Cal Poly News Tips: Great Grads of 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Great Grads Illustrate Success of Cal Poly Class of 2005

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly's Class of 2005 will have 3,616 spring commencement candidates June 11, all outstanding. The 9 a.m. commencement ceremony is set to honor the 1,916 graduates from the colleges of Agriculture, Architecture and Environmental Design, and Engineering. The 3 p.m. ceremony will honor the 1,710 graduates from the Orfalea College of Business and the colleges of Education, Liberal Arts, and Science and Mathematics.

The graduates are all exceptional. But if you're looking for interesting grads to profile for a good feature story, consider these 'great grads' from Academic Year 2004-05:

Graciela Camacho -- Camacho, of Palm Springs, will earn her bachelor's degree in history Saturday, after undergoing chemotherapy, dialysis and a complete kidney transplant in her junior year at Cal Poly. The oldest of three children and a first generation Mexican-American, Camacho speaks fluent Spanish as well as English.

Her parents, Rosendo and Lorena Camacho, came to the U.S. from Mexico. Her father learned English and started a successful landscaping business; her mother is a checker at Ralph's. Growing up, Camacho watched her two younger siblings while her parents were at work. The family will watch her graduate on Saturday.

Her graduation marks a complete recovery for Camacho, whose kidneys failed completely in early 2003, her junior year at Cal Poly. She'd never been seriously ill before; after doctors in San Luis Obispo diagnosed her kidney failure and started her on chemotherapy and dialysis three times a week, she stayed in school and kept her part-time job at Student Academic Services and membership in Alpha Phi Sigma, a Latina interest sorority.

"My dad and I are really close, and he said, 'Gracie, I want you to come home. I just want you home.' I said 'No, Dad, I want to stay here. Here I'm a student. I go to school. I go to work. I volunteer. I have my friends. I have a boyfriend. There are a lot of facets to who I am. If I come home, I'll just be someone who is sick. I won't have all these other things about me that define who I am.' He understood. It was hard for him, but he understood."

Over the Thanksgiving holiday in 2003, Camacho received a kidney transplant -- from her mother, the day before Thanksgiving. It was Lorena Camacho's birthday.
After the transplant, Grace Camacho was back in class at Cal Poly for Winter Quarter in January 2004 without skipping a beat. “My doctors think I’m crazy,” she said with a grin. “My doctors in San Luis Obispo are great: Dr. Stephen Hilty and Dr. Scott Morey. They’re the best.”

Her drive to stay in school, she said, came from her father. “My dad was adamant about education. He was always, ‘Education, education, education. Your schooling is really important. It is the most important thing.’ He instilled it in me.”

“Gracie simply never allowed her illness to interfere with her education,” said Susan Sparling, Director of Student Academic Services at Cal Poly. “She also never let her illness get in the way of mentoring younger students or community service. Gracie is an inspiration and role model to students, staff and faculty alike.”

Though she was accepted into the credential programs at San Diego State and Cal State San Bernardino, Camacho wants to stay on the Central Coast for now. She begins Chapman University’s teaching credential program this fall in Santa Maria. She wants to be a middle school teacher.

“To me, it’s the perfect balance between elementary school, when they’re still learning how to be in school, and high school, where the students are in the phase of ‘I’m too cool to do that.’ ”

Mary Lee Weeks -- Weeks, of Spokane, Wash., will graduate with a bachelor's degree in physics, and wants to become a high school science teacher. As one of Cal Poly's top physics grads, she applied for -- and won -- a Knowles Science Teaching Fellowship (find out more at http://www.kstf.org/). Weeks was among only a handful of graduates in the nation to receive the prestigious fellowship. She'll receive $80,000 to $100,000 a year for the next five years to pursue her credential and training to become a top science teacher.

The fellowship will pay for her teaching credential tuition, give her a stipend of $1,000 a month for living expenses while she is pursuing her credential, and provide a mentor teacher for her first four years of teaching. The fellowship will also pay for her to attend three professional science conferences per year during her first four years of teaching -- including her registration, travel and hotel expenses. It will also reimburse her future school district for the cost of substitute teachers to cover her classes while she is gone. She will attend her first fellowship science conference this summer.

Women are still a minority in physics, as teachers and students. Weeks said that never bothered her, even though all of her physics instructors have been male. "All of my professors have been great. They never treated me any differently because I’m not a guy. I’ve been treated like everyone else. Here at Cal Poly, the professor's doors are always open and the professors are willing to help you anytime."

She said she chose high school teaching over a career as a college professor or in research because it's in high school she feels she can make the biggest difference in bringing the joy of science to students -- all students. "My high school teachers were a huge inspiration to me," she said. "I think my high school teachers had a lot more impact on my life than my college professors. It's during high school that a lot of teens turn to teachers about life, about college. I want to be there for students to turn to."

Weeks will pursue her teaching credential at Cal Poly's College of Education, beginning this fall.
Carl Bauer -- Bauer will receive a bachelor's degree in physics June 11 and celebrate in an unusual way. He and two roommates (mechanical engineering graduate Orb Acton and mechanical engineering student Kyle Lind) are participating in a 4,500-mile fund-raising bike ride across the United States for the American Red Cross.

“We were talking about what to do after school,” said Bauer. The trio of friends wanted to benefit a worthy cause -- and put a spotlight on sustainable resource use and living. "I bike everywhere -- I haven't owned a car in four years. Sustainability is something I've always believed in. The world's oil resources are running down, because we are consuming resources we can't replenish. As a physics major, I like thinking of new ways to get energy from the sun."

The trio will set out on their continent-crossing ride from Gig Harbor, Wash., Bauer’s hometown. To donate, go to the trio’s Web site at www.bikeusa05.com. Eighty percent of all donations will go to the Red Cross; 20 percent will be used to keep the trio pedaling across the US. Cycling devotees and friends can check the site throughout the summer to read their web journal entries about their trip and travels.

After the cross-country bicycle ride, Bauer is heading off to graduate school at the University of Colorado.

Brandi Dias -- Dias, born and raised in Arroyo Grande, completed her degree in history after finishing her studies in March 2005 and will enter the teaching credential program in Cal Poly's College of Education this fall.

Her determination to be a high school teacher comes from her own experiences in high school -- when she was battling leukemia. Her successful struggle and treatment are familiar to Central Coast residents thanks to stories about her in the local news media.

Following a successful stem-cell transplant more than five years ago, Dias came to Cal Poly to pursue her dream of being a teacher. She was one of two Cal Poly students to carry the Olympic Torch on its run through campus in January, 2002. She hopes to eventually serve as a teacher for hospitalized children. She's currently working at Coastal Cardiology in San Luis Obispo, before beginning credential classes in the fall.
Beau Kramer -- Grad student Beau Kramer will earn his Master's of Business Administration. He earned a bachelor's degree in computer engineering at Cal Poly. In order to finance grad school, he started his own mobile DJ business, Kramer Entertainment. During his first year in the MBA program in 2002, his business tripled. He's juggled his business and his grad school studies, applying what he was learning in classes. He may be the only computer engineer on the board of directors of the Central Coast Wedding Professionals. "It paid my way through college. I'd spend weekends working at fraternity parties; I've done work for ASI (Associated Students Inc.)," and all those weddings.

With his degree almost in hand, he's currently thinking of opening a nightclub on the Central Coast. Kramer is originally from Alamo, but now lives in Paso Robles.

If you are interested in profiling any of these great grads, contact Teresa Hendrix at thendrix@calpoly.edu or (805) 756-7266 for their phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

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