Ann Truong

IDEA Center's Spotlight on UC San Diego's Asian American Pacific Islander Engineers

Quick Facts

Grade: 2nd Year

Major: Electrical Engineering

Outside Interests: reading, baking, video games

Questions about your experiences:

What personal significance does Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month have for you? How do you celebrate AAPI heritage month?

AAPI Heritage Month, to me, is the month where I remember to be homesick. I moved six hours away from home to attend UCSD, and May is when that fact hits hardest. I find myself even missing the sound of other people speaking Vietnamese. I'm looking forward to celebrating by cooking some thịt kho and calling my mom (probably for help).

Previously, you did research at the FREEDM Systems Center. What inspired you to pursue research? Are there any research labs or topics that you'd like to pursue in the future or are currently pursuing?

I wanted to pursue research because I was unsure about where I wanted to go career-wise, and wanted to expose myself to the possibilities. UCSD offers its electrical engineering students a variety of depths of study that they can pursue, and I was unsure of which I wanted to choose, so my position at the FREEDM Systems Center was my exploration of one of the depths. I don't see myself pursuing research in the future, but it was definitely a valuable learning experience for me. However, I think I would still like to pursue a career in power engineering (the focal point of the FREEDM Systems Center) .

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You've participated in several programs while in SEDS, like the SEDSxFEM, the female engineering mentorship program, and now as a part of the electronics team for their Colossus project. How has the organization helped you grow as an individual? What has been the most rewarding moment while working with SEDS?

SEDS has given me a lot of opportunities to grow both as a person and an engineer. I've gained a lot of invaluable experience—mostly hands-on technical skills that I wouldn't necessarily have gotten in class (such as soldering). I've also learned that there's a large difference between solving well-defined, surely solvable problems in a class and solving a problem that presents

itself in the context of a larger project like Colossus (i.e. "Why does this fuse keep blowing?" or "What's the best way we can protect our wires in the case of a fire?"). SEDS offers me the opportunity to solve these kinds of problems and practice good judgment in doing so. I feel that I've learned so much from working on Colossus that I would never have learned otherwise.

Beyond engineering, I've grown a lot as a person and a leader due to my involvement in SEDS, especially since becoming Electronics Lead this winter. Furthermore, most of my friends are people I've met in SEDS and I think it's definitely more than just a project org to me. I think the most rewarding thing about SEDS, though, is co-leading SEDSxFEM. I've had the opportunity to carve out a space for other underrepresented groups in our org, and it makes me enormously happy to know that I'm able to help them feel a sense of belonging in a field that historically does not accommodate people like us.

You have been involved in many mentoring experiences. Is mentoring important to you? If so, do you prefer being mentored or mentoring others?

Mentorship is definitely very important to me. The guidance I got from my SEDS mentor and IDEA Big in my first year was invaluable and really helped me build up my confidence. I feel that it's both a duty and a privilege to provide the same service for newer students, especially those who don't have many other support systems. I also find mentoring others to be very rewarding; it warms my heart to hear about my mentees' successes.

You have been involved with SWE's high school mentorship program, EDGE. How did you get involved with EDGE? What role do you currently have?

I joined EDGE Committee in fall of my first year because I wanted to get involved in SWE beyond just being a member and I hold the same role now. Currently, my job is to moderate the Discord community and try to help people connect with each other by sending out fun challenges every week. I find it really rewarding, especially since some high schoolers from my first year in the program reappeared as UCSD mentors the following year.

Last summer, you were a Peer Facilitator in the IDEA Center's Summer Engineering Institute program. What is your favorite memory while working in the program?

My favorite SEI memory was probably our (unofficial) closing event, Roast a PF, where the students were given free reign to tease all of the Peer Facilitators. It was great lighthearted fun, and I felt good about the fact that the students felt comfortable enough by the end of the program to poke fun at us—that means I did my job well. Also, it was hilarious.

What has been the most beneficial aspect of being an IDEA Scholar? How has it made a difference in your UCSD experience?

Honestly, the biggest benefit of being an IDEA Scholar to me was just feeling like I had a community, and being able to recognize people in my classes due to that. As a result, many of my friends/study buddies are IDEA Scholars, and have led me to other awesome opportunities (like SEDS!). Also, Ruben's mentorship was quite literally invaluable to me as an incoming freshman who was completely clueless about how college works.

As an Asian woman engineering student, do you feel supported by UC San Diego and its programs? How have you overcome these challenges during your college career?

I feel like the answer to this question is both yes and no. There are a lot of programs and resources available to support student success and mental health, but in my opinion, the quality of said programs is hit or miss. Some programs are truly valuable, and the care that goes into them is evident. For example, I have always had stellar Supplementary Instruction leaders, and they've been crucial to my academic success. On the other hand, I've found that some of the services that mean to support students who are struggling are lacking (i.e. CAPS—appointments take weeks to schedule because counselors are overworked, and it shows). Thankfully, I'm lucky enough to have a support system outside of the structures that UCSD has put in place; I think that the friends I have made here are the best supporters I'll ever have.