Jeffrey D. Armstrong

Age: 51
Birthplace: Lyon County, Ky.
Family: Wife Sharon; daughters Jessica, a medical student at Michigan State University, and son Zack, a finance major at Michigan State
Education: B.S., Animal Science, Murray State University, 1981; M.S., Physiology, North Carolina State University, 1984; Ph.D., Physiology, North Carolina State University, 1988
Before Cal Poly: Dean and professor, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, July 2001–January 2011; Department head and professor, Department of Animal Sciences, Purdue University, June 1997–June 2001; Professor and former administrative posts, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, North Carolina State University, July 1986–May 1997
Hobbies: Reading, running, golf, basketball, traveling with family
Favorite sports to watch: “Anything involving the Cal Poly Mustangs.”
Favorite movie: The Shawshank Redemption
“It’s a great story about perseverance in the face of hostile odds.”
Favorite musicians: Jack Johnson, The Eagles, Bob Seger
Favorite book on leadership: Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln
“T’ll work with the CSU to try to persuade the relevant people in Sacramento to make sure Cal Poly is funded adequately.”
Favorite meal: “A cheeseburger with lettuce, tomato and mayo.”
PC or Mac: “Both. I have an iMac and a Dell.”
How will we know if Cal Poly is doing its job well? A: My daily presidential campus is fixed on one guiding light: student success. Every decision I make as president will be based on the question “Will this help students succeed?” The formula for success is straightforward: Put smart, motivated students together with caring and dedicated faculty and staff. How to measure success? One way is graduation rates. Cal Poly does well already, our graduation rates are the best in the CSU, and we’ve been on an upward trend for five years. I suspect that progress in the next couple of years will be harder to come by given the probable cutbacks in state funding -- but over the long haul, we will make steady progress on graduation rates. Another marker for student success is how well our alumni perform after they leave here. Are our graduates continuing to land good jobs? Are they moving on to prestigious graduate programs? Are they earning at the top of the pay scales? Are they quickly moving into leadership roles? If the answers are yes, then we’re doing our job. Of course, we can always improve. I won’t be satisfied until we’re graduating every one of our students on time and sending them off to long, productive lives.

What areas of the campus do you feel still need work? A: It’s an excellent draft in so many ways. I particularly like the vision statement’s focus on our need “to help California meet future challenges in a global context.” I want to see some expansion on that point, because I believe it’s a critical part of our mission that we offer students a more global, multi-cultural experience. For our graduates to succeed in their professions, we have to enhance their awareness of the rest of the world. They need to understand different cultures if they’re going to function well in an increasingly inter-connected global community. I want to be sure that we’re preparing Cal Poly students exceptionally well for a future that will change rapidly in ways not yet imagined.

What has been most inspiring to you in your professional work? A: That’s easy: No matter who I talk to on campus, no one is satisfied with the status quo. Everyone believes that as great as Cal Poly is, we can do better. I feel the same way. That’s what’s inspiring. It’s an excellent draft in so many ways. I particularly like the vision statement’s focus on our need “to help California meet future challenges in a global context.” I want to see some expansion on that point, because I believe it’s a critical part of our mission that we offer students a more global, multi-cultural experience. For our graduates to succeed in their professions, we have to enhance their awareness of the rest of the world. They need to understand different cultures if they’re going to function well in an increasingly inter-connected global community. I want to be sure that we’re preparing Cal Poly students exceptionally well for a future that will change rapidly in ways not yet imagined.

What is Cal Poly Education in the future? A: Absolutely. Learn by Doing is the heart of Cal Poly, and no one does it better. Delve deeply in the power of hands-on, learning. I grew up on a farm and had a lot of chores. My parents were good teachers. But my learning accelerated when I actually had to do the jobs, rather than just listen. I experienced this when I was in college, as well. I also believe that Learn by Doing is the key to the professional success that Cal Poly alumni enjoy. I have the sentiment I’ve heard many times already: Employers love our graduates because they have two hands on the problem and two feet on the ground.