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Cal Poly Receives Nearly \$200,000 from National Science Foundation *Grant funds study on the women in academic science and engineering careers*

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Four Cal Poly faculty members were recently awarded nearly \$200,000 by the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE Program to study the experiences of female faculty in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields at Cal Poly.

The NSF's IT (Institutional Transformation) Start grant asks investigators to look at the problem of low numbers of female STEM faculty and develop a plan for improvement that is both institution-specific and sustainable over time.

Mary A. Armstrong, one of the investigators receiving the grant, says that Cal Poly reflects the national trends of low numbers of female STEM faculty in many ways. "But we also do surprisingly well in some fields. We want to figure out what factors lead to our successes, as well as our shortcomings. It is a puzzle we are approaching without any preconceived notions or assumptions about solutions."

During the year-long study, researchers from three different Cal Poly colleges will look carefully at current institutional trends including hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty. They will examine any current university policies and procedures that may affect female STEM faculty, and they will conduct surveys and interviews with faculty.

"The goal of our project is to figure out how we can enable the university to more successfully retain excellent faculty regardless of their gender or membership in traditionally underrepresented groups," Armstrong said. "We want to help ensure that our campus climate promotes an environment that allows our faculty to reach their full potential."

William W. Durgin, provost and vice president for academic affairs, is pleased that the group will conduct this research. "This effort has every potential to cause fundamental institutional change here at Cal Poly and will in all likelihood be one of the most important diversity initiatives in our history," he said.

Members of the interdisciplinary team are Nilgun Sungar, College of Science and Mathematics; Mary A. Armstrong and Jasna Jovanovic, College of Liberal Arts; and Daniel Walsh, College of Engineering.

About the IT Start Program

The IT-Start Program gives institutions an opportunity to collect data that will allow them to apply for a larger IT ADVANCE grant.

Also funded by the NSF Advance Program, IT ADVANCE Grants are multi-million dollar awards that underwrite major campus transformational activities that support diversity in STEM fields. The grants have been effective at increasing diversity among STEM faculty in major institutions throughout the US over the past 15 years.