Thanh Maxwell  
Student Affairs Officer 1  
Academic Affairs: Cognitive Science  

I am very pleased to nominate Thanh Maxwell for Exemplary Employee of the Year at UC San Diego. As the only undergraduate coordinator for the Department of Cognitive Science she has a very full plate. We are a dynamic and growing department with courses, enrollments, majors and degrees awarded increasing significantly since 2011. This growth has impacted Thanh’s workload, but rather than bemoan it, she’s excited for Cognitive Science.

Thanh is the rare employee that not only accepts change gracefully, but also embraces it, encourages it even. She sets yearly goals for herself and CogSci benefits immensely. One year, her goal was to increase outreach with local high schools, another year it was to increase industry contact. I am immensely appreciative of an employee that in addition to doing her job well, continually tries to do it better by building relationships with students and the local community.

For outreach to local high schools she started by reaching out to her own daughter’s high school, Patrick Henry High. She helped coordinate a CogSci speaker for their career day and from there reached out to other local high schools including University City High, Castle Park High, Santana High, and Mt. Miguel High among others. While developing these relationships, she recognized the need for these students to experience CogSci up close and now helps facilitate lab tours for local students. She also helps solicit participation from local high schools for the San Diego Brain Bee. In 2011, she joined the board of Project Lead The Way for the San Diego Unified School District. This group comprised of teachers, parents, doctors and industry professionals aims to increase the number and quality students entering the STEM fields.

After students arrive at UCSD and especially after they identify as CogSci majors, Thanh is a fixture in their lives. From advising the CSSA, UXSD, and Interaxon student groups, to sitting down individually to develop graduation plans, Thanh provides service far above and beyond what is expected of her. A sampling of thank you notes she’s received from graduating seniors include the following:

• “Best advisor in all of UCSD”
• “Thanh is such a joy to talk to. I never felt stressed or overwhelmed knowing how helpful and great she was”
• “She has been an invaluable resource the entire time I’ve been at UCSD. …I feel so strongly that I have even emailed my college to change my answer for the graduation petition question “Who was your favorite professor?” to Thanh. I honestly believe she has contributed more positively to my undergraduate experience than any other faculty member or professor.”

Thanh also does a fantastic job of staying in touch with alumni. Since she has been with the department in this role for over 7 years, many students she formerly advised have advanced in their careers far enough to give back by offering internships. She feels strongly that the relationships she develops with CogSci majors result directly opportunities for our students. Cubic Defense, Sony PlayStation, Direct TV, Intuit, Sony Electronics, Raytheon and Fico are companies that offered internships or jobs to recent Cogs graduates.

Without Thanh, our program wouldn’t be as vibrant and productive as it is. I hope you will consider her nomination as employee of the year. She certainly fits the bill in my book.