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National Academy of Inventors recognizes Professor Thuc-Quyen Nguyen

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Chemistry professor Thuc-Quyen Nguyen has been named a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors (NAI). Nguyen serves as the director of the Center for Polymers and Organic Solids, where she works to develop organic semiconducting materials.

“Being elected a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors is the highest honor accorded to academic inventors,” said Pierre Wiltzius, Susan and Bruce Worster Dean of Science. “We are lucky to call Quyen a member of our esteemed faculty.”

Nguyen has focused on creating organic photovoltaics (OPVs) that are more efficient, long-lived and environmentally friendly than conventional solar cells. “I am extremely grateful for the support that UCSB has given me to make my childhood dream of converting the sunlight into electricity a reality,” she said.

In addition to her NAI election, Nguyen recently received several other accolades for her work on OPVs, including the de Gennes Prize, awarded by the Royal Society of Chemistry, and the Wilhelm Exner Medal, by the Wilhelm Exner Foundation of the Austrian Trade Association.

“I am deeply honored to be elected as an NAI Fellow.” she said. “I am extremely fortunate to work with so many talented young people and to collaborate with great scientists at UCSB and around the world for the past 19 years.”

Many of Nguyen’s previous honors emphasize her scientific achievements: advancing knowledge in chemistry and material science. However, election as an NAI Fellow recognizes the direct impact of her inventions. Indeed, the National Academy of Inventors selected her in part for her work’s “tangible impact on the quality of life, economic development and welfare of society.”

Accessibility and quality of life underpin Nguyen’s ambitions. In July 2020, the founders of the VinFuture Foundation entrusted her to establish prizes for global scientific breakthroughs and technological innovations that positively improve quality of life. Notably, she convinced the founders to create awards celebrating innovators from developing countries and female scientists. “Innovations should be accessible and practical not only to people at certain economic levels, but to everyone,” Nguyen said. “Growing up in small villages in Vietnam — without electricity, clean water or enough food to eat — I understand the challenges that these people face daily.”

Nguyen hopes the prestige of her NAI Fellowship and the impact of the scientific inventions inspire young people to pursue a career in science.

The academy was founded in 2010 to recognize and encourage inventors with U.S. patents and enhance the visibility of academic technology and innovation. The 2023 class of fellows includes 162 distinguished academic inventors. The fellows will be presented their medals by a senior official of the United States Patent and Trademark Office at the NAI 13th Annual Meeting on June 18, 2024 in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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