My four years in Tony’s group were some of the best and most defining years of my life. When I look back on my time at PASA, I remember the inspiring “Teaching Tuesday” talks, psych buddy breakfasts at Jimmy V’s, grueling aerobic IM practices, *early* mornings uncovering the pool in the pouring rain at 4:45am, the fulfilled feeling after a hard practice, Tony’s bad jokes, and most importantly the fun times I had with the lifelong friends I made there. These certain moments come to mind because they were when I grew the most as both a swimmer and a person (excluding Tony’s “jokes” of course…). I learned what it meant to be a good teammate, to be coachable, to work hard for something I wanted, and to always strive for more. When I entered Tony’s group, I was a shy (and terrified) girl who wasn’t really sure what she wanted or how to speak for herself. When I left, I felt like a confident and empowered young woman who had found her voice. I knew I still had *a lot* left to learn, because we are all always still learning, but I felt equipped with the tools to do so. On PASA, I had experienced (what felt like) the full range of failure to success. I had *many* disappointing meets and many good ones as well. But what I was still in the process of learning was that it wasn’t just the time on the scoreboard that mattered, and that it’s ok to fail, and that it’s ok to ask for help. And, I’m still learning these things. Looking back on my years in Tony’s group makes me realize how many parts of myself came to be, and I feel lucky to have had these core values instilled in me at a young age.

I am currently finishing up my junior year at Cal where I have loved (mostly) every minute of it. I’m not going to lie and say it’s all been easy because it certainly hasn’t, but I don’t think any experience should be. During my freshman year, I struggled with getting my first C, with letting myself get so overwhelmed that I got sick, with the horrible feeling that I let down my team after a bad dual meet and other disappointments I hadn’t experienced before. With the help of my coaches, old and new, my mom and my friends, I came to realize that all you can do is your best. Though it sounds cliché, this is something that I often try to remind myself in moments of disappointment. If I get a not-so-great grade on an exam, knowing I studied as much as I possibly could have with the time I had helps to buffer the disappointment because I know I gave it my all. I’ve gotten slightly better with this each year but it’s still something I continue to work on, and probably always will. But I’ve learned that there’s no worse feeling than wishing I had studied a little more or tried a little harder after the fact.

The opportunity to swim at Cal felt unimaginable right up until my first day of practice, and still feels surreal at times. I have made more lifelong friends in my teammates, had the honor to learn from an incredible coach and professors, and been presented opportunities I wouldn’t trade for the world. Swimming at the collegiate level is entirely different than club swimming; *everything* you do represents your team, good and bad. This introduces new pressures to the sport that I hadn’t experienced to this degree before. My first Conference championships were eye opening, as that was when I really realized how much “team” matters. I feel proud and lucky to be on a team where I can genuinely say we ALL have each other’s backs. But this doesn’t just happen automatically. It takes months of team bonding and shared experiences. It requires being vulnerable with each other and putting others before yourself at times. It takes day in and day out practices where you put everything you have on the line for your teammates, for your coaches *and* for yourself. Being in the middle of a workout and seeing everyone around you giving it their very best makes it nearly impossible to not want to do the same. This is part of what it means to be a part of a collegiate team with one common goal, and I hope it’s something you all get to experience one day for yourselves. I have extremely fond memories of my first three seasons as a Cal Bear.Last semester I declared Integrative Biology as my major and currently plan to pursue a career in medicine. Managing my time as a collegiate student-athlete has been extremely hard but extremely rewarding at the same time. I’m enjoying starting my “upper division” or more specialized course requirements on topics that really interest me. For example, this semester I am taking a class called Infectious Disease Dynamics, which as it turns out is extremely applicable to our current situation... Outside of school and swim, I work with residents at UCSF Oakland Children’s Hospital as the data collector for research projects in the pediatric trauma department. Just recently the first project I joined was published in the American College of Surgeons where my name is listed as an author.

It seems like my first three years at Cal have flown by, and it’s weird to think I only have one more to go. My biggest piece of advice to younger PASA teammates would be to live in the moment and appreciate where you are. While it’s good to plan for the future, don’t get caught up in wishing for it to come faster. Every stage of being an athlete is important for different reasons, so be grateful for where you are now! Oh, and listen to Tony because he really knows what he’s talking about despite his sense of humor ☺ GO PASA!

-Natalie Tuck, Class of 2017