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Cal Poly Architecture Program Again Ranks High in National Survey

SAN LUIS OBISPO – A national poll of practicing architects has once again ranked Cal Poly’s architecture program as one of the best in the United States at producing “graduates most prepared for real-world practice.”

The survey, conducted for the architecture and engineering journal DesignIntelligence, rated Cal Poly's program No. 3 in the nation among Bachelor of Architecture degree programs and the best bachelor's program west of the Mississippi.

Cal Poly also scored as practically the best value in architecture education in the nation, one point (582 to 583) behind a school that charges no tuition at all, even though the survey was looking at the tuition out-of-state residents pay to attend Cal Poly.

The rankings, released in the November 2003 issue of DesignIntelligence, were the result of a survey mailed last summer to the partners, principals and personnel directors at more than 1,000 firms throughout the United States.

"It is especially significant that we offer the West's highest-quality program and also its most affordable," said R. Thomas Jones, who became dean of Cal Poly's College of Architecture and Environmental Design last summer. "We are able to defy the wisdom that small programs are best. Cal Poly’s architecture program is among the nation's largest, and at the same time we have a proven record of high-quality learning with extraordinarily low fees.

"We're a millimeter from being the best value even for out-of-state students," Jones said. "For California residents, our programs are a truly exceptional value."

To calculate value, the magazine looked at its survey rankings along with five other criteria. Cal Poly received the highest scores given for survey ranking, selectivity, resources such as technology and studios, and the quality of its dean, faculty and students. Cooper Union of New York City, which edged out Cal Poly for top value, is a private school that gives all of its students full scholarships.
For its ability to prepare architects well for a career in the field, the survey ranked Cal Poly's bachelor's degree program third in the nation behind only the University of Cincinnati and Cornell University.

The magazine also polled within each region, because, it said, it has found that reputations sometimes are better at a distance than near home. Cal Poly topped the Western region bachelor’s program rankings as well.

Dean Jones attributes Cal Poly's effectiveness partly to the combination of programs within the College of Architecture and Environmental Design and to the collaboration among those programs and with programs in other colleges.

"What is unique about this highly ranked architecture program," Jones said, "is that it is in a college with the full spectrum of disciplines involved in the making of great places. Our students are exposed to a combination of disciplines unique to Cal Poly, and there may be an increased appreciation by practicing architects of the value of learning with the same professionals that graduates will work with in their practice."

Besides an Architecture Department, the college includes departments of Architectural Engineering, City and Regional Planning, Construction Management and Landscape Architecture.

"This philosophy of collaboration extends to our sister colleges at Cal Poly," Jones said, "as exemplified by our solar decathlon team, which is working on designing and building the most energy-efficient and innovative home possible." That team also includes students in the colleges of Engineering and Liberal Arts.

This is the second year in a row that Cal Poly's architecture program has been rated best in the West. A 2002 poll, combining bachelor's and master's programs, ranked Cal Poly No. 2 in the nation behind Harvard.

DesignIntelligence is published by the Design Futures Council, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank dealing with architecture, engineering and building technology.

Cal Poly’s five-year architecture program first awarded degrees in 1965 and educates an estimated one of every five architects in California. More information on the department is available on the college's Web site, www.caed.calpoly.edu.