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## *Cal Poly Computer Science Student Receives CSU Trustee Award*

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly computer science sophomore Michelle Lam will receive the 2014 California State University (CSU) Trustees' Award for Outstanding Achievement, one of the system's highest student distinctions. The awards will be presented Sept. 9 at the CSU Board of Trustees meeting in Long Beach, Calif.

As a recipient of the CSU Trustees Award, Lam will receive \$6,000 for the 2014-15 academic year. "It will mean everything," she said.

The CSU Trustees Award scholarship will allow Lam to give her full attention to completing her education and achieving a personal goal: She says that she plans to be the family's *first* first-generation college graduate, though she has two older brothers who are computer science students at Sacramento State and San Jose State, respectively.

Lam grew up in the inner city of Sacramento, Calif., one of five children and the only daughter of Chinese immigrants.

"My parents, though supportive, were always working: my father as a bus driver and my mother as a seamstress," said Lam. When her youngest brother, now 12, was diagnosed with autism, her mother left work to care for him. More recently, her father was diagnosed with diabetes.

"My mother speaks only Chinese," said Lam. "My father learned to speak both Spanish and English while working first in Venezuela, then New York City." Looking back, she sees his early influence on her current interests. "My father has a thing about technology. He always encouraged me in that area, saying, 'You can totally do this.'"

Factors that helped shape Lam's academic path included being admitted into the GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program, which made her eligible for advanced classes during her elementary and high school years. "I had no expectations for myself. GATE helped provide guidance and motivation. In the sixth grade, in particular, we had a math teacher who pushed us hard."

In high school, Lam was introduced to the MESA (Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement) program, which catapulted her into a variety of competitions and exposed her to various universities and engineering possibilities.

As Lam entered her senior year in high school, her family's move to the suburbs proved to be pivotal for her future. "I was transported from the inner city to an affluent high school. Suddenly there were plentiful counselors, passionate teachers. I gained confidence."

She found herself aiming for UC Davis or other UC schools. Then came a call from members of Cal Poly WISH (Women Involved in Software and Hardware), who

invited her to visit the campus. From her first meeting with them, she felt surrounded by friends and mentors.

"Some of them, like me, had not known how to code or program prior to college — but they learned. They've been my role models. Not long ago, only 9 percent of Cal Poly computer science majors were women; now it's 20 percent. We're making gains."

Lam's student experience was further enhanced by her active involvement with Cal Poly's Multicultural Engineering Program.

She is excited about the opportunities in the computer science field and plans to pursue a career in software engineering, probably in the cybersecurity field. In addition, she wants to be part of outreach efforts in low-income areas.

"CSU trustees' scholars have defied the odds, rising above circumstance to become leaders among their classmates and exemplifying the CSU mission of access to a quality higher education," said CSU Chancellor Timothy P. White. "Through talent, determination and drive, they now grasp the promise of a brighter future — for self, family and community."

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