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Cal Poly Hosts First Annual Summer Lab Chemistry Workshop for Blind and Sighted Students June 23-30

TO: News Editors, Photo Editors, Assignment Editors and Reporters

WHAT: Cal Poly is scheduled to host "Access Chemistry 2007," the first annual hands-on summer laboratory chemistry workshop for blind and sighted high school students June 23 to 30. Students’ ages range from 14 to 18, attending from throughout California and out of state.

WHEN: Daily, Saturday, June 23 to Saturday, June 30.

WHERE: Lab activities will take place in Bldg. 38, Rm. 123 at Cal Poly. Recreational activities will take place throughout the Central Coast.

BACKGROUND:
The workshop will be led by Dennis Fantin, a Cal Poly chemistry instructor and practicing biophysicist. Fantin, himself blind, has developed techniques and procedures which make the chemistry laboratory a rich environment for visually impaired students.

The workshop will employ a discovery-based teaching approach, encouraging participants to learn about chemical phenomena and adaptive laboratory techniques by doing their own experimental work and making their own observations and measurements. The workshop environment will be supportive, and the scientific subject matter presented will be stimulating and challenging to both sighted and blind participants.

In the laboratory, the students will work in teams, each assisted by a Cal Poly chemistry major and Fantin. The project's philosophy places the direct apprehension of physical reality by the blind student at the core of the laboratory experience. In keeping with this principle, the blind student will take the lead in carrying out laboratory operations wherever possible.

Among many experiments and activities, the students will:

- Construct a magnesium-copper battery with a buzzer that sounds to indicate the completion of the electrical circuit.
- Learn about chemical reactivity by hearing the difference between small pellets of lithium and sodium when dropped into water.
- Feel the difference between saturated and unsaturated lipids when extracted by distillation.
- Build chemical models using an accessible molecular modeling kit.
- Investigate the unusual properties of liquid nitrogen and dry ice through tactile play.
- Taste the differences between and measure the pH of assorted weak acids and bases such as vinegar, lemon, and orange juice, baking soda, and Tums.

Students and instructors will work in the laboratory during the day. Evenings and the weekend will be spent by everyone relaxing and doing recreational activities such as kayaking in the Morro Bay estuary, playing team
building games and making dinner together on the beach.

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