HAVING IT ALL: FAU HONORS COLLEGE STUDENT INTERNS AT THE MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE AND AS A PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, ACHIEVES IMPRESSIVE SCORE ON THE PHARMACY COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST (PCAT), AND GRADUATES IN THREE YEARS

February 22, 2016 (Jupiter, FL) – Students at the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University are known for their academic achievements and performance in classes, conferences and standardized tests, among many other things. Nicolas Tran, a third year student concentrating in biochemistry and graduating this spring 2016, has always been interested in understanding the molecular mechanisms of how drugs work. He recently took his Pharmacy Admissions Test (PCAT) and placed in the 94th percentile. But this achievement is only a glimpse of his academic success. Tran managed to obtain a high score on the PCAT while interning at Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience, working at Walgreens Pharmacy as a pharmacy technician, writing his honors thesis, taking an average of 16-18 credits each semester, and maintaining a Summa Cum Laude GPA of 3.9 or higher.

Tran has been working at Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience since last spring of 2015. During the summer he worked an average of 40 hours per week but throughout the school year he interns about 20 hours a week. At Max Planck, Tran works under department head Jenny Yu in the Molecular Core. “I help with the molecular cloning, genotyping, and tissue/cell cultures. I am also working on a gene expression profile for a project that I will be presenting at the Symposium for Young Neuroscientist and Professors of the South East (SYNAPSE) 2016 in April,” he shares. In a like matter, Tran has worked at the Walgreens Pharmacy for a little over a year—receiving first-hand store and field experience. He works between 20-35 hours a week and is responsible for typing and filling prescriptions, customer
service, updating prescription monitoring programs, organizing and ordering medication. “It makes me feel good to know that I am a part of making people’s lives better,” he says.

Every Honors College student has the opportunity to write and publish their honors thesis. Tran’s thesis looks at integrating a digital microcontroller with a classic analog pH meter circuit. His Honors College Thesis advisor is Dr. Eugene T. Smith, Associate Professor of Chemistry. “It was frustrating constantly tweaking the first circuit board we were working with and seeing no good results, but after months of research we finally designed a new board that works great. Dr. Smith and I were both ecstatic when the new board worked,” he adds. Tran is very thankful to the many Honors College professors and staff who have played a vital role in his undergraduate career. “All of my teachers are amazing. I would specifically like to thank Dr. Chandrasekhar, my academic advisor, for all the times she has helped me throughout the years and Dr. Smith, my thesis advisor, for giving me all the tools to make my thesis project a success,” says Tran.

An incident from Tran’s childhood kindled his interest in pharmacology. Since he was a young kid, Tran has always enjoyed playing basketball in his free time—from playing in organized teams to playing open recreation and in local scrimmages. Early in his childhood, he witnessed an incident that began to stir his interest towards the molecular mechanisms of drugs. Tran was playing basketball at the park when one of the other players had a seizure. As Tran observed the family administering his medicine, he began to realize the importance of drug composition.

His academic record and achievements have made him a very competitive candidate for Pharmacy School. Tran has applied to the University of Florida’s Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm. D.) program. He intends to later pursue a Ph. D in Biochemistry or Neuroscience. When asked if he had any advice to give to first year students he stated, “Do not take any opportunity for granted and do as much as you can. You never know what any opportunity can lead to.” He also added, “If you are taking the PCAT make sure to take advantage of all the ‘optional’ classes that most schools suggest, they are really instrumental in scoring well on the PCAT.”

Tran is an exemplary student that brings great pride and joy to the Honors College. The Honors College wishes him the best luck at SYNAPSE 2016 in April and in his many future endeavors.
**About Florida Atlantic University:** Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University, with an annual economic impact of $6.3 billion, serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students at sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. FAU’s world-class teaching and research faculty serves students through 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University is placing special focus on the rapid development of three signature themes – marine and coastal issues, biotechnology and contemporary societal challenges – which provide opportunities for faculty and students to build upon FAU’s existing strengths in research and scholarship. For more information, visit [www.fau.edu](http://www.fau.edu).

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