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Cal Poly Appoints New Joint Engineering/Business Faculty Member to Promote Students' Entrepreneurial Efforts

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Tom Katona, an engineer with extensive experience in technological innovation and startup ventures, has been appointed to a joint teaching position in Cal Poly's Orfalea College of Business and College of Engineering, with an eye toward fostering student entrepreneurial activity.

Katona will play a pivotal role in expanding collaboration among the College of Engineering, the Orfalea College of Business, and the Cal Poly Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE).

"Dr. Katona is an engineer of depth and breadth who moves easily and naturally between business and engineering environments," said Debra Larson, dean of the College of Engineering. "No one could be better qualified to help us break new ground."

Katona sees his role as "advancing innovation across disciplines, using principles of design thinking and product development to nurture successful entrepreneurial activity on campus and in the local community."

That all-encompassing approach will start in the classroom, where he will teach a multidisciplinary design course in the College of Engineering and co-teach an entrepreneurship course with Jonathan York, professor in the Orfalea College of Business and co-founder and faculty director of the CIE.

"I see this as a major next step in advancing our goals to weave diverse disciplines with entrepreneurship across campus and through the CIE," said York.

The CIE manages and supports a wide variety of entrepreneurial programs, including the Innovation Sandbox, Innovation Quest Competition, and SLO HotHouse Summer Accelerator.

"The challenge now is to expand the reach of those programs throughout the university," Katona said. "My key role is to be an advocate for students and faculty who are working on interesting research or have great ideas and get them connected to the entrepreneurial support system that we're putting in place at CIE."

Katona has been working in startups for the past decade in capacities varying from hardcore engineering and development to marketing and business development. He earned his master's and doctorate degrees in electrical and computer engineering from UC Santa Barbara and holds an MBA from the University of South Carolina.

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