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Cal Poly Liberal Studies Alumna Begins Fulbright Program in Malaysia

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Trisha Huynh, a 2014 Cal Poly graduate, was awarded a Fulbright student grant to serve in the English Teaching Assistant Program in Malaysia, which she started at the beginning of January. She will assist a local middle or high school English teacher in a rural area with high needs schools. Huynh is only the second Cal Poly student Fulbright recipient in 20 years.

The prestigious Fulbright U.S. Student Program promotes cultural exchange through individual interactions and community engagement. The grant provides transportation, room, board and incidental costs. Of those who applied to serve in Asia in the 2014-15 application period, about one-quarter were accepted.

Huynh, a Liberal Studies alumna, applied to the Fulbright program in her senior year because it combined her interests in teaching, travel and international exchange, which were piqued during a semester in a study abroad program.

"While volunteering as an English teaching assistant in a preschool in Madrid, I got to apply teaching methods I had learned at Cal Poly to a classroom of non-English-speaking students," Huynh said. "Studying abroad in Madrid opened my eyes to other cultures and how much I enjoy exploring them."

Huynh chose Malaysia because its mix of cultures sparked her curiosity. "Malaysia has Chinese, Indian, Malay and Muslim populations. I really wanted to learn more about how those cultures meld into one country and how they make it work," she said.

"Trisha is so excited about learning," said Anne Marie Bergen, a liberal studies professor and Huynh's senior project advisor. "She never just scratched the surface as a student. Instead, she dug in and found all sorts of opportunities."

Huynh plans to pursue a career in elementary education when she returns. "What's exciting for me is thinking of her being an elementary educator after the Fulbright," said Bergen. "The experiences she'll have that she can then bring to the classroom and the children — it will be extraordinary."

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