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Architecture Students Win Paris Competition

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Three Cal Poly architecture students were declared "laureates" in a regional design competition in Paris - an event that wasn't meant to be international at all.

The prestigious urban architecture competition, strictly a contest between Parisian architecture students in the past, made some changes this spring when the Cal Poly team of Omar Bárcena, Lizbeth Gonzalez and Christopher Campbell entered the picture. For one thing, the competition named four teams as laureates instead of the traditional three. Because of the unexpected success of the American team, Bárcena said, the judges "opened up the competition to four places and called us all four laureates."

Laureate is not a common American term for contest-winner, but it is often used in Europe and other places. A laureate is defined as someone "worthy of the greatest honor or distinction," the title-bearer often honored with a crown of laurel leaves.

The competition, called the Concours des Ecoles d'Architecture de Paris Palais de la Porte Dorée, included designs for the renovation of the historic Paris Zoo, portions of a neighboring forested park (Bois de Vincennes) and the Musée de Porte Dorée, according to Gonzalez. It also called for designs for new underground infrastructure connecting the zoo to the museum and above-ground buildings to house aquariums and other facilities. And the students were asked to solve noise- and light-pollution problems that would accompany a large entertainment area set in a forest.

"In general, it was a massive urban design project that allowed some freedom to be bold," Gonzalez said. The students' designs for the zoo included a savanna, and tropical, polar, desert and oceanic lagoon greenhouses.

Each laureate team was awarded 1,000 euros, and the president of the competition was so impressed, Gonzalez said, he presented the students work to the Outer Seas Ministry, an important contributor and client of the competition.

"In my mind, I was really excited to have been a part of this competition and to have been named a laureate," said Gonzalez. "I was honored and surprised. Surprised because I felt that being a regional competition, and our being the only foreign team, we didn't have much of a chance."

The students' winning work was on display at the Palais de Porte Dorée in early October.

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