



May 16, 2005

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Cal Poly Students Have Best Year Ever at Statewide Competition

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly had six prize-winners among its 10 entries at the annual California State University Student Research Competition, held on April 29 and 30 at CSU Sacramento.

"This was a banner year for Cal Poly students," said Susan Opava, dean of Research and Graduate Programs. "It's typical for us to have two or three winning presentations," she said, "so we were surprised and pleased at this year's success."

Thirteen Cal Poly students were among the approximately 200 students from 22 campuses who took part in this year's competition. The students' research and creative work was judged by scientists, academics and other professionals from outside the CSU.

Four Cal Poly entries won first-place awards in their divisions. Physics majors Lewis Abra from San Francisco and Xerxes Steirer from Philadelphia, Penn. took first place in the undergraduate physical and mathematical sciences division for their work on polymer photovoltaic devices.

In the undergraduate engineering and computer science division, Jackson Pang and Jesse Ralston, from San Francisco and Trinidad, respectively, won first place for their work on the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's "Gondola Project." They designed computer hardware that enables the accurate transmission of images from deep-space with a greatly reduced burden on the spacecraft's main computing system.

The other two first-place prizes went to Roland Fumasi, a graduate student in agribusiness, and to Brandy Bunyea-Baron and Joseph Campanale, both senior biology majors. Fumasi, from Galt, won for his use of mathematical modeling to predict long-term economic returns on various sales methods used in the specialty crop industry. Campanale, who hails from Rancho Cucamonga, and Bunyea-Baron, from Atascadero, won for their use of genetic analysis to study the stability of the microbial communities that populate the human gastrointestinal tract.

Second-place awards went to Philip Bass, an animal science major from Ferndale, who studied the effect of specific dietary manipulations on egg production and quality in second-cycle laying hens, and to Foaad Khosmood, a graduate student in computer science. Khosmood, a native of Tehran, Iran, developed a novel computing system that could be "trained" to distinguish among several writing styles. The system can attribute previously unexamined writing segments to their correct source. His system was able to recognize the work of Shakespeare and noted linguist Noam Chomsky, as well as excerpts from various versions of the Bible.

Also representing Cal Poly in Sacramento were mechanical engineering graduate student Brent Sindorf, agriculture graduate student Craig Macmillan, animal science graduate student Vanessa Arias, and computer science major Andrew LeBeau.

All participants were first nominated by their respective colleges, then selected in a preliminary competition at Cal Poly. Each CSU campus was allowed 10 entries. Final competitors submitted written papers and made oral presentations to juries of experts from major California corporations, foundations, public agencies and

universities.

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