Welcome to the UCI School of Physical Sciences: Kelly Pham

Undergraduate chemistry major Kelly Pham talks about navigating life as an anteater.

Monday, September 25, 2023

Lucas Van Wyk Joel
UCI Physical Sciences Communicaitons



Kelly Pham's UCI journey hasn't exactly been straightforward – and that's totally fine with her.

Picture Credit:
Carolyn Pham

It’s a new academic year at UC Irvine, and we at the UCI School of Physical Sciences couldn’t be more excited to see all the new faces around campus and around our school. Life as a new anteater can be exciting – but it can also be tricky to find your way in these early days. That’s why the UCI Physical Sciences Office of Communications caught up with a few upperclass undergraduates and asked them about their UCI story and some of the lessons they’ve learned along the way.

Lucas Van Wyk Joel: Tell me a bit about yourself.

Kelly Pham: My name is Kelly Pham, and I was born and raised in Orange, California. I’m a chemistry major, but I didn’t always know that I wanted to pursue chemistry in college. When I was applying to universities in my senior year of high school, I considered a pretty extensive list of majors, because I liked a lot of different subjects. Ultimately, I chose to apply as a chemistry major. I wanted to study something that was broad and wouldn’t limit my future career options – chemistry, often referred to as “the central science,” seemed like the most reasonable choice. During my first chemistry lab course at UC Irvine, I was so enamored with the hands-on, experimental aspect of chemistry that I became certain I had made the right decision. After completing the general chemistry lab series, I applied to be a Learning Assistant (LA) for the series to support newer chemistry students in the lab and help them experience the same wonder that I had felt while performing those experiments. Now, going into my third year, I have become fairly involved in the chemistry community at UCI – besides being a Head LA in the Department of Chemistry, I am also a Peer Academic Advisor for the School of Physical Sciences and the secretary of the undergraduate Chemistry Club at UCI.

LVWJ: What might you say to a new student who's concerned about finding their way at UCI and at Physical Sciences?

KP: UCI is a big university, so sometimes it can feel like you’re lost in all the crowds. However, I would tell the new student that the school is also very diverse and welcoming, so I am sure they will be able to find their place in no time! Almost everyone I’ve met at UCI has been incredibly kind and supportive. One of my favorite things about UCI is how collaborative the student body is – in my experience, classmates are typically eager to share information and resources with

each other in order to help each other learn. If the student is concerned about finding friends, I would suggest joining academic, cultural or recreational extracurricular activities. To anyone interested in chemistry: the Chemistry Club at UCI will always welcome you!

LVWJ: What's your favorite spot on campus to study?

KP: There are a lot of really nice study spots on campus, but one of my favorites would definitely be the fifth floor of the Science Library. It’s pretty quiet up there, so it’s easy for me to get into my productive mode. The color aesthetic is also very clean and modern. But I would say that the best thing about the fifth floor is the abundance of charging outlets!

LVWJ: What's a favorite memory of yours from your time at UCI Physical Sciences?

KP: I’ve made many great memories at UCI, but one of the best ones that comes to mind is a particular general chemistry lab session that I had a couple weeks into my first quarter as a freshman. The experiment itself was a color-changing experiment, which was really cool to observe. What made the experience so memorable was that the lab environment in my class was both fun and supportive. It was the first time that any of us had taken such an intensive chemistry lab course, and we bonded over the unforgettable experience of learning how to navigate a lab together. I remember feeling very fortunate to be a part of such an intelligent and friendly community of chemistry learners.

LVWJ: What's one top thing you wish you'd known when you were just starting out?

KP: I wish I had known that it’s okay if you don’t end up following the original plan you made for yourself. I came into college with a lot of ambitious plans for what classes I would take, which extracurricular activities I would be involved in, when I would start undergraduate research, and a lot of other experiences. When I had to make adjustments to these plans, whether that meant postponing things or removing them from my plan altogether, I was disappointed because I thought that I wouldn’t be able to get the “perfect college experience.” In hindsight, however, I don’t see the deviations from my original plans as a waste of time or something to be upset about at all. Plans may change because of unexpected situations or new opportunities that arise. They may change because we learn more about ourselves

and what we truly want. Instead of having a fixed idea of what the ideal college experience looks like, I now accept that it’s perfectly fine to make changes to our plans in college and in life.

Feature Stories
Instruction
Chemistry
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
View PDF