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From left, Sam Fedrow, Brandon Leon, Jacquelyn George and Jericho Cezar represented Cal State Fullerton's Titan Capital Management program at the Charter Financial Analyst Investment Research Competition.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Chemistry grad finds true calling: Teacher, religious sister

CSUF News Media Services

For Class of 2023 graduate Kim Nguyen, it was divine intervention to pursue becoming a chemistry teacher and a Catholic sister.

After graduating from high school, Nguyen entered the religious order of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Los Angeles in August 2019. She began to live a life of prayer, service and commitment to God. A few weeks later, she started her journey at Cal State Fullerton to study chemistry.

"Many young people would give a lot of their time and dedication to education, career and success. I felt these worldly pursuits are not the attractions of my heart," Nguyen said. "I wrestled with a deeper question: How could my life be a gift to others? My studies, especially chemistry, are a means for me to glorify God and to serve others."

Her college experience the past four years has been intertwined with religious life. In addition to enrolling in required courses for her bachelor's degree in chemistry, she also has taken courses within her religious order, such as studying about the Catholic faith and community life, and what it means to be a religious sister.

At CSUF, she has conducted research in the lab of faculty mentor Daniel B. Curtis, associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry. Over the last two years, she has studied atmospheric aerosols and how they impact the Earth's climate and the environment.

Nguyen's research project focuses on constructing an instrument that uses a more refined spectroscopic technique to measure these properties.

"We study the properties of atmospheric aerosols using an analytical technique called spectroscopy, which is the study of how light interacts with matter," Nguyen said. "At the very core of our research, it's about how to become better stewards of the Earth."

Nguyen has been fascinated with chemistry ever since high school, where her teachers inspired her to enter the teaching profession.

"I plan to teach high school chemistry because I believe that it provides students with one of the many lenses to discover the world and capture the beauty of creation. I also hope to inspire my future students to live a life of service by sharing their gifts and talents with others," she said.

Nguyen found a vibrant and welcoming community at CSUF, which is close to her convent home in Whittier.

"The professors in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry have been supportive of my educational journey," she said. "I never thought that I would be able to join a research lab as an undergraduate, but faculty members encourage students to gain research experience as young chemists."

She credits Curtis for helping her to develop research and lab skills, such as how to use technical instruments and gain scientific knowledge.

"Dr. Curtis has helped me to see how chemistry can address and seek solutions that could potentially affect the future of our planet," she said.

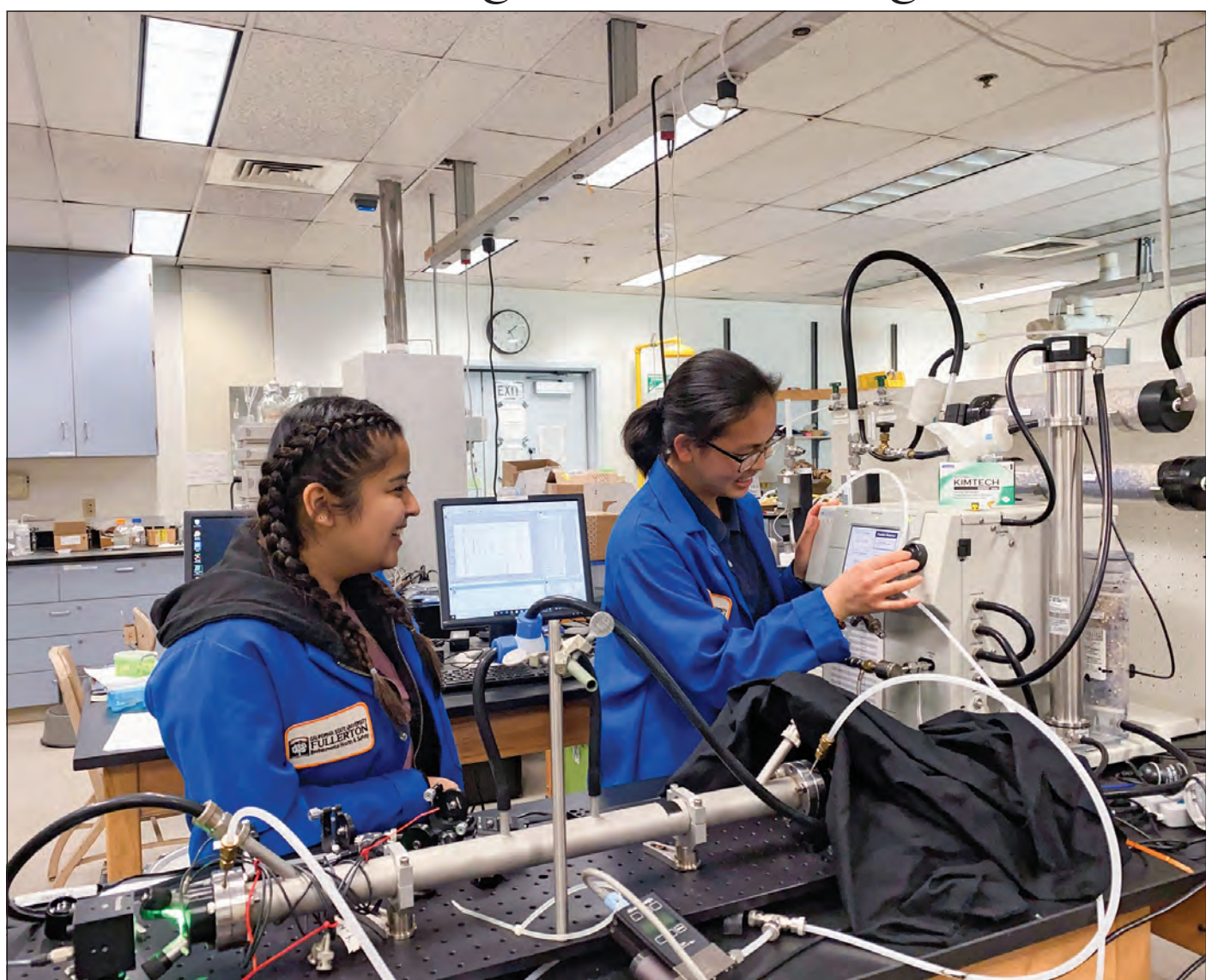


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Graduating senior Kim Nguyen, right, with student researcher Esther Morales, studies atmospheric aerosols.

Nguyen has earned several awards for her outstanding work, including the 2023 Robert C. Belloli Future Chemistry Teacher Scholarship and Eric and Alyse Streitberger Science Education Endowed Scholarship (2021, 2022) from the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

Nguyen's father fled Vietnam in the early 1980s after the Fall of Saigon and arrived in Pennsylvania. Her mother, a teacher in Vietnam, came to the U.S. later after her parents married.

She grew up in Roseville, near Sacramento, with three older brothers and a younger sister. Her parents, devout Catholics, taught her the importance of hard



Kim Nguyen is earning a bachelor's degree in chemistry and also is studying to become a religious sister.