Samantha Lee

Cal State LA student excelled in the classroom and on the basketball court

By Sabrina Hamilton
Cal State LA News Service

For Samantha Lee, the decision to attend California State University, Los Angeles came after receiving an unexpected phone call.

While playing basketball her senior year at Mark Keppel High School, just a few miles from the Cal State LA campus, the Monterey Park native averaged 18 points, and five 3-pointers a game. Her stats inspired then-Cal State LA women’s basketball coach Janell Jones to call and offer Lee a spot on 2013-14 team.

“I never thought playing basketball in college was possible because I was so small,” the 5-foot-4-inch tall Lee explained. “I was also excited to remain close to home.”

Since then, Lee has focused on academics while juggling the demands of being a successful college athlete and working part-time as an office assistant at Cal State LA Downtown. In May, four years after arriving at the University, she will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an option in accounting. Lee will be the first in her family to earn a college degree.

Lee has received honors for her performance in the classroom and on the court. She is a three-time California Collegiate Athletics Association (CCAA) Academic Award winner. This past season, she was named to the CCAA All-Conference Basketball Team.

“Grades were always my priority,” Lee says. “Even in high school, I learned to make the best use of my time. Honestly, just waking up earlier helps.”

On the court, Lee improved each season. She had limited playing time her first year, but worked hard and refined her skills. By her senior year, she was a key offensive player. She became one the most prolific 3-point shooters in the conference, earning the nickname “Sammy 3.” By the end of the season, she was named to the second team All-CCAA team and came within one 3-point basket of tying the Cal State LA record.

For Lee, being a well-rounded student was important. “I made sure I was more than just a basketball player,” she says. “I made time to do what I enjoyed, like photography and going on adventures with friends.”

Lee is fluent in Cantonese, a skill that she plans to use as she pursues a career in international finance. She is planning to move to China, where she has family, and explore career opportunities.
“I like to play with numbers,” Lee says of her career plans. “I am more comfortable communicating with numbers than words.”