I met my current graduate student mentor through the MAE Mentorship Program, we went from being complete strangers to lab partners within a few weeks! So I highly recommend joining mentorship programs, applying to guided research programs, speaking to your professors, and of course, never stop being curious!



What are your plans for the future?

After my undergraduate, I hope to enroll in a PhD program for Mechanical Engineering or Materials Science. With more knowledge and research experience under my belt, I hope to later become a Research Professor at a university where I can conduct research on developing sustainable materials. As a Professor, I hope to also promote programs and mentorship networks to support historically underrepresented and underserved students in engineering. One of my major personal goals in life is to establish my own need based scholarship fund to support first generation women in engineering.

From your experiences, what advice would you offer current students?

If I had to offer advice to current students, it would be three things. Throughout my experiences with all the research roadblocks, rejection letters, and simple mistakes, I learned that I needed to consciously choose to keep going even when faced initially with failure. On that same note, I learned to go easy on myself when these failures came. And finally, I learned to not worry so much about what others did and to instead pave my own path as I realized that not everyone's engineering journey is going to look the same or be perfect. So finally, 1. Don't give up, 2. Don't be so hard on yourself, and 3. Pursue a journey that is uniquely yours.



