

Amy Trinh '20 Senior Story

Headline: Designing a Path to A Bright Future



“It’s really what you make of the experience that matters most,” reflects Amy Trinh '20 on her education at Whittier College. “The faculty and staff at Whittier are supportive, and I’ve never been afraid to ask them for help or to try new things.” Trinh has certainly made the most of her time at Whittier. From creating her own major through the Whittier Scholars Program (WSP) to taking on research projects with her professors to helping bring a major artwork to campus, Trinh has had many enriching experiences over the past four years.

Trinh is passionate about graphic design and psychology, but she wasn’t always sure how to connect the two. As an international baccalaureate student in high school, she studied psychology, Chinese, and biology. She became interested in graphic design when she took some classes on the subject in her senior year. Trinh remembers meeting with the head of the psychology department at a college she was touring and feeling like she would have to choose between her interests.

“The [head of the psychology department] told me about a project she oversaw in which psychology students worked with graphic design students to make commercial packaging look appealing,” Trinh said. “I thought that was interesting, so I asked if I could double major. When they told me no, that I wouldn’t graduate on time, I said, ‘well, you don’t know me then!’”

Afterwards, Trinh toured Whittier College. She spoke with the head of WSP at that time, who told her that she could absolutely combine her two interests and double major. That’s when Trinh decided to join the Poet family.

Now, Trinh is finishing her double major in graphic design and consumer studies, which she created through WSP, as well as a minor in Chinese. Consumer studies combines principles from marketing and psychology to better understand consumer behavior. Trinh chose to major in consumer studies because she hopes to design signage for places that offer immersive experiences like theme parks and museums.

“The Walt Disney Company is at the top of my list,” she said. “I’m So-Cal born and raised, so I love Disney.”

Working for Disney as an Imagineer is Trinh’s dream job, and it’s clear she’s well on her way. Her time at Whittier is dotted with internships, fellowships, and other experiences. A few of the places she’s done graphic design for include the Lewis Group of Companies (supported by Whittier’s Parks Fellowship), A3 Marketing Services, the LA County Library, the LA Metro, and Whittier’s own Office of Marketing & Communications. At the LA Metro, Trinh actually helped come up with the guidelines for buying ads on buses that Whittier now uses to advertise its transfer ad campaign. In fact, she also designed the graphics for the campaign as a POET intern, so many Angelinos have likely seen Trinh’s design work passing by on the street.

Research has been a large part of Trinh’s academic career. As a Nixon Fellowship recipient, Trinh studied the impact of public support on graphic design history, with a focus on the rebranding of government agencies in the 1970s. Through the Jan Cauffman Fellowship, she designed an online resource for learning Chinese for Whittier’s Department of Chinese, complete with tutorials, tutoring hours, and more. Her favorite research project was supported by the Ondrasik-Groce Fellowship and involved collaborating with Associate Professor of Marketing Kristen Smirnov—Trinh’s WSP advisor and sponsor—and Associate Professor of Social Psychology Christina L. Scott to study what kinds of foods count as “Instagram-worthy.”

Trinh has also been deeply involved in the campus community. She’s worked with the Office of Equity and Inclusion to design Ally decals for LGBTQ+ and undocumented students, and she coordinated a cultural graduation for Whittier’s Asian Pacific Islander (API) students.

“Being a first-generation college student myself, I was honored to be part of planning the celebration for API seniors,” she said.

One of the things Trinh is most proud of being part of was the team that helped bring the “Walkers” statues to campus. Trinh led the marketing and signage efforts for the opening ceremony and spent time with the artist. She also helped plan where the artwork would be placed and worked with students and faculty from the Department of Business Administration to figure out how to ship half a million dollars worth of art.

Trinh was looking forward to senior dinners, presenting her fellowship research at Whittier’s Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (URSCA) conference, and interning over the summer at Disney’s Parks and Experiences division in Florida. However, the impact of COVID-19 has suspended her plans.

“I’m devastated that I can’t intern at Disney this summer, but I’m also not discouraged,” she said. “I’m going to keep trucking and doing my thing.”

Trinh is prepared for anything that comes her way, which she attributed to her education at Whittier, but also to her family. She pointed to her family as her number one supporters, and she said she knows how much they’ve sacrificed to support her. Her older sister is her inspiration. “We’re best friends. She’s always challenging me and encouraging me.”

For now, Trinh plans to continue helping her sister manage the new bakery they recently opened in Brea, CA, and she has a few freelance projects lined up as well.

“I’m back to square one, but I’m going to keep applying to things,” she said. “I’m just glad that my family and my loved ones are healthy. That’s what’s important to me. What more can you ask for, right?”