By LEAH KOLT

The resume of Cal Poly graduate Nick Franco (POLS '95) reads like a travel brochure: redwood forests, mission towns, ocean dunes, islands.

His current assignment with the California State Parks system is the San Luis Obispo Coast District, where he has served as superintendent for the past year and a half. His domain stretches from Lime Kiln in southern Big Sur to Pismo Beach.

The opportunity to work in such scenic playgrounds is a privilege, according to Franco, who says competition is so strong for the relatively few full-time state park ranger positions that jobs practically have to be inherited.

Which is close to how Franco found his way into a coveted ranger position. “My brother was a seasonal park worker in high school. So when he left home, I applied and got the job,” he said. “That work helped me get into the ranger academy later.” Because he had not completed his degree when he went to the academy, Franco later returned to school, while stationed at Pismo State Beach, to continue his political science studies, with an emphasis on public administration.
His senior project on how public policies affect the balance between work and personal life was highly relevant. In addition to school and work, he shared child-care responsibilities with his wife, a Hearst Castle guide at the time. "Talk about learn by doing," he said, chuckling.

Which of his many choice assignments is his favorite? "They’ve all been fun in different ways," he said. "I loved being on horse patrol at Will Rogers, and the Big Basin Redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains was a special place. Angel Island, in the middle of San Francisco Bay, was unique, since it is accessible only by boat. But I think the best place to live was San Juan Bautista, originally a mission village inland from Monterey, a classic California small town."

In the San Luis Obispo Coast District, he feels as though he has it all. "I have the challenge of a huge park district, so I am never bored, but it’s also a great place to live and raise kids. And it’s an easy commute to any of the parks or to my office in San Simeon."

Being close to his alma mater also allows Franco to visit campus. When he served on a career panel for a recreation class, he advised students who want to go into park service to be patient. "Also, work for a park in any way you can – seasonal worker, concessions, maintenance. Just get your foot in the door and keep going, toward whatever area interests you."

In response to the request to divulge something most people don’t know about Hearst Castle, Franco said, "It’s a California State Park and has been since the ’50s!"

He added that most people don’t realize how much work and expertise it takes to make it a smooth outing for some 800,000 visitors a year … from bus drivers trained to negotiate the hairpin turns leading up to the castle … to tour guides who can answer almost any question about the Hearsts, the castle, or even architect Julia Morgan. ■

Julia Morgan — Pioneering Spirit

And speaking of Julia Morgan, the nation’s largest collection of original Morgan drawings and other material related to her personal and professional life is located in the Kennedy Library, creating a special bond between the university and Hearst Castle, the state’s most popular park.

The Library’s Special Collections department and the College of Architecture and Environmental Design recently commemorated the centennial of Julia Morgan’s licensing as an architect in California. Talks on Morgan and an exhibit of rarely seen Morgan materials were included as part of the commemoration. The exhibit, titled “Julia Morgan, Pioneering Spirit,” will be on display in the Library’s Special Collections department until March 25, 2005.

Morgan’s heirs donated her personal and professional papers and architectural drawings to Cal Poly in 1980. Containing irreplaceable and comprehensive documentation of Morgan’s long, distinguished career, the Julia Morgan Collection also contains the only known family photographs, personal papers and correspon-
dence, as well as sketchbooks, competition drawings and notes, and medals from her years in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts.

A few years ago, some of Morgan's original, signed drawings were discovered at the castle, bringing her career back into the media spotlight. “We are seeking funding to digitize her works,” said Nick Franco of the state parks system. “Not only do they need to be preserved, since they are ‘as-built’ blueprints for us, but we would like to make them more accessible to scholars. We need to protect them for both practical and historical reasons.”

The amazing stability of the Hearst Castle during the 2003 San Simeon 6.5 earthquake is a testament to her skills. Not only an architect but also a civil engineer who was in San Francisco during the 1906 quake, Morgan insisted that the castle be constructed of steel-reinforced concrete.

As a result, the only damage was to a few items that fell off walls and shelves.

For more information on the Julia Morgan collection at Cal Poly, go to www.lib.calpoly.edu/spec_coll/morgan/.
Julia Morgan — 1872-1957

**Born:** San Francisco. Graduated from Oakland High School, 1890.

**Early commission:** The bell tower at Mills College in Oakland.

**Notable accomplishments:** Rebuilt San Francisco’s Fairmont Hotel after the 1906 earthquake. In all, designed more than 700 buildings during a career that spanned from the turn of the century to 1951.

**Greatest claim to fame:** In 1919, began design and construction of William Randolph Hearst’s estate at San Simeon, known today as Hearst Castle. Called the “most extraordinary residence ever to rise on the Pacific Coast,” the estate has three guest houses and a main building, linked by an esplanade and surrounded by spectacular gardens. Casa Grande, the centerpiece of the estate, contained a 50-seat movie theater, billiard room, wine cellar and two libraries. The grounds included indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, a private zoo, dog kennels, a thoroughbred horse ranch, miles of bridle paths and a private landing strip and airplane hangar. To facilitate daily operations, the estate also had a reservoir, poultry ranch, dairy, vegetable garden, orchards, greenhouses and a hothouse.

Hearst Castle remains the most-visited site in the California State Parks system, with some 800,000 visitors a year.

Lizbeth A. Gonzalez — ARCH ’04

**Profession:** Member of a project team at Michael W. Folonis, AIA Architect and Associates in Santa Monica.

**Where did you grow up?**
Born in Guadalajara, Mexico. My family immigrated to California when I was very young. Since then, we have lived in Turlock.

**When did you know you wanted to be an architect?**
I knew I wanted to study about architecture when my high school guidance counselor told me that architecture was a combination of art and science. It wasn’t until I took an architecture history course that I realized that I wanted to be an architect.

**Why did you choose to study at Cal Poly?**
My guidance counselor told me it was the best architecture school in California.

**What has been your greatest challenge?**
My senior design thesis on “A Spatiodynamic Complex at San Francisco’s Transbay Transit Terminal.” To me, a thesis should be a culmination of everything you learned and more.

**What are your career goals?**
To convert the loft I live in, in downtown Los Angeles, into a design/architecture office, get licensed and practice.

**Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**
New York, Paris or Rotterdam.

**What are your hobbies and interests?**
I’m an urban observer. I like to explore and experience the downtowns of cities. I may photograph or record the unique characteristics of each downtown. I also write screenplays and I make collages, usually related to my urban experience.

Alumna Lizbeth Gonzalez
(Photo courtesy of Lizbeth Gonzalez)