

THE Current

January 8, 2008

Gail Gallessich

UCSB Chemist Wins Prestigious Plous Award

Thuc-Quyen Nguyen, assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, has won UC Santa Barbara's 2007-08 Harold J. Plous Award, one of the university's two most prestigious faculty honors. The honor is given annually by UCSB's Academic Senate, on behalf of the faculty, to an assistant professor from the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences, who has shown exceptional achievement in research, teaching, and service to the university.

Nguyen, who joined the faculty in 2004, will have an opportunity to showcase her research when she delivers the annual Plous Lecture this spring. The date has not yet been set.

In congratulating Nguyen, Chancellor Henry Yang said, "Our campus shares great pride in your research and teaching achievements in photophysics and the electronic properties of organic and metal-organic hybrid materials. We are so glad to have you as our colleague, and we will all look forward to your lecture in the spring." He noted that Nguyen has achieved many distinctions, including the 2005 Office of Naval Research Young Investigator Award, and a 2006 National Science Foundation CAREER Award.

Nguyen has established a highly recognized research program in the area of organic optoelectronic materials, with special emphasis on characterization of nanoscale electronic properties, according to Alice O'Connor, chair of the Plous Memorial Award

Committee. One example of how her work has made significant academic and applied contributions is in the area of light harvesting materials, which is an attempt to imitate photosynthesis. Nguyen's work in this area is specifically aimed at improving organic semiconducting polymers, one of the most promising classes of materials for these uses. Following groundbreaking research in which she found ways of bringing more stability to these materials, Nguyen has recently published work showing how to develop photovoltaic devices which are designed to absorb a broader than usual range of the solar spectrum.

The selection committee also commented on her "zest" for teaching. At the graduate level she developed a new class on nanoscience and nanotechnology that quickly became very popular with graduate students from physics, chemistry and biochemistry, and engineering. The course was featured in a presentation to the State of California Education Subcommittee panel of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Nanotechnology. She redesigned and updated the undergraduate advanced analytical chemistry laboratory class, which students consistently describe as one of the best classes in the chemistry curriculum. Currently, she is developing a class to teach scientists how to relate their enthusiasm for science to the general public. For the past two years she has organized a Science and Technology Day, when approximately 800 students from 17 schools in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties are brought to UCSB to participate in science workshops, demonstrations and competitions.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.