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Cal Poly Fares Well at National Student Affairs Competition

SAN LUIS OBISPO – A Cal Poly team took first-place at the Graduate and New Professionals Case Study Competition at the national convention of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education in Seattle.

Adam Serafin, advisor to Cal Poly's Student Community Services, and Laura Butler, a graduate assistant in Orientation Programs, won the grad students division of the competition March 9.

The competition asked students in teams of two to act as high-level administrators at a university having to decide how their campus should deal with budget cuts. Participants worked together to develop a plan for the cuts, then presented their proposal to a panel of judges acting as the president of the fictional university.

Butler is a student in Cal Poly's Master's of Education program for counseling in higher education and student affairs. Serafin works at Cal Poly through AmeriCorps and will enter a master's degree program for education at Seattle University in the fall.

Cal Poly student Meghan Farrier-Nolan took second place in the competition's new professionals division. Farrier-Nolan was paired with a student from Evergreen State College in Washington. Farrier-Nolan also is studying in the Master of Education program, focusing on higher education counseling and student affairs.

Cal Poly faced eight other teams from schools such as Clemson University in South Carolina, Oklahoma State, Northeastern University in Boston, and Missouri State University. This is the first year Cal Poly has taken part, said coordinator Logan Hazen, an assistant professor at the University of Rochester.

"In the classroom, we tend to be a little more idealistic," Hazen said. "In the field, things tend to be a little more pragmatic. This competition is a way for graduate students and new professionals to come together and test a little of what they have learned."

Serafin and Butler presented a plan that included a proposed student referendum, with students deciding where money raised should be directed on campus. Hazen said the judges were particularly impressed by the pair's efforts to include students in the process, as well as rationale the two presented for all staff cuts they proposed.

They did a good job of articulating the mission and philosophy behind what they were doing," Hazen said. "They represented Cal Poly very well in the process."

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