Alumni Voice Their Passion for Cal Poly

By Matt Lazier

Attending Cal Poly was a “great decision” according to almost 90 percent of the 2,663 alumni who answered a survey from the university’s Alumni Association last fall.

The poll aimed to measure how alumni feel about their education and whether they think they received a good return on their investment. It is administered by the Texas-based Alumni Attitude Study, which also surveyed more than 100 universities and alumni associations around the country, including several CSU campuses.

Cal Poly earned glowing marks from its alumni in many categories and, in many cases, received responses that were significantly more positive than averages for CSU campuses and universities nationwide. For example, less than 60 percent of alumni from the other schools said studying at their respective campuses was a “great decision.”

Cal Poly alumni credited their “learn by doing” education with preparing them for success most strongly in the following areas:
• current work status and ability to respond to new career opportunities;
• commitment to graduate education and/or continuous learning;
• commitment to personal development; and
• contributing to their communities.

“These results are nice to hear but not surprising,” said John Sweeney, president of Cal Poly’s Alumni Association. “Cal Poly alumni are usually more successful than the average college graduate. The learn-by-doing experience makes Cal Poly graduates exceptionally well prepared when they hit the work force.

“As an employer, I always prefer to hire Cal Poly graduates, who are ready to hit the ground running. They frequently are much better prepared for the actual work they will be doing than graduates from some of the more expensive schools. For my money, the return on investment of a Cal Poly degree can’t be beat anywhere.”

Cal Poly alumni also like to brag about their alma mater. About 75 said they talk up the university to others “regularly” or “all the time.” About the same number of CSU and national alumni said they brag about their schools “regularly” or only “occasionally.”

Nearly 80 percent of Cal Poly alumni said their current opinion of the university is “excellent” (compared to 50 percent for all schools and just less than that for the CSU). And almost 20 percent of Cal Poly respondents said their opinion is “good.”

And as time goes by, an alum’s opinion of Cal Poly is likely to stay positive. More than half of Cal Poly respondents said their impression of the university has improved since they graduated, while more than 40 percent said it had not changed.

The survey also asked a range of questions about how well Cal Poly communicates and connects with alumni. In general, alumni said Cal Poly does well at reaching out through important communication vehicles such as e-mails, electronic newsletters, the university and
alumni Web sites and the quarterly Cal Poly Magazine.

The survey also identified areas where alumni hope to see Cal Poly grow and improve. Respondents overall ranked “identifying job opportunities for graduates” and “providing feedback to Cal Poly about how it is perceived” as “very important” for alumni to do. But they said Cal Poly is between “fair” and “good” at supporting alumni in those efforts.

They also want the university to do better at helping alumni mentor current students.

Here’s what some alumni had to say about Cal Poly in their survey responses:

* While I was there, I only thought of it as a state school. I didn't realize until I was in job interviews that companies view Cal Poly with the likes of MIT.
* People from other schools, even Berkeley and Stanford, can't compete with us in the field.
* Always had a great impression of Cal Poly. My experience at Cal Poly is on par with my experience at Cornell ... a very good one.
* I continue to be impressed with the things Poly students accomplish in their lifetime. Olympic athletes, innovative ideas ... it's all awesome! I hope to contribute.
* Still believe it's the best school in California hands down. Great people, great location, great academics for the cost of attending.
* I can say that I use what I learned at Cal Poly every day at work! Not many people seem to feel that way about their college experience.
* I had no idea how much my industry respected Cal Poly grads until I was looking for a job.
* Once working full-time you realize what hands-on learning is all about. And Cal Poly grads run circles around other professional in my field of engineering.
* I understand the name that Cal Poly has in the business world, which has made my degree so much more valuable and makes me want to further support Cal Poly.

Photos courtesy Cal Poly College of Architecture and Environmental Design and Cal Poly College of Engineering.