

## 2009 Grads Are Ready to Do the Work

### Learn By Doing Means Cal Poly Seniors Walk Off Campus and Into Jobs On Day One

By Stacia Momburg

Each spring, as graduation approaches, Cal Poly seniors are abuzz with anticipation.

Final projects are submitted, commencement paperwork is finalized, and tickets for the ceremony are thoughtfully distributed.

Graduating seniors also face the prospect of what's next. Some pursue advanced degrees, some travel, and many enter the workforce for the first time.



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For Cal Poly seniors, there's good news: Companies in California and around the world are welcoming the university's talented graduates.

"What distinguishes our graduates is their ability to dive into work with little training," said Cornel Morton, Cal Poly's vice president for Student Affairs. "Executives from a wide range of industries tell us they seek out our graduates because they are well-trained, work-ready professionals in scientific and technical fields. The common quote we hear is, 'Cal Poly graduates are ready to contribute on day one.'"

Data from an informal campus survey of graduating seniors showed that many attribute their success in finding careers to internships or co-op programs through their college departments. The survey was conducted to help the university understand how graduates were faring in their job searches in the current economic climate.

Even in a sluggish job market, the value of a Cal Poly degree translates into good job news for many grads. Many report landing highly sought-after positions in diverse fields – such as construction project managers, software developers, ice cream makers and agricultural professionals.

Meet five Cal Poly students who will tackle demanding jobs now that they've graduated:

#### KIRSTEN PETERSON

As you might expect for a graduate of one of the nation's top business colleges, Kirsten Peterson of Cal Poly's Orfalea College of Business has landed a job with a premier entertainment company – Pixar Animation Studios.

She will work at Pixar near San Francisco as a production management intern. The East Bay native hopes her three-month internship will result in the job of her dreams.



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"I've wanted to work at Pixar since I was 15," said Peterson, now 22. "My first Pixar toy was a Woody doll from 'Toy Story.'"

Though a business administration major, Peterson points to classes she took in Cal Poly's parks, recreation and tourism program in helping her land the job. "I took an independent course of study and wound up taking a lot of event planning and management classes," she said. "I was able to demonstrate exactly what I was capable of doing because of the hands-on projects I completed at Cal Poly."



#### **MACI DEPAOLI**

After obtaining a dairy science degree from the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, the country's fourth largest agriculture school, Maci DePaoli will move on to a nine-month training program with Dreyer's Ice Cream in Bakersfield – the nation's largest ice cream producer.

The Strathmore, Calif., native will complete different training sessions in various divisions of the Dryer's processing plant, which will expose her to all areas of the business. She'll then be assigned a role in the plant.

"I grew up with dairy cows, and I love them," DePaoli said. "When I got to Cal Poly, I was able to do internships at processing plants in the Central Valley processing milk, butter and cheese. I began to love dairy processing because of those experiences."



She's been getting ideas from family and friends about ice cream flavors she should develop. "The best I've heard so far have been apple crisp and root beer float. Both are my brother's."

#### **ALEX LEHMAN**

Alex Lehman, an environmental horticulture major in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, joined Vaccarino & Associates, Inc. in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, two days after graduating.

The 23-year-old grew up in Ojai, Calif., gardening with his parents and grandparents. He will take over native plant collections for one of the Caribbean's largest landscape architecture companies, which specializes in sustainable landscapes for homes, businesses and government, and restoration of native plants in the region.



Lehman, who minored in plant biology, will travel throughout Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands collecting native plants for the company's various restoration projects. "I'll oversee ground installation and restoration work. The company works to restore sites degraded by sugar cane and other cash crops. We also rehabilitate waterfront property that has experienced over-development, erosion and years of compounded abuse."

Manager of Cal Poly's Plant Conservatory for the past two years, Lehman is looking forward to his new job. "It requires me to travel all over the Virgin Islands collecting plants, to get my scuba certification and focus on what I love to do. Not bad."

#### **KLAY ADAIR**

With construction management degree in hand from the College of Architecture and Environmental Design, Klay Adair will now work at the university that landed him his new job. He is joining San Diego-based Sundt Construction in San Diego as project engineer on the Cal Poly Rec Center renovation project.

"I'm going to be working on project budget and scheduling, as well as quality control, site safety and processing submittals and transmittals," said Adair, 22.

The San Luis Obispo native got the job after attending an



information session provided by the Construction Management Department.

“The department does a great job of relating everything we do to what we will encounter after graduation,” he said. “The internships gave me first-hand experiences of what I would actually be doing in my career.”

#### **MAX BRANDT**

Also a construction management major, Max Brandt will complete a six-month, paid internship with Clark Construction and then head to Tanzania for a year to complete a senior project he began two years ago. He'll finish design work on a self-sustaining, LEED-certified technical university for the Catholic Diocese of Same, Tanzania. He and a friend also plan to start a nonprofit corporation to help develop Same using sustainable practices.

Born in St. Louis, Brandt now calls Davis, Calif., home. He attributes his love of construction to his family. “I grew up remodeling homes with my mom and dad,” he said. “We remodeled every house we lived in.”

The 23-year-old was also recognized for work he did while at Cal Poly, receiving an award this year for outstanding service to the off-campus community and one for outstanding leadership from the Construction Management Department.

Like so many Cal Poly students, our featured grads agree the hands-on experience they had as part of Cal Poly's learn-by-doing education helped them land the jobs they wanted and provided them skills that make them “ready to contribute on day one.”



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California Polytechnic State University

San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

805.756.1511

[polynews@calpoly.edu](mailto:polynews@calpoly.edu)