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Cal Poly Students Learn from Special Effects Pioneer at SLO International Film Festival Event

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Cal Poly's Expressive Technology Studios group, in collaboration with the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival, recently celebrated the life and work of Sir Richard Taylor, co-founder of Weta Workshop – the powerhouse effects studio behind the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, “Tin Tin,” “King Kong,” “District 9,” and many other well-known films.

Dr. David Gillette, the lead coordinator for the Expressive Technology Studios group, led an hour-long panel discussion March 10 at San Luis Obispo's Fremont theater, involving Taylor and several other leaders from the image technology industries and focusing on how to best connect cinematic imagination, invention and advanced technology to real-world solutions.

With his wife, Tania Rodger (COO of Weta), and “Lord of the Rings” director Peter Jackson, Taylor and the Weta Workshop developers have created many new imaging technologies that have forever altered the film industry and have now been embraced worldwide by prominent filmmakers such as James Cameron, Robert Zemeckis and Steven Spielberg.

The evening panel discussion was a unique opportunity for Cal Poly students, faculty and members of the San Luis Obispo community to hear first-hand from the developers and designers who are charting the future of the film, television and gaming industries.

Expressive Technology (ET) Studios, is a new university initiative that ties together the technical and theoretical expertise on the Cal Poly campus with a focus on expression, technical innovation, storytelling and advanced forms of communication. ET Studios combines technology and arts by building on Cal Poly's extensive experience with engineering, mechatronics, theater, robotics, literature, built environments, music, computer imaging, audio engineering, gaming and interactive system design.

ET Studios uses the entire campus as a production and design studio, tapping into the new computer science usability testing lab, some of the campus's fine art design studios, many live performance spaces, media suites and technology workshops throughout the university. ET Studios is building collaborations with expressive technology organizations outside of campus through partnerships with Warner Brothers, THX, Ricoh, and a number of smaller, innovative organizations such as Aspect Studios in San Luis Obispo and the SLO International Film Festival.

During the discussion, Gillette noted that the work created by Taylor and Weta demonstrates “the pinnacle of achievement that can be reached when the rigor of excellence in engineering and applied math and science are combined with the creativity and understanding we gain from the arts and humanities.”

“The innovative work in technology and artistic expression coming out of Weta,” Gillette said, “is exactly the type of interdisciplinary creativity and problem solving that we need to encourage everywhere – especially in our academic institutions – as we prepare to work through the problems of the 21st century.”

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