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Cal Poly Shines with Third Place Finish in International Solar Decathlon

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Cal Poly's solar house and student team, Solar CalPoly, won third place at the international Solar Decathlon competition in Washington, D.C.



Final results of the seven-day contest were announced today. The University of Colorado took first place, followed by Cornell University in second, and Cal Poly in third. University of Colorado was the first-place winner at the first Solar Decathlon, held in 2002. Some 18 universities from the United States, Canada and Europe competed in the event.

The competition was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy; teams built their entries on the National Mall in the nation's capital. The Cal Poly entry was California's only team in the competition.

Cal Poly held on to second place throughout the weeklong competition. The Cal Poly earned first place in many of the individual daily decathlon competitions that gave teams points toward an overall total.

That included first place for performance of their energy efficient appliances, first in lighting, second overall in architecture (the category with the most points possible), dwelling and comfort zone, and third in the hot water generation category.

"We are proud of our success, especially considering the caliber and experience of the other competitors," said Cal Poly Architecture Professor Sandra Stannard, one of the team's advisors. "This is our first year competing, while many of the other leaders were here in the last competition. We worked well as a team, and we're thrilled with the final results."

Judges commented that Cal Poly's entry was excellently crafted and offered elegant design and living solutions. "The best part has been watching the students from all the teams rise to this significant challenge," said Cal Poly Architecture Professor Robert Peña, one of the team's advisors.

The final contest, energy balance, tested the teams' ability to maintain a balance in the amount of solar energy collected at the start of the competition compared to the energy reserves still available in the last round of testing.



Though skies were sunny in Washington D.C. when the teams first arrived, rain and cloudy skies covered the Capitol during most of the week. The low-sun conditions created a situation where the teams' solar power systems had to perform during much of the testing without maximum recharge, Stannard said.

The other schools competing this year were Washington State University, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, University of Missouri, Florida International University, Crowder College, New York Institute of Technology, Pittsburg Synergy (a joint entry by Carnegie Mellon, University of Pittsburg and The Art Institute of Pittsburg), University of Puerto Rico, Concordia University with the University of Montreal, Universidad Politécnic de Madrid, Rhode Island School of Design, University of Texas and University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.

Gamesmanship was a big factor in the competition, said Cal Poly student Nicholas Holmes. The teams based their strategies on the number of crucial points they could win with the amount of solar energy they had stored each day. "We've learned the difference between a real solar-powered house versus a competition solar house. What is comfortable for us or how we might really use the house is different from how we had to manage the house for the competition," Holmes said.

To score well with the Solar CalPoly house low on energy, the team conserved in several ways, including delaying errands with their electric car and keeping windows shut to preserve interior warmth.

Over the last two years, more than 100 Cal Poly students from numerous departments, along with architecture and engineering faculty, designed and built the 650-square-foot Solar CalPoly structure. The design was based on some very specific challenges, including the longest overland travel route. Solar CalPoly traveled across the country by truck to the National Mall.



Trucking the house across the country was not without mishap. While it dodged Hurricane Rita, siding on the house was damaged by a hit-and-run driver in Tennessee. The team had to order more siding and quickly install it when the house was set up on the Mall.

The team used pre-fab construction to minimize construction logistics, Stannard said. The pre-fab prototype also served as an example of environmentally conscious alternative housing. The team and advisors felt the model could be particularly useful in California and also in disaster-prone zones where traditional energy sources are vulnerable to outages and interruptions.

Cal Poly's solar home is scheduled to return to San Luis Obispo in late October. The College of Architecture and Environmental Design will use the Solar CalPoly house for on-going educational use.

For more on the final scores and standings, event photos and other information about the 2005 Solar Decathlon, see http://www.eere.energy.gov/solar_decathlon/.

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Note to editors: Cal Poly's logistics team in Washington, D.C., includes: Chris Auriemma, Pittsford, N.Y.; Stephanie Espiritu, Newark; Michelle Hamilton, Carmichael; Nicholas Holmes, Costa Mesa; Robert Johnson, San Francisco; Austin Quig-Hartmann, Vallejo; Jay Hann, Danville; Brian Friel, Santa Cruz; Chris Levash, San Luis Obispo; Stephan Long, Rantoul, Ill.; Matt Ridenour, Thousand Oaks; David, Aine, Corona; and Eric Vergne, Sacramento. Approximately 90 other students assisted with the various stages of construction of the solar house.

Faculty advisors include Robert Peña, Sandra Stannard, Jesse Maddren, Richard Beller and Elbert Speidel.

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