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Contact: Jay Thompson
805-756-5186; jthomp04@calpoly.edu

Cal Poly's Warren J. Baker Center Receives LEED Gold Certification

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Cal Poly's Warren J. Baker Center for Science and Mathematics has been awarded gold for being green. The 189,000-square-foot structure, which opened for classes in September 2013, earned LEED gold certification by the U.S. Green Building Council earlier in January.

LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — is the national benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings. Certification means a building has met rigorous standards for sustainability, water and energy efficiency, resource selection and environmental quality.

The designation brings the number of LEED-certified projects on the Cal Poly campus to four, representing nearly 30 percent of the campus' 6 million square feet of building space.

"We planned and designed the building for LEED certification and were reasonably confident that gold was accessible," said Philip S. Bailey, dean of the College of Science and Mathematics. "What a joy to have it confirmed."

Joel Neel, Cal Poly's director of facilities planning and capital projects, agreed.

"I've been here for 15 years, and it's the building I'm most proud of," he said. "LEED has several levels — certified, silver, gold and platinum. This is a gold building. It's a pretty interesting accomplishment considering it is a science laboratory building with more than 170 fume hoods in it, which means it has a lot of heating, ventilation and air conditioning requirements. All that makes it more difficult to attain gold certification."

Ample study spaces in the Baker Center facilitate teamwork, and studio classrooms integrate lecture and lab, encouraging students to actively discover science. Beyond the strictly academic, the showcase structure is designed to be a working model of sustainability and building performance for tomorrow's scientists and engineers.

Set in the heart of campus, it rises six stories standing out to students and visitors alike.

"The symbolism is powerful — science and mathematics is central to the polytechnic curriculum and the Center for Science and Mathematics is at the campus center — and the second largest building on campus," said Bailey who worked 20 years to see the structure built. "We planned from the first to have a design that attracted students and artwork that stimulated curiosity. It's all happened, and we are still building on it."

Every Cal Poly student will take a class there in a range of subjects including chemistry, biochemistry, physics, and earth and soil science.

It is one of only two buildings on campus to feature a roof garden, which helps limit overall heat absorption, eases building temperature swings, increases the lifespan of the roof, creates habitat and controls storm runoff.

Neel said Cal Poly strives to be a leader and innovator in sustainable design and management of campus buildings, infrastructure and land.

"With the Baker Center, we have four projects that have been LEED certified," he said. 'The 1.3 million square feet Poly Canyon Village student housing project is LEED gold, 166,000 square feet at the Recreation Center is LEED gold, and the Faculty Office East, at about 33,000 square feet, is LEED silver.

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Phone: 805-756-1111