Cal Poly's Sustainable Design Curriculum Wins Top National Award for "Ecological Literacy"

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Cal Poly's Sustainable Environments minor program has won top national honors for "ecological literacy" from the American Institute of Architects.

The Sustainable Environments minor and its core interdisciplinary courses on environmental design (called "EDes" on campus) are all offered by Cal Poly's College of Architecture and Environmental Design (CAED). The college also offers a Sustainable Environmental Design Education curriculum project.

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) named the CAED programs as the first-place winner of a grant program designed to recognize architecture programs that promote ecological literacy.

In announcing the award the AIA selection team lauded Cal Poly's program as the "obvious" first choice because it is both interdisciplinary and comprehensive.

The AIA selection team reviewed 49 programs at architecture schools across the U.S. Cal Poly was one of three grant winners named at the national AIA Convention on May 19 in Las Vegas. The winners each received a $3,000 grant, courtesy of the Tides Foundation, as recognition for their immersion of students in ecological literacy concepts.

"Due to the number s and prestige of the competing schools, we were surprised and gratified to win this award," said Architecture Professor Jonathan Reich. "Because Cal Poly is a polytechnic university, we've felt the need to work harder to make the program broad and theoretical, as well as practical and technical. Following the principle of ecology - that everything is connected - we've also made the interdisciplinary aspect of the program a priority," continued Reich.

"Ecological literacy" is a term coined by author David Orr that implies a broad understanding of the relationship between humans, societies, and the natural world. The AIA's Committee on the Environment undertook the research and award program to address their concern that many architecture schools are turning out graduates with little ecological knowledge even though design professionals are well suited to be open to the perspective.

Margot McDonald, architecture professor and co-director of the Renewable Energy Institute (REI) says the goal of the Sustainable Environments Minor, EDes courses, and SEDE curriculum is to educate and prepare the next generation of practitioners in those fields for leadership in innovation and sustainable design.

"Cal Poly is uniquely positioned for teaching and practicing sustainability due to the combined presence of the professional colleges of Agriculture, Architecture and Environmental Design, and Engineering that cover all aspects of living systems," said McDonald.
National representatives from the AIA/COTE Ecological Literacy project will visit Cal Poly in July to prepare the "AIA/COTE Ecological Literacy Report" to be published in the fall.

The report will summarize their study and include feedback from the field highlighting early and recent initiatives; education awards and fellowships; green curriculum efforts; and surveys of students, professionals, schools and educators. Two CAED programs, "Agents of Change" and "Solar Decathlon," will be profiled in the report.

About CAED's "Sustainable Environments" Program
The program began with the course "Sustainable Community Development," 15 years ago and was taught by CAED faculty members Dan Panetta and Henry Hammer. The course was eventually expanded by faculty members Brian Kesner, Paul Wack, Walt Tryon, and Walt Bremer, who organized a group of courses university-wide into the current "Sustainable Environments Minor."

The minor includes two team-taught interdisciplinary "EDes" courses covering theory and implementation of "sustainable design."

These minor courses are now taught by Jonathan Reich, Paul Wack, Joe Donaldson, D. Gregg Doyle, Tom diSanto and many guest lecturers from across the university and from the community at large. For more on the program, visit http://www.calpoly.edu/~acadprog/currdisplay2003-05.html and click on "Sustainable Environments."

The minor was expanded to include sustainable environmental design in architecture and landscape architecture. Professors Margot McDonald, Cathy Corlett and professors emeriti Ken Haggard and Polly Cooper further expanded the program with support from the California Integrated Waste Management Board and Cal Poly's own Renewable Energy Institute (REI). Visit http://www.calpoly.edu/~sede/home.html for details.

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Note to Editors: Electronic graphic images of Cal Poly's sustainable design education projects are available upon request. Please contact Ray Ladd at 805 756-7432 or rladd@calpoly.edu