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Cal Poly's 2014 'Great Grads' Make Their Mark on the World

SAN LUIS OBISPO — In June, Cal Poly will graduate approximately 4,200 men and women who are uniquely prepared to tackle today's tough challenges. This year the university is highlighting six "great grads" who will use the university's Learn by Doing philosophy to solve complex 21st century problems, including streamlining efficiencies in airplane manufacturing, effectively delivering water to crops, and improving business processes.

College of Agriculture, Food & Environmental Sciences — Kerilyn Ambrosini, a BioResource and Agricultural Engineering major from Ferndale, Calif., has worked as an engineering technician for Cal Poly's Irrigation Training and Research Center (ITRC) for the past three years. She has compiled and analyzed data; written proposals, reports and professional papers; given presentations at professional workshops; monitored and repaired a pressure line recorder and tracker; and trained new student employees. Ambrosini was involved in the Nevada Walker River Irrigation District's Water Measurements Plan project, which seeks to modernize the water measurements in its canals and other distribution structures. This has involved designing flumes, long-crested weirs and a pipelined canal section. She developed the modernization layout, implementation guidelines, and requests for proposal. In November 2013, she gave a presentation about Cal Poly's ITRC at the Irrigation Association Conference in Austin, Texas. Ambrosini co-authored and will present two papers for the American Society of Civil Engineers Environmental Water Resources Institute Congress in June. "This real-life experience has been truly rewarding," she said. "Cal Poly has helped me learn how to learn and research efficiently and effectively. Being a critical thinker is the foundation to solving any real-world problem." In addition to school and work, Ambrosini was in charge of the Agricultural Engineering Society Career Fair in 2014, coordinating all details, which included inviting companies, finding a location, placing advertisements, and ordering refreshments and name tags. Over the summer she will intern in CH2M HILL's water market division in Redding, Calif. She will return to Cal Poly in the fall to pursue a master's degree in engineering with a specialization in water engineering. With a grade-point average in her major of 3.98, she has made Dean's List every quarter. Her plans involve a career in the agricultural water industry. "With that come numerous challenges. I have a passion for helping people, particularly the farmers and the agriculturists who feed the world. I know this passion will allow me to make a positive impact in our state's water crises."

College of Architecture & Environmental Design — Architectural engineering major Shawna Peterson from Lake Arrowhead, Calif., chose Cal Poly because of its Learn by Doing philosophy and hands-on, interactive labs and studios. Peterson demonstrated her capacity and love for math and physics by earning straight A's throughout her college career. While interning at Moffatt & Nichol in San Diego, Peterson was involved in the design of various bridges and Navy projects. "At Cal Poly, I learned how to design structures using materials such as concrete, steel, masonry and timber," she said. "This knowledge is critical at my internship. I also learned how to use software analysis programs and drafting/modeling programs, which I often use at work. As her senior project she traveled to Camilo Ortega,

Nicaragua, with a team of eight students to help design a school. "Many kids are not receiving formal education because there just aren't enough schools," Peterson said. The students partnered with Cal Poly's student chapter of Engineers Without Borders. After surveying the site and getting feedback from community members, the students returned to the U.S. and designed three alternatives using reinforced masonry, confined masonry, and a light gauge structure. "We decided on the light gauge structure because of the cost, ease of construction, and accessibility of local materials. Our plan was to build the school this summer. Since three of us are graduating, we passed our completed design to our EWB teammates to carry out the construction." Peterson will pursue graduate studies at Stanford in the fall and eventually hopes to use her seismic engineering knowledge to provide earthquake disaster relief services around the world.

Orfalea College of Business — David Anthony Larsen, a business information systems senior from Orcutt, Calif., transferred from Allan Hancock College in fall 2012. He has maintained a minimum 3.5 GPA, while taking as many as 26 units per quarter. In addition to attending Cal Poly, he served in the U.S. Navy Reserves at the Port Hueneme Naval Base. He has incorporated much of the curricula from his classes into two final senior projects. As part of the 2014 Global Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Institute Research Challenge, he led a team of four students to victory in the Los Angeles division. The team went on to compete against 48 of the best business schools from Canada to South America at the Americas Regional Finals in Denver. For his second senior project, he analyzed Chevron's Digital Oilfield operations, looking at all of the company's information technology-related business processes and risks to outline a plan for data flow, data security and storage. Last year, he and a former roommate won first place in the Orfalea Entrepreneur Challenge by creating an idea for a liquid bandage derived from milk proteins. Last summer, Larsen worked as an intern at Ernst and Young's (EY) San Jose office, analyzing and documenting the internal processes for technology clients. "I worked at the headquarters of some of the largest technology clients in Silicon Valley," he said. "At Cal Poly, I learned all of the internal control procedures and financial reporting requirements EY follows for information technology auditing. I was able to read internal control procedures from day one and understood what they meant." He has accepted a full-time position in EY's La Jolla office, where he will continue working within the information technology risk management and consulting practice. "Attending Cal Poly was the best decision I've ever made," he said. Other Cal Poly graduates who have made a positive impression on him include: his brother, a materials engineering graduate; two mentors, a defense attorney and a prosecutor from the Santa Barbara County Courthouse where he interned prior to attending Cal Poly; the partner at EY who hired him; and his current Navy Reserve commander.

College of Engineering — Justine Ramos, industrial engineering major from Long Beach, Calif., took her lifelong passion for math and science to become the first in her family to graduate college. "I am extremely proud to honor my family by becoming a college grad," Ramos said. "I would not have made it without the love and support of my family." Her dream to work in the aerospace industry was realized in summer 2013, when she interned at the Boeing Airlines Commercial Delivery Center in Seattle. "It was an amazing experience," she said. She served as the lead on several projects and worked with senior-level engineers from many departments. By analyzing various systems using computer programs she learned at Cal Poly, she was able to increase efficiency of the Commercial Delivery Center. While an undergraduate, Ramos worked with industry professionals to solve real-world problems. "In one of my first major classes, my team was able to work with Frito Lay to generate a new forecasting technique for some of their most popular products," she said. "Cal Poly helped me build a strong project portfolio, expand my social and professional network, and strengthen my presentation, communication, and time management skills. I feel confident to enter the workforce and take on projects alongside industry professionals to help solve issues faced by the industry." And she will step into that professional role June 30 when she begins work at Boeing's Everett, Wash., facility in the 777 Body Structures Department on the Mid-Bodies Industrial Engineering team. While an undergraduate, Ramos served as an ambassador for Cal Poly as a Poly Rep, helped with Week of Welcome, and was a member of the swimming and diving teams.

College of Liberal Arts — Daniel Brosnahan, a modern languages and literatures major from San Francisco, was planning to become a paramedic/firefighter when he fell in love with Cal Poly during a "fluke" visit to campus. While an undergraduate, he

volunteered at Pacheco Elementary School, San Luis Obispo's only bilingual school, reading to the students, correcting their homework, and helping them learn the multiplication tables. He also volunteered with RISE (Respect, Inspire, Support, Empower), an agency formed by the North County Women's Shelter, Cal Poly's Resource Center, and the Sexual Assault Recovery and Prevention Center of San Luis Obispo County. Rise helps women get out of abusive relationships and into shelters. Brosnahan's primary role was translating Rise's website (riseslo.org) into Spanish. He spent seven weeks in summer 2013 in Argentina with Arrhythmia Alliance Argentina, or Corazonada, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to educating the public about heart health. Brosnahan helped by translating English informational materials into Spanish and spoke to a local college about CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). At Cal Poly, he works as a front desk program assistant at the Disability Resource Center, which helps accommodate students with a range of disabilities. "We provide a wide range of services for students with disabilities," he said, "including on-campus transportation for those with mobility impairments, sign language interpreters for deaf students, extended time on tests and note-taking for students with certain learning disabilities, peer mentors, advocacy and learning-assistance services for any student with a disability. He has accepted an offer as a recruiter by Insight Global, an information technology staffing firm. He said the College of Liberal Arts taught him the importance of good communication and critical thinking skills. "The communication and critical thinking skills I learned at Cal Poly will enable me to build and maintain relationships with clients." He also credits his faculty advisor, Karen Muñoz-Christian, for his success at Cal Poly. Brosnahan is receiving the College of Liberal Arts' Senior Recognition Award for Contributions to the Objectives and Public Image of the University.

College of Science and Mathematics — George A. Brusch IV, biological sciences major from Vista, Calif., dropped out of Cal Poly as a forestry major with a 1.7 grade-point average only to return six years later (married and with a daughter), switch majors (to biology) and maintain a 3.9 GPA. He is the first in his family to attend college. Brusch's return to academia has been a remarkable success. As part of a study examining the management of nuisance rattlesnakes by moving them long distances, he taught himself to use global information systems (GIS) to analyze their movement patterns in their new homes. That led to his participation in a World Congress of Herpetology conference and work on another project examining the effects of chemoreception on navigation in rattlesnakes. "I recruited three undergraduate students from the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP), a program aimed at increasing the number of underrepresented students completing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) degrees programs." Selected by the Organization for Tropical Studies Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU), he spent eight weeks in the Costa Rican jungle, first working on a study characterizing the temperature tolerances of lizards, then expanding into a much larger examination of the effects of climate change on tropical ectotherms and the broader implications of those effects on conservation efforts. He authored a manuscript based on that research that will soon be published in a scientific journal. Brusch, who will attend Arizona State University in the fall, was awarded a Graduate Research Fellowship from the National Science Foundation that will help support up to three years of his doctoral program. These highly competitive fellowships are rarely given to first-year doctoral students. "My experience communicating scientific research to the public will inspire my life's work. I want to explain to the Tico people of Costa Rica what the scientists are up to in their jungle and how important its preservation is to everyone's future. I want to help the day laborer figure out why they should not kill rattlesnakes. And I want to encourage youth to hold onto their childhood dreams and reach for a better future regardless of where they came from."

About commencement

Cal Poly's spring commencement ceremonies will be held at 9 a.m. Saturday and Sunday, June 14-15, in Spanos Stadium. The June 14 ceremony will recognize degree candidates in the colleges of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences; Liberal Arts; and Science and Mathematics. On June 15, students in the colleges of Architecture and Environmental Design; Orfalea College of Business; and College of Engineering will be honored.



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