FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cal Poly Landscape Architecture Instructor Wins Coveted Rome Prize

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- A member of Cal Poly's landscape architecture faculty will take up residence in Rome this fall as one of 31 winners of the 107th annual Rome Prize Competition of the American Academy in Rome.

Lecturer Joseph Ragsdale won the prestigious award for a proposal to study the relationship between the material surfaces that make up the city of Rome and the "source landscapes" of those materials -- industrial sites, quarries and working communities.

Ragsdale will spend 11 months in the Italian capital living and working with the other 2003-2004 winners at the American Academy's 11-acre site on Rome's highest hill. The other winners include architects, landscape architects, visual artists, writers, composers, historic preservationists and scholars with interests ranging from the ancient world to modern Italy.

"The Rome Prize is considered one of the most significant accolades offered in the design and arts fields," said K. Richard Zweifel, interim dean of Cal Poly's College of Architecture and Environmental Design. "Joe's receipt of this award puts him in the company of internationally recognized leaders in the arts and humanities."

Previous Rome Prize recipients include composer Samuel Barber, writer Ralph Ellison and architects Michael Graves and Robert Venturi.

Rome has lived with its environment for more than 2,500 years, Ragsdale said, and he hopes to find, in studying that relationship, new ideas for solving some of the problems found in America's contemporary urban landscape.

He describes his project as investigating "two landscapes linked by production -- one a source landscape of extraction and the other, a surface landscape of additive urban form. The city of Rome and supporting landscapes provide rich lessons for us to better understand how our own depleted landscapes can be regenerated and rundown industrial areas revitalized."

Ragsdale's professional work has included involvement in the site landscape for the Getty Center in Los Angeles, design for the plazas and waterfront at San Francisco's PacBell Park, and, most recently, work on
urban revitalization projects and Superfund toxic cleanup sites in several states.

"My current research and professional work focus on a proactive role for landscape architecture in the regeneration of degraded post-industrial sites," Ragsdale said, "including proposals for establishing the next uses of and reconnecting communities to EPA Superfund sites. Current remediation efforts primarily focus on excavating our problems to a willing landfill or covering our problems with a cap. These efforts do not go far enough to respect the historic legacies, the local ecologies or the dedicated communities that are associated with these sites."

Ragsdale has been teaching at Cal Poly since January 2002. Before that he taught at the University of Virginia, where he earned his master's in landscape architecture in 2000. His graduate research on "post-industrial terrain" won a national student research competition. He earned his bachelor's degree in landscape architecture at UC Berkeley in 1991.

What became the American Academy in Rome was established in 1894 by a group of prominent Americans to provide an opportunity for American artists and scholars to pursue independent study in the ancient city, and the academy has become what some consider America's leading overseas center for advanced research in the arts and humanities. The Rome Prize is awarded through an open competition juried by leading artists and scholars.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: A photo of Ragsdale is available from Bob Anderson in the Public Affairs office at (805) 756-1511 or banderso@calpoly.edu.