

Making Her Family Proud!



No matter what activity **Aaliyah Balagtas** took part in, she was always thinking of others.

Valedictorian Aaliyah kept herself quite busy throughout her career at Mater Dei. She found academic success and served in many leadership positions. Whether serving as the executive secretary for ASB, a retreat master for Campus Ministry, an Ambassador for Christ, a sprinter and hurdler for track and field or as a volunteer who helped elderly people with special needs through the Response Club, Aaliyah gave her all. No matter what activity Aaliyah took part in, she was always thinking of others. As a member of the Academy of Science, Aaliyah worked in a summer internship that inspired her future career in biochemistry. During this internship at USD, Aaliyah worked in a biochemistry lab researching cancer cells to learn more about ways to stop cancer cell replication. She and her lab partner, Melanie Cruz, were graciously invited to present their research at the National Experimental

Biology Conference 2020, which was going to be held in San Diego prior to the pandemic. "Mater Dei has helped me grow into the person I am by presenting me with so many different opportunities to make a difference for others," Aaliyah said. She is grateful for all her friends and teachers at Mater Dei who positively impacted her personal growth. Aaliyah is now planning on attending UCLA in the fall to study biochemistry and hopes to become a researcher. She is excited to go into a field where she can impact others' lives with her work. "My internship with Dr. Provost at USD changed my perception of the biochemistry field and helped me to see how I could use my gifts in the world." With all of her impressive accomplishments, Aaliyah had always wanted to make her family proud. As a first-generation Filipino American, she wants them to know "the sacrifices they made were worth it!"