



Admissions & Aid	Majors & Colleges	Research	Alumni Community	Campus Life	Athletics	About	➤
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Cal Poly Professor Helene Finger Honored as a Woman of Distinction

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Helene Finger, director of Cal Poly's Women's Engineering Program, is one of four recipients of the 37th Women of Distinction awards sponsored by Cuesta College and the Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County's Women's Legacy Fund.

The award celebrates Women's History Month and honors women from throughout the Central Coast for their professional and civic contributions.

Finger was recognized with the Progress for Women Award for her directorship of the Women's Engineering Program, a position she has held for 15 years. In that capacity, she works with the university and industry to recruit and retain female engineering and computer science students by focusing on outreach, on-campus support and professional preparation.

Finger also serves as faculty advisor to the Cal Poly Society of Women Engineers (SWE); she received the Outstanding SWE Counselor Award at the 2013 SWE national convention. Under her mentorship, the Cal Poly chapter has received the national Gold Level Outstanding Collegiate Section Award for the last three years and 10 times since 2002. Building an Engineer Day — a semiannual SWE event that Finger helped found — introduces sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students to engineering through fun, hands-on labs.

A Cal Poly alumna, Finger earned her bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1988 and her master's in civil and environmental engineering in 1989. She has taught in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department since 1997.

The other Women of Distinction awardees include:

- Sandy Richardson, who was recognized with the Community and Public Service Award for founding Womenade, a nonprofit serving San Luis Obispo County that donates items, time and money to meet the essential needs of those in crisis;
- Jeanette Duncan, who received the Community and Public Service Award for serving as executive director of Peoples' Self-Help Housing since 1977; and
- Barbie Butz, who was honored with the Grace N. Mitchell Lifetime Achievement Award. Butz is a founding member and chapter president of the Assistance League of San Luis Obispo County.

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