Cal Poly’s Society of Women Engineers Takes Five National Titles

SAN LUIS OBISPO—For the third year in a row, Cal Poly's Society of Women Engineers (SWE) has been named the outstanding student section in the nation – and also this year took home the top national collegiate awards for multicultural programs, membership programs, career guidance and project engineering.

“To receive the top national award for outstanding student section three years in a row is unprecedented and an incredible honor,” said Cal Poly Engineering Instructor Helene Finger, one of the club’s faculty advisors.

“Thanks to the support of our faculty and our dean, we’ve received more national recognition for the efforts of our students – recognition that this is a great place for all students to get an engineering education,” Finger said.

Cal Poly’s SWE chapter received the awards Oct. 16 at the SWE national conference in Milwaukee, Wisc. In addition to the designation as the top student SWE section in the nation, Cal Poly also won four more national awards: Best Multicultural Program, Best Membership Program, Career Guidance Audio Visual Award, and second place in the “Team Tech” competition.

Cal Poly is one of more than 300 SWE collegiate student sections nationwide. In 2003-04, Cal Poly’s SWE chapter had 402 members, making it the largest student section in the nation. Cal Poly’s student chapter membership was followed by Purdue at 386, the University of Texas at Austin with 292 and the University of Michigan at 277.

In granting Cal Poly’s SWE chapter a third national first-place designation in the Outstanding Student Section, judges recognized Cal Poly for its overall activities and programs. “The judges were very impressed not only by our many activities, but by the organization and
management of the section,” Finger said.

One of the highlights of Cal Poly’s 2003-04 SWE activities included partnering with the Cal Poly Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers to present bilingual engineering workshops at Pacheco Elementary school in San Luis Obispo.

The SWE chapter’s second place win in the Team Tech competition is also a major accomplishment, Finger noted.

Cal Poly’s SWE took second place in the national competition for its roller-coaster restraint design project, which partnered the chapter with sponsor Disney Imagineering. “Working with Disney to develop an improved safety system was an incredible experience for many of the team members, and Disney was equally enthusiastic about the project,” Finger said.

The Cal Poly students impressed the Imagineers, the company said. "Walt Disney Imagineering is very pleased with the outcome of our Team Tech sponsorship this year. The students were timely, professional and enthusiastic throughout the entire duration of the project and the quality of work, its thoroughness, and their innovative solution impressed every Imagineer who worked with them,” said Eric R. Garcia, Walt Disney Imagineer.

“The SWE’s Team Tech proposal will be used as a design base for our Restraint Enhancement Project. Walt Disney Imagineering has had so much success with Team Tech, that we are going to sponsor Cal Poly’s SWE team again next year,” Garcia said. “This is the ultimate testament to these student's hard work and dedication, and it’s the beginning of a new relationship between Walt Disney Imagineering and Cal Poly’s SWE.”

Cal Poly also earned the first place national title in SWE’s Multicultural Programs competition for developing and implementing the best multicultural program to increase and retain a diverse membership. Cal Poly SWE’s Multicultural Program is in its second year. The SWE chapter was honored for fostering relationships with other minority-engineering clubs on the Cal Poly campus: the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Society of Black Engineers and Scientist, and American Indian Science and Engineering Society.

The Cal Poly engineering clubs collaborated on several outreach and social activities, participated in awareness/history months and made displays to recognize distinguished engineers.

Cal Poly also won the first place award for best membership program in the nation in the “large student sections” category. The award recognizes programs that have demonstrated successful recruitment and retention of members.

Editors please note: Photos of the team and activities are available. To receive photos via e-mail, contact Amy Hewes, ahewes@calpoly.edu.
About SWE

Cal Poly SWE belongs to Region B of the National Society of Women Engineers. The mission of National SWE is: to stimulate women to achieve full potential in careers as engineers and leaders; expand the image of the engineering profession as a positive force in improving the quality of life; and demonstrate the value of diversity.

The Society of Women Engineers at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, strives to provide a voice for women that will encourage them to achieve their full potential as engineers and as leaders. Its mission to create engineering opportunities, provide career and scholastic resources, and demonstrate the value of teamwork to all students of the university and of the community.

About SWE Award Criteria

The Outstanding Student Section Award competition was first established in 1975 with funds donated by Union Carbide and cash grants presented each year. Judging is based upon evaluating section programming for alignment with the national strategic plan, and innovation and participation in activities throughout the year as presented in the Competition Report. SWE strategic priorities for chapters include value and benefit, inclusive organization, knowledge base, leadership, and professional competency.

The Membership Program Award recognizes chapters that have demonstrated successful recruitment and retention of members.

The Multicultural Programs Award recognizes chapters which have successfully accomplished the continued fostering of relationships with the other minority-engineering clubs on campus.

The Team Teach Competition was established in 1992, based on a recommendation from Cal Poly to the National SWE. It emphasizes the key role of teamwork and industry partnerships in the engineering education process. Participating teams are evaluated in the following five areas: 1) ability of the team to work together; 2) use of engineering processes; 3) product; 4) quality of the results; and 5) ability of the team to work with industry. A panel of judges reviews oral presentations from competing teams along with their previously submitted team reports during the national annual SWE convention.

The Career Guidance Audio Visual Award is presented for the best 10-20 minute program using sight and sound. Media include slides with sound on cassette or with script and videotape. Topics must be suitable for showing to secondary students, guidance counselors, parents, etc. Programs should be about activities of SWE Student Sections and their members or SWE aids to students.

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