

CLASS OF 2026

Outstanding Graduate



MOHAMMAD AL AQTASH

College of Engineering

Mohammad Al Aqtash is graduating with a bachelor's in Chemical Engineering and four minors: Pre-medicine, Chemistry, and Biomedical and Computational Engineering.

Mohammad grew up in NMSU family housing, with early memories of feeding ducks at the Alumni Pond. In high school, he enjoyed building and programming Lego® robots to do his chores, which led him to pursue engineering. He says he chose chemical engineering because of the field's versatility. During one internship, he worked on an engineering system designed for detecting toxic warfare chemicals. In Dr. Houqian Li's research group, Mohammad worked on building and automating a system for catalyst characterization.

“At NMSU, I was given the space to try, the space to learn from failure, and the tools I needed to grow into who I want to be.”

Currently part of Dr. Gary Eiceman's lab, Mohammad's research seeks chemical markers in vapors emitted during surgical procedures to differentiate healthy and cancerous tissue. This work is part of a collaboration with researchers at Tampere University in Finland to develop technology to help surgeons extract brain tumors without the loss of healthy tissue.

Mohammad is proudest of traveling to Finland in 2025 to assist with this research — the lone student on a team of professional researchers and a brain surgeon. “It felt surreal,” he says. “Both grounding and motivating, seeing the impact of the work and what we can do.” Dr. Eiceman notes, “[I watched Mohammad's] competence, behavior, and demeanor in a challenging foreign environment . . . with a wholly new team of investigators. He was superb in all aspects of travel, communication, relationships, and responsibility.”

Mohammad's interest in medicine led him to co-found NMSU's Friends of Doctors Without Borders, leading a healthcare service trip to Guatemala in 2023 to assist a resource-limited community with clinic operations. In his spare time, Mohammad is learning to play piano. He plans to attend medical school eventually, but after graduation he plans to “sleep and travel” a bit, as well as continue as a guest researcher in the Eiceman Lab. ▲