

Bioengineering Department Reaches Milestone with First Graduating Class

By Matthew Chin



Bob Knight Photography

Top Row: James Pinney, Tim Canan, Vu Nguyen and David Boren. Bottom Row: Professor Benjamin Wu, Jessica Nguyen, Phuong Dang, Riju Gupta, Professor Andrea Kasko and Professor Daniel Kamei.

The Bioengineering Department reached an important milestone this past June with the graduation of its first senior class at the 2007 commencement for the UCLA Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science.

The department was established in 2002 with the goal of providing students with the fundamental scientific knowledge and engineering tools necessary for graduate study in engineering or scientific disciplines, continued education in professional schools specializing in health science, or employment in private industry.

“I chose bioengineering because I love engineering and I discovered a love for biology, so it just seemed like the perfect major since it incorporates both fields,” said Phuong Dang, one of the graduates.

For the graduating students, their experiences in upper division courses taught by professor Daniel Kamei gave them their first real window into the multidisciplinary field of bioengineering.

This exposure was expanded upon in follow-up courses, and culminated in their senior year with the systems-

integrated biology, engineering and medicine (SIBEM) classes. These courses offered the students a wonderful opportunity to learn about bioengineering applications and, at the same time, see these applications firsthand at the Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

The clinical visits were closely tied to the lecture material. For example, while the students were learning about cardiac physiology and the biocompatibility of materials in the heart, their field visit included an observation of open heart surgery in which a patient received a new aortic valve. The course was taught by professors Benjamin Wu and James Dunn, who are also both practicing clinicians.

“SIBEM is designed to show students how their classroom knowledge is used in real life problems,” Dunn said. “We hope that they will be able to get an appreciation for the cutting edge in bioengineering and medicine. Eventually they will be able to contribute toward making things even better for patients.”

In fact, for graduate Tim Canan, that’s exactly what happened. Canan will be attending the Geffen School of Medicine in the fall.

“Since my interest was to go into medicine, it was an amazing opportunity for me to be able to learn all about the medical devices and procedures through Dr. Wu’s lectures, and then actually be able to go over to the med center with Dr. Dunn to see them in action,” Canan said.

Every week he had a “eureka moment” when he knew that bioengineering was the right choice as his major.

Both Wu and Dunn noted that the students’ affinity for the course material made it a delight to teach.

“The students were very enthusiastic, and I certainly sensed it during the course,” Dunn said.

“The students were prepared for class, exams, and always asked very relevant questions in lectures,” Wu said. “We had a great group of students and I must emphasize that courses of this kind are made possible by the quality of our fantastic students.”

With the graduation of its first senior class, the department is now looking ahead as it grows in the number of students.

“Now that we have taught our full curriculum for the first time, we will continue to refine our courses to best serve our students,” said professor Timothy Deming, chair of the Bioengineering Department. “Changes for the future will include better preparation of our undergraduates for careers in industry, in addition to pursuing higher education.”

The bioengineering 2007 class members included: David Boren, Timothy Canan, Phuong Ngoc Dang, Riju Gupta, Jessica K. Nguyen, Vu Nguyen and James Pinney.