Finding Your Way

JESSICA TSOONG BS’08

Jessica Tsoong may be considered fresh out of school, but she’s already revolutionizing the way people interact with their environments. Last year she cofounded WiFiSLAM, a start-up that develops enabling technologies for indoor location-based services. Its technology can run on any smartphone and has the ability to provide indoor location-based services with no initial setup in any Wi-Fi-enabled building.

“WiFiSLAM’s technology can pinpoint the location of your phone on a map to within a couple of steps,” says Tsoong. “This could lead to all kinds of useful applications, like helping people find their way through sprawling complexes like airports, malls, and hospitals. And if you stop in front of something that interests you, we’d be able to give you information on it.”

Tsoong has always been interested in entrepreneurship. While both her parents are doctors, they are also entrepreneurs and “savvy business people,” as she puts it, “who created a lot of inspiration for me.”

Born and raised in California, Tsoong planned to go to college locally, but after attending a SEAS Days on campus, she changed her mind. “It was mainly the people and other students that I met at Columbia that made me decide to come,” she says. “The caliber of students and the curriculum set Columbia apart from the other schools I was considering.” Its New York City location was an added bonus.

During her undergrad years at Engineering, Tsoong was active in a range of interests, even though she says that Columbia was a lot of work. “Doing problem sets every week definitely helped me to learn diligence and persistence,” she notes. “Even if it wasn’t something you wanted to do, you knew that it had to get done. That happens a lot in a start-up, too!”

Tsoong played tennis all through her four years at Engineering and also took piano lessons at Teachers College. She credits the core curriculum for encouraging her to learn beyond her major. Tsoong also took all the classes she could on entrepreneurship that were offered at the time and cites Professor Jack McGourty as one of the professors who encouraged her to explore entrepreneurship. She also was active in the Columbia Organization of Rising Entrepreneurs. After graduation, she earned her MS from Stanford.

Tsoong, who is the youngest member on the School’s Entrepreneurship Advisory Board, loves being an entrepreneur. “It’s been such an amazing experience because you are able to meet innovative and passionate young entrepreneurs who are so smart and have a strong drive to build products that can change the world,” she says. “It’s also been tough at times because you are always learning. The start-up experience, like everyone says, is filled with ups and downs, exactly like a roller coaster. You have to learn to take the ups and downs in stride and not let it affect the big picture of what you want to create.”