

“Project Symphony” Serenades at the American Chemistry Society National Meeting

This past August, Honors students Joseph Giancaspro, Lynn Chong, Marnie Skinner, AJ Liles, and Escarlin Perez, who are part of the undergraduate research group “Project Symphony” led by Chemistry Professor Dr. Sunghee Lee, had the opportunity to attend and present at the American Chemical Society (ACS) National Meeting in San Diego, California. The ACS National Meeting is an international exposition that features thousands of presentations on new discoveries in science. During the event, chemistry professionals meet to share ideas, advance scientific and technical knowledge, and their passion for chemistry.

The Iona students who are chosen to attend the ACS National Meeting typically present at the Undergraduate Poster Session. This summer, however, all of the students in “Project Symphony” presented at the graduate level, meaning they presented alongside scientists who were working towards their PhDs.

The group as a whole presented eight posters highlighting their research findings. Several of the “Project Symphony” group members won awards, including ICHP senior Marnie Skinner who won the ACS Colloid and Surface Chemistry Division Best Student Poster Award for her research project, “Interactions of Nanomaterials with Model Lipid Bilayer.”

“This ACS conference was the most memorable of the past three, in part because it was the final one and I was able to present my work done here at Iona for the last time,” Skinner said. “I am so thankful again to Dr. Lee for making it possible for us students to attend these conferences and will miss getting to work in the lab.”

Junior Lynn Chong presented her research, “Interactions of PAMAM dendrimers with lipid bilayers,” under the category “Fundamental Research in Colloids, Surfaces & Nanomaterials,” at the ACS Division of Colloid and Surface Chemistry. Chong has been recently chosen as a recipient of the COLL PUI Honorable Mention Award, and will be presenting again at ACS Spring 2020 National Meeting and Exposition in Philadelphia, PA.

Dr. Lee has been taking undergraduate research students to the ACS National Meeting since 2004 and has group photos from all of the previous ACS excursions quite literally lining her office wall with stacks of photos that just couldn’t fit tucked away in the bottom of her office bookshelf. She is incredibly proud of her research lab and stresses that while “Project Symphony” may be described as the “independent research” of each student, the key to their success is collaboration.

“Project Symphony” is a cooperative space where students have the opportunity to learn from each other and become team players, skills which she says are more important than ever. Just like in an actual symphony, each student plays their “instrument,” and they work together in order to create something meaningful.

“I want everyone to benefit from each other...science is a social enterprise,” Dr. Lee said. “When we play together, we have a bigger impact than playing solo.”

Victoria Sanseverino, Class of 2020

