

Ellen Bell Scholarship recipient's curiosity benefits community

Oceanna Nguyen describes herself as “a curious person.” That desire to learn has already prompted the 20-year-old to take on some unique opportunities early in her marketing-focused career, but it has also helped her to make a significant impact on members of her community.

“I love trying and experiencing new things, and marketing is such a great umbrella for that,” said Nguyen. “A big part of it is getting to work with people at something that energizes me, because I find that when I’m collaborating with others, that’s when my work is best.”

A third-year undergrad student in UBC’s Sauder School of Business, Nguyen’s volunteerism and academic achievement were key to her selection as the 2023 Ellen Bell YMCA Memorial Scholarship recipient. The award is presented annually to a female student pursuing a career in marketing or advertising who embodies Bell’s values.

A dedicated YMCA volunteer who valued giving back to her community, Bell was highly regarded within BC’s advertising industry before her passing more than 30 years ago. Bell’s friends and family, led by Shirley Broadfoot and Nick Vos, founded the scholarship to support other remarkable young women like Nguyen with similar career aspirations.

Though Nguyen has been working to support herself since she was 14, she has found a variety of ways to help people of all ages through her selfless spirit. Just a couple of her volunteer pursuits include serving as a youth day camp counsellor and establishing a gym-buddy program for fellow female UBC students. Nguyen has also given her time to teach seniors how to use smart devices, an idea sparked by introducing technology to her own Vietnamese immigrant father.

“I thought, ‘If I’m doing this for him, how many people are out there who don’t have a daughter who can help them?’” said Nguyen. “I’ve grown up in a privileged space in that I was born here and can speak the language... When you recognize your privileges, you can turn that into: ‘How do I lower barriers for others?’”

The marketing jobs Nguyen has held in her young career have varied from positions in the finance world to serving as a social-media coordinator for a company selling “the world’s first dog bed for humans.” In her current role as a Product Marketing Manager for Microsoft, Nguyen is helping develop a platform within the video game Minecraft to deliver indigenous teachings in partnership with the Kwikwetlam First Nation and Coquitlam School District. It’s a project close to Nguyen’s heart because it fuses her desire to “empower the minds of tomorrow” and her values of diversity and inclusion.

“You need diverse perspectives because that’s where all the strengths lie,” she said. “I think that times are changing, and you can no longer say: ‘This is the only way.’ We have to always be questioning why we’ve done things a certain way. There’s always so much more to learn and ways to grow.”

Beyond the knowledge that she’ll remain in marketing, Nguyen is uncertain where her career path may lead, partly because she anticipates that “jobs will be coming up that don’t even exist yet” in the years to come. For now, she’s grateful for Foundation donors who are helping to alleviate her financial burden.

“I’d just love to say thank you for investing in this really special scholarship,” she said. “It’s life-changing in that it opens up more doors and opportunities for students like me.”



Oceanna Nguyen