





PROVOST PROFILE

BY STACIA MOMBURG

GENIAL, ECLECTIC AND PROLIFIC – each describes Cal Poly’s new provost and vice president for academic affairs, William “Bill” Durgin, whose personal philosophy is “to work hard and play hard.”

Durgin arrived at Cal Poly in August from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Worcester, where he was most recently the associate provost for academic affairs and vice president for research. He succeeds Robert Detweiler, who served as interim provost and vice president for academic affairs at Cal Poly for more than two years.

Having earned his doctorate in mechanical engineering from Brown University, Durgin began his career as an assistant professor of engineering science and mechanics at the University of Florida in 1970 before being named a senior research engineer and assistant professor of mechanical engineering at WPI the following year.

He went on to serve in numerous capacities for WPI, including director of the Advanced Space Design Program, head of the Mechanical Engineering Department and dean of undergraduate and graduate studies.

Among his achievements, honors and distinctions, Durgin established WPI’s Aerospace Engineering Program and played a central role in establishing programs in biomedical engineering, manufacturing engineering and industrial engineering. In 1992 he was awarded a NASA Significant Achievement Award, and from 1993-2002 he served as the K.G. Merriam Professor of Mechanical Engineering.

He says he remains committed to learning and discovery as core university values, and accordingly has maintained his teaching and research programs throughout his career as an administrator.

The Massachusetts native, with an easy smile and distinct Northeastern accent, enjoys flying, hiking, skiing, and sailing. He’s also partial to Renaissance art, spy mysteries, and the movie “My Cousin Vinny.” “It’s terribly enjoyable,” he says. Frostbite sailing is one passion he will not be able to pursue along the Central Coast.

Durgin strives to incorporate the insights he’s gained through his various interests into his work. “I love flying and I’ve been able to apply a lot of what I’ve learned as a pilot to how I operate in the office,” he says. “Good pilots need to be highly organized, have good time-management skills, and be able to effectively communicate needs and expectations. I try to do all of those things every day.”

He also prides himself on his ability to foster productive, collegial work environments. “I enjoy working with faculty and staff to help them succeed and encouraging them to take charge whenever appropriate. I think managing by empowering is important in enabling good people to do their best work.”

The new provost says he and his wife, Kathy, are excited about their new hometown. “We’re eager to get to know as many people as possible both on campus and in the community.” □