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Cal Poly Director of Women's Engineering Program Receives National Award

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Helene Finger, director of the Cal Poly Women's Engineering Program, won an award from The American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) for efforts to promote women in engineering and computer science.

The DuPont Minorities in Engineering Award recognizes the contributions of individuals who have made significant progress increasing diversity in engineering or engineering technology programs. It comes with a \$1,500 honorarium and will be presented June 14 at the ASEE annual conference in Seattle.

"I feel very honored to have received this award," Finger said. "Through collaboration across the university, the College of Engineering has reached a historical high in freshmen engineering students who are female: 25.3 percent in 2014, up from 18.5 percent in 2010."

Finger, a Cal Poly alumna who earned bachelor's and master's degrees in 1988 and 1989 respectively, has been a faculty member in Cal Poly's Civil Engineering Department since 1997. She was named director of the Women's Engineering Program in 2000.

Her passion has led her to conduct extensive research on the recruitment and retention of female engineering students. She has written and presented in an effort to boost the female engineering population at schools throughout the country. She actively seeks the collaboration of engineering department chairs and deans to help improve the number of female student enrollment nationwide.

At Cal Poly, Finger's focus is paying dividends. After learning that nine of 10 female engineering students choose to become engineers in high school, she implemented stronger outreach efforts, including a high school shadowing program, making personal calls to admitted female engineering students, and holding forums during Cal Poly's Open House forums.

Kathy Chen, professor and chair of Cal Poly's Materials Engineering Department, nominated Finger.

"Many people at Cal Poly are aware of Finger's outstanding achievements and supported her nomination with letters of recommendation, including College of Engineering Dean Debra Larson and many former Society of Women Engineers students who have gone on to become great leaders themselves," Chen said. "Her passion and talent for inspiring and mentoring collegiate members to the highest levels of professionalism had an incredible positive effect on female success in engineering, both during and after college."

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