We want students to learn outside their comfort zone.

... Only by engaging in a broad spectrum of learning can a student unleash the full power of the mind.

The Power of the Comprehensive Polytechnic

You often hear about Cal Poly’s excellent reputation in terms of one element at a time, and often that element is engineering, agriculture, architecture or science and technology. While we’re obviously proud of those programs, thinking in those terms ignores the most important part of our curriculum — and in fact our very name.

Polytechnic.

It’s a term that comes from the Greek words for “skilled in many arts.” This concept forms the core of our mission.

I hope you’ve noticed the theme running through this issue — from the introduction to our new mascot program, to the profile on our provost Kathleen Enz-Finken, to the accomplishments of alumni like Kyle Wiens and Hans Hess. The strength of our educational model, the comprehensive polytechnic, is that it brings many different disciplines together through Learn by Doing to create a complete educational experience.

As the provost discussed in her interview, we’re proactively developing more opportunities for Cal Poly students to learn in interdisciplinary settings. We’re creating courses and majors that span multiple colleges. We’re building centers and institutes that allow students of diverse interests and educational backgrounds to combine their strengths, working together toward greater results than they could achieve alone.

At the end of this past summer I had a chance to participate in an event that embodies that polytechnic spirit – the project presentations at the Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship’s HotHouse Accelerator. This interdisciplinary effort puts students together in multidisciplinary groups to develop business ideas.

I met young graphic designers, web developers, horticulturalists, physicists and marketers, all applying lessons they had learned inside the classroom to real-world problems. And whether or not their business plans turn them into the next Steve Jobs, all these students gained something invaluable.

We want students to learn outside their comfort zone — to try new things, to work with students and faculty from other majors and colleges, to broaden their experiences. Only by engaging in a broad spectrum of learning can a student unleash the full power of the mind.

Here at Cal Poly, that’s our specialty.

Jeffrey D. Armstrong
President