Cal Poly Faculty Member Donates $10,000 to Create Latin American Studies Program

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly Assistant Professor of Geography James Keese has donated $10,000 to create an educational, nonpartisan Latin American Studies Program at the university.

Keese is collaborating with Craig Arceneaux in the Political Science Department to establish this program. The program is designed to coordinate and support activities related to Latin America, according to Keese. "The program recognizes that knowledge of Latin America and its connections to California are essential to bridging the peoples and cultures of the two regions and to the stability and growth of the state. This knowledge is increasingly important for careers in education, healthcare, social services, agriculture, law enforcement, business and tourism," he said.

The Latin America Studies Program also aims to encourage student involvement in the university and the community, advance the professional development of faculty with interests in Latin America, promote a diverse and global learning environment, and foster outreach to local educational institutions, government, business and civic groups.

"Latin America is a region of critical importance to the United States, and California in particular," Keese said, "Yet it seems that we know little about the issues, places and people that link and impact both sides of the border."

According to statistics:

- 41 million Latinos live in the United States, making up the nation's largest ethnic group
- 34 percent of California's population is Latino; by 2040, there will be a Latino majority in the state
- Free trade with Mexico, Central America and South America is expanding rapidly
- The United States receives 30 percent of its oil imports from Venezuela, Mexico and Ecuador
- The Amazon has the world's largest rainforest
- Tens of millions of tourists annually cross the border in both directions.

Keese, who is also a Cal Poly alumnus, hopes his donation will attract matching funds to support such activities as study abroad programs, student internships, lecture series, a student-studies club, and travel and research. The goal is to create a Latin American Studies Center on campus that will coordinate all program activities, and to have a fully funded endowment after 10 years to make the center financially self-sustaining.

Donations can be made payable to Cal Poly Foundation and mailed to Cal Poly, Advancement Office, College of Liberal Arts, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407. Be sure to write Latin American Studies Program on the memo line of the check. Donations are tax deductible.

For more information, contact Keese at 756-1170 or jkeese@calpoly.edu.

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