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UC San Diego Partners with Little Saigon Foundation to Establish Graduate Fellowship

Collaborative efforts launch Vietnamese American Studies Fellowship initiative to preserve language and culture



1 Festival unites thousands of participants together to Vietnamese culture.

“It is important to preserve the cultural, artistic and economic developments of the Vietnamese community,” says Kendrick Ton, treasurer of the Little Saigon Foundation. “Without language, you can’t communicate with your elders and the stories get lost in translation.”

Community leaders like Kendrick hope to preserve the legacy of the Vietnamese culture by empowering local Vietnamese Americans through higher education. That’s why the Little Saigon Foundation is partnering with the ethnic studies department at the University of California, San Diego to launch a Contemporary Vietnamese American Studies Fellowship fundraising initiative. This fellowship (a graduate

level scholarship) will support UC San Diego graduate students who are working to help preserve the Vietnamese culture and language as an investment to the future of the San Diego community.

The Little Saigon Foundation was started by UC San Diego alumnus Frank Vuong and community organizer Victor Wilson. The two envision Little Saigon, a six block stretch of cultural importance for current and future generations of Vietnamese decent, to accelerate economic growth by sustaining small business development in City Heights.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, San Diego has the fifth largest Vietnamese population in the nation. San Diego is home to more than 33,000 Vietnamese-Americans, many of whom settled in City Heights in the late 1970s and early ‘80s after immigrating to the U.S.

“As a largely refugee group coming in 1975, Vietnamese residents have really diversified San Diego in numerous ways. Whether visiting the library or a grocery store, especially in areas like El Cajon, Vietnamese culture can be found everywhere,” says Yến Lê Espiritu, a professor in UC San Diego’s Ethnic Studies Department.

The social and cultural fabric of the local Vietnamese community contributes to the overall rich diversity of San Diego. Graduate students are the key to documenting the history of the culture and continuing the legacy for preserving Vietnamese heritage.



The Little Saigon Foundation works to preserve Vietnamese language and culture.

“A graduate fellowship would enable us to train researchers to conduct this kind of work so that we will be able to document this history before the older generation passes on,” adds Espiritu.

At UC San Diego, initiatives contributing to community outreach for graduate students are important to fuel the regional research economy; train the next generation of teachers, innovators and leaders; and enhance the university’s excellence, impact and reputation.

Currently, graduate students at UC San Diego represent approximately 19.4 percent of the total student population. At peer public institutions, graduate students are 30 to 40 percent of the student body. As state and federal government funding decreases, private support for graduate students is a campus priority.

To learn more about supporting the Contemporary Vietnamese American Studies Fellowship for graduate students, please visit www.giving.ucsd.edu/vietnamese or call (858) 534- 8305.

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