FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Class Lets Cal Poly Students Study, Shape Government Agriculture Policy

SAN LUIS OBISPO - A new class made possible by alumni gifts and a state grant is allowing Cal Poly students and faculty to research real agricultural policy issues, come up with recommendations, and then make the case for agriculture in Sacramento and Washington D.C.

The upper-division class, Agriculture Policy Issues, is funded by a grant from the state's "Buy California" program and from funds raised by an alumni reception in Sacramento in September 2002 for Cal Poly Dean of Agriculture David Wehner.

It's team-taught by Agribusiness Professor Ron de Yong and Mark Shelton, associate dean of the College of Agriculture. First taught during winter quarter at Cal Poly, it's currently continuing with a new crop of students. The winter-quarter course focused specifically on California agriculture policy; the spring course is focusing on national farm and international trade policy, said de Yong.

The purpose of the course is for students to learn and experience how policy decisions that impact agriculture are made, de Yong said. "The students who will graduate with agriculture degrees need to learn how to go about making and changing agricultural policy. They need to know how to look at a government budget and see how it relates to agriculture, and they need to know how to make recommendations to the government in order to shape that policy," de Yong said.

During winter quarter, the 19 Cal Poly students in the class examined the California budget, heard from guest speakers in different branches of government, law, industry and trade associations, and came up with policy recommendations regarding California's Williamson Act, worker's compensation, pest eradication, and water- and air-quality monitoring. Students and professors then traveled to Sacramento to meet with attorneys, lobbyists and Gov. Gray Davis's staff.
Currently, the spring quarter class is also hearing from agriculture and trade-policy experts from across the state and the nation, brought to campus thanks to the grant funding and alumni donations.

"We're trying to see if we can make a difference in the policy arena," de Yong said. "It's exciting. We've trained 19 students now to do this, and we're casting the net wider. It's a perfect example of Cal Poly's tradition of hands-on learning."

-30-

Note to Editors: For more details on the agriculture policy class, or contact information for students who have taken the class, contact Ron de Yong at rdevong@calpoly.edu. For information on the 'Buy California' grant, contact Mark Shelton at mshelton@calpoly.edu.