

Stacey Sueoka, PhD, 2016

What influenced your decision to attend graduate school at OSC?

My undergraduate physics professors planted the seed in my head to apply to graduate school. Also, perhaps serendipitously, all of my summer internship experiences in some way or another were related to the field of optics. It felt meant to be!

What do you wish you would have known your first day of graduate school? Was there anything you wish you had done to prepare more for graduate school?

I felt my first year was particularly challenging because I had been away from academia for two years. I lived in Japan as an English teacher during that time because I wanted to take the opportunity between undergraduate and graduate school to strengthen my Japanese language skills. I wish I had taken time to strengthen my math and science skills again before starting.



T. Lam, R. Chipman, S. Sueoka, A. Guilmo

Which classes did you find most enjoyable? Which ones did you find most difficult?

I really enjoyed OPTI 512, the Linear Systems and Fourier Optics class taught by Dr. Scott Tyo. It definitely was difficult but his teaching style was different and very engaging.

Was there an individual (professor, advisor, staff, friend, family member) who played a particularly important role in your education?

It's hard for me to think of any particular individual because there were so many people who positively affected my experience at OSC! Faculty members often had an open-door policy, and were eager to engage with us outside of the lectures—even OSC's emeritus professors would come to colloquia or other OSC events to speak with us and encourage us. I still think fondly of the hallway conversations I had with Dr. Arvind Marathay at many such events. All of the administrative staff were so kind and took care of us as if we were family. It helped me during the most challenging times to see their smiling faces after long days of sitting in the dark cubicles! Perhaps I owe the most gratitude to my peers—they supported me day in and out in education, research and also life's obstacles.

What was your research while attending OSC?

I was in Dr. Russell Chipman's Polarimetry group. My main research area focused on the polarization modeling and predictions for the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope.

What was the cost of rent in Tucson while you were in school?

\$900/month for a 2-bedroom, 1-bathroom house that was fairly spacious!

If you owned a car during graduate school, what year and model was it?

2005 Honda Civic.

What was your favorite restaurant/student hangout near campus?

Bookends, until they closed and were replaced by Starbucks. They had the sweetest ladies who prepared the sandwiches. We used to eat there almost every day. We often ate giant bowls of pho at Miss Saigon on Campbell Ave., and took walking breaks to Allegro Gelato on 6th. Late night trips to Nico's Taco Shop were essential as well, especially while studying for prelims.

What did you do for fun during your time in graduate school?

Lots of sports and outdoor activities, hiking and soccer in particular. Also, many, many get-togethers and events with friends.

What was most memorable about your commencement ceremony?

Having my family attend my commencement ceremony meant the world to me.

At the time of your graduation, what were the most sought-after jobs/most popular industries/most popular companies?

We were very lucky to graduate in a time when optical engineers were in very high demand. Many of the large tech companies like Apple, Google and Facebook finally realized they needed optical engineers to take their consumer products to the next level.

What was your first job after graduation?

Optical systems engineer for the construction of the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope.

What was the most significant world event during your time in graduate school. How were you affected by this event?

In 2011 there was the great Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan. The magnitude 9 earthquake off the coast of Japan triggered powerful and deadly tsunamis that took many lives, caused massive structural damage, and even caused a nuclear accident. I held Japan very close to my heart because I lived there for two years before coming to Arizona. I was worried about my friends, colleagues, and for the many people who were suffering from the destruction.

Was there a campus or community event in Tucson that was especially important to you?

I really enjoyed participating in the different events put on by the Student Optics Chapter (SOck). I feel that SOck provided us opportunities to connect to the broader community as well as strengthen our own graduate student community. We did a laser graffiti demo at a downtown art event, hosted the IONS conference in 2010, gathered for many Sports Friday events, played intramural soccer, and one of my favorite memories I remember was helping Bill Duncan and Christine Bradley put together the first Laser Fun Day laser maze.

What advice would you give to this year's graduating class?

Congratulations to the graduating class! You have so many wonderful things to look forward to in your future! My advice to you is be as true to yourself as you can. I think we are lucky in our profession to do what we love. Know that there is a plethora of job opportunities out there, so pursue your dreams and the things that make you excited and driven!