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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jennifer Jipson  
805-756-2611; jjipson@calpoly.edu

## *Cal Poly Professor Awarded \$2.5 Million National Science Foundation Grant to Foster Preschoolers' Interest in Astronomy*

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Jennifer Jipson, a Cal Poly associate professor of child development in the Psychology and Child Development Department, is part of a team that has been awarded a \$2.5 million National Science Foundation grant to reinforce and extend preschoolers' interest in astronomy-related topics.

The Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP) will spearhead the four-and-a-half-year project, titled "My SkyTonight," which is designed to reveal the hurdles to early childhood science learning and develop ways to promote preschool-age science learning through astronomy. The ASP will serve as principal investigator and partner with co-principal investigators Jipson, Julia Plummer at Penn State University, and Maureen Callanan from UC Santa Cruz.

The number of preschoolers visiting U.S. science centers and museums has been increasing over the years. The overall goal of the project is to help these venues offer effective informal learning opportunities for families with young children that will promote children's developing identities as "kids who like science."

Although young children spontaneously show great interest in the sun, moon, planets and stars, many parents and informal science educators lack the astronomy knowledge, interpretive strategies and confidence needed to effectively support preschool-age children's developing astronomy-related understandings. This project will result in enjoyable new ways to support and encourage young children's understanding of science.

Jipson is an expert in young children's science learning. Her contributions to this project will focus on identifying children's ideas about and interest in astronomy, examining parent-child conversations about astronomy, and exploring ways to support children and their families in developing a greater understanding and interest in that area.

Her findings will inform the design and development process of the project deliverables:

- An early astronomy toolkit for informal science educators and practitioners, focusing on children's daily observations
- Professional development workshops to train practitioners to effectively use the toolkit's activities and materials
- A "Community of Practice" website to support capacity-building in this area.

Taken together, the deliverables will form a coherent approach to how early childhood astronomy can be characterized and delivered effectively by informal science educators.

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