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## Cal Poly Receives Grant to Add Innovation and Entrepreneurship to Student Humanitarian Projects

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Cal Poly will add a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship to university programs that serve people living in poverty. The move will be enabled through a \$10,000 Sustainable Vision grant from the National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance (NCIIA).

The multidisciplinary grant proposal was developed by faculty members Kathy Chen in the Materials Engineering Department, Sema Alptekin Ervin in the Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering Department, and Jonathan York, a professor in the Orfalea College of Business (OCOB) and co-founder of Cal Poly's Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

"Faculty and students alike want to apply their knowledge and education to assist underprivileged people," said Chen. "This grant will enable two noteworthy student groups — Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and Cal Poly Entrepreneurship (CPE) — to collaborate to address poverty and sustainability in targeted communities in developing countries."

EWB has four international engineering projects underway in impoverished communities in Nicaragua, India, Thailand and Malawi. Through the NCIIA grant, EWB teams will assess the needs of those communities and share their ideas with the campus community. Based on these assessments, Cal Poly students will have the opportunity to evaluate and develop innovative enterprise projects that can raise the standard of living in EWB's partner communities.

"The inspiration for this proposed project comes from a successful experience of the EWB-India team," explained Alptekin Ervin. "Although the team's primary goal was to implement a sanitation project, after observing women painstakingly de-kernelling corn, the group devised a low-cost implement, made from locally available materials, to improve the process and increase productivity. The NCIIA grant will enable Cal Poly students to investigate other innovative entrepreneurship opportunities like that."

The NCIIA is part of a cross-university effort to incorporate humanitarian projects into the curriculum. "When students apply their knowledge and skills to helping others," said Alptekin Ervin, "they gain valuable educational outcomes."

"Humanitarian projects introduce our students to topics such as cultural awareness, poverty, economics and sustainability in real-world contexts," said Alptekin Ervin. "They inspire students' creativity and professional development, preparing them for senior projects, graduate work and entrepreneurial careers, and making a real impact on the world."

The engineering world in general is also working to bring more women and people from under-represented groups. "When we incorporate humanitarian projects into the curriculum," said Alptekin Ervin, "we're able to generate more interest from those

students.”

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