

Spring 2009



CAL POLY • COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS • HISTORY DEPARTMENT

LINKS TO THE PAST

Faculty member honored for service to Nigeria



Dr. John Orij, professor of African history, was honored in August 2008 in Washington, D.C. by the Ngwa National Association USA with their "Special Achievement Award." The NNAUSA honored Orij's "vast contributions in documenting, preserving and promoting the history and cultural heritage of the Ngwa people [of Nigeria]."

In April 2009, Orij was also named a 2009 African Goodwill Recognition Awards Honoree, along with figures like singer Hope Foye, actor Isaiah Washington, and neurosurgeon Dr. Deborah Hyde. These African Goodwill Awards formally recognize the contributions made by individuals and organizations in response to the humanitarian needs of the African people. Orij was recognized for his contributions to research and publications in African history, and for his services to the Nigerian community. Since 2000, he has chaired an educational program offering scholarships to less privileged students in Nigerian universities. So far, over 200 Nigerian students have benefited from the program. The department congratulates and salutes Dr. Orij for this award.

Alumna, film actress, world traveler, activist

Katrina dela Cruz, Cal Poly history alumna and winner of the 2005 J. Irving Snetsinger Award for Excellence in Writing, has had a very eventful, fulfilling, and busy four years since her 2005 graduation.

During 2004-05, her senior year at Poly, dela Cruz acted in the film "Leave it to Chance," directed by Bernard Badion, a business marketing major and a fellow member of the Pilipino Cultural Exchange. The film, a romantic comedy that director Badion calls part of a "new breed of film ... that show Asian-Americans in films where they can be themselves," premiered at the PAC in April 2005 to a crowd of one thousand people. It was then officially selected for the Santa Barbara Film Festival, and from September 2005 to June 2006, dela Cruz was one of several cast and crew members who took the film on tour, screening the film at various colleges and film festivals around the U.S. (More information is available at www.leaveittochance.info, and the film is available online via Target or Amazon.)

Dela Cruz currently serves full-time with AmeriCorps, the prestigious national service organization, working at Adams Elementary School in Santa Barbara, teaching and improving literacy skills with young elementary students. She will continue this commitment by enrolling in the Master of Social Work program at USC for fall 2009.

Dela Cruz says that "The education and experiences I received at Cal Poly have been completely invaluable.... Changing my major to history turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. At first, I considered transferring to a more liberal arts-oriented school, but after speaking with history faculty and students, I knew that becoming part of Cal Poly's enthusiastic and intimate History Department was the very best decision. I have always appreciated that the history professors at Cal Poly were consistently attentive of and sensitive to the needs of those on the margins of society. As a result of this, I now seek to think more critically about world issues I hear or read about on a daily basis."



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Mustang history majors excel in athletics . . .

Ali Waller, a history major and outside hitter for the women's volleyball team from Cypress, CA, completed her standout three-season career at Cal Poly this past fall by earning All-Big West Conference honorable mention praise. Named also in 2007 to the All-Big West first team, Waller (at right) used her senior-year numbers to finish seventh in program history with 3,305 career hitting attempts and ninth with 1,130 kills. Waller is the only Mustang in program history to have recorded more than 1,000 kills in just three seasons. She finished her 2008 senior campaign ranked second among Cal Poly players with both 2.76 kills per set and 2.81 digs per set, and produced 16 matches of double-digit kill figures in 2008. Ali showed her versatility by appearing in 334 of Cal Poly's 335 sets during her tenure. She is currently finishing her senior project on "Daily Life during the German Occupation of the Netherlands



during WWII" and will graduate in June 2009.

Julia Heath, a history major from Lompoc, is currently averaging 78.7 strokes over 15 rounds for the Mustang women's golf team. This season she already has four top-20 finishes and a pair of top-10 finishes. Julia placed fourth in the Bulldog and Eagle

Invitational co-hosted by Gonzaga and Eastern Washington, and eighth in the Coast BMW Intercollegiate hosted by Cal Poly at Monarch Dunes. Heath also competed in nine tournaments during the 2007-08 season, finishing with a 77.3 scoring average over 20 rounds, and she currently sports a career 78.18-stroke average over 57 rounds with 11 top-10 finishes.

Jason Swisher, a history major from Walnut Creek, CA, wore No. 95 for the Mustang football team last fall. Swisher, playing inside linebacker, helped the Mustangs to an 8-3 overall record and a spot in the NCAA Division I Football Championship Subdivision playoffs for the second time in school history. Jason recorded 23 total tackles, including 16 solo stops, 4.5 tackles for lost yardage and 1.5 sacks. He also had two pass breakups and three quarterback hurries. Swisher's career high for tackles in a game is six against North Carolina Central.

First History Career Skills Day a success

On April 17, the Friends of the History Department sponsored the first annual History Career Skills Day. Nine presenters, led by alumnus Greg Schulte, County Administrator of Archuleta County (Colorado), gave presentations to some 50 history majors about the different careers that

are available to them, and about the skills taught in the discipline of history that are prized by all sorts of employers.

Ilana Winter, a junior History major, said, "I had a wonderful time and felt better informed about the various paths a History B.A. can lead to."

Graduate student Toby Willett commented, "The [event] was helpful for me, personally, and should prove especially helpful for undergrads and those just beginning the M.A. program." Thanks again to all who were involved!

Donation Form

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... and in the arts

Kyle Wilhelm, a senior History / Art and Design double major, exhibited his latest collection of paintings, titled "Six Year Plan," at Traditional Tattoo in San Luis Obispo in the fall of 2008. These works, including "Construct" (below), explore the history and ideologies of the Soviet Union, consider the historical context of artistic and social achievements in the Soviet era, and investigate the effects of socialism on the USSR population during that time.



"Construct."
54" x 60", oil on canvas, 2008.

Kris Baughman, a senior history and French minor, plays accordion in the Cal Poly Arab Music Ensemble. The ensemble debuted in 2007 and is under the direction of Music Department faculty member Kenneth S. Habib, a composer who holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology. In March, the Ensemble put on a sold-out performance at Cal Poly's PAC of traditional and contemporary music and dance from the Eastern Mediterranean and larger Middle East.

Baughman has been playing piano since age 5, and accordion in this ensemble for three years. His accordion has been altered - adding half-flats and half-sharps - so that it adheres to the *maqam* musical system (of 40-60 different modes). Baughman says, "I was attracted to the different and exotic sounds and beats of Arabic music," and attributes his "overall attraction to Eastern music" to the fact that his mother is Russian and was born in Iran. "It is hard to ignore the historical implications of music, whatever style you are talking about," continues Baughman. His senior project, titled "Western Instruments in the Arabic Genre," discusses the use of Western musical instruments, like violin, piano, and accordion, in Arabic music, and "challenges our thinking of what a culture can claim as its own."



Baughman, center, Habib, second from right, and other members of the Cal Poly Arab Music Ensemble.

And Alyssa Carnahan, a senior history major and dance minor, is currently serving as the Vice President of the Orchesis Dance Company, an organization housed under the Theatre and Dance Department at Cal Poly. Carnahan, who has been dancing since age four, has been a member of Orchesis Dance Company for each of her four years at Poly. She pointed out, "As a performer, I have been lucky enough to have danced a few solos and have worked with some excellent guest choreographers. One of my very favorite experiences has been working with dance faculty Diana Stanton for her modern dance piece in which the sculpture-like dancers magically came to life to reenact various pieces of famous Renaissance paintings and friezes amidst swirling white fog."

Carnahan continued, "Dancing in college is a very unique experience because we have the benefit of seeing our work through a more analytic type of lens - in other words, not only do we discover new ways of dancing, but we also explore why we dance, what makes a dance, and who decides what makes dance 'good.'" Carnahan says that it has been easy for her to connect her dance minor work with her major work in history; her senior project is on the advent of Modern dance and gender in the early twentieth century United States. In particular, Carnahan is researching Ted Shawn, his 1930s all-male dance company, and how ideas about men and dancing evolved during this period. She concludes, "I could not have decided on a topic about which I am more passionate!"

New Thomas "Learn By Doing" History Endowment

The History Department is proud to announce the new Thomas "Learn By Doing" History Endowment, created this spring by Poly alumni Christopher and Joan Thomas (both BUS '84). The Thomas family has longstanding

ated from Cal Poly with a degree in engineering in the early 1960s, and their son Paul is currently an Agricultural Business major. The Thomases, who live in Pleasanton, California, have committed \$20,000 to provide

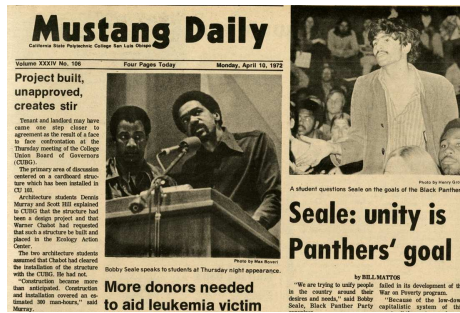
Department's "Learn By Doing" emphasis for faculty and student research. They stated, "We believe that Cal Poly delivers a unique educational experience and we are very excited to be helping our alma mater."

Grad Students put on Black History Month exhibit

Cal Poly history graduate students Josh Harmon and Laura Sorveti, with the help of Catherine Trujillo in the Robert E. Kennedy Library Special Collections & University Archives, showcased a free public exhibit entitled "Strive and Struggle: Documenting the Civil Rights Movement at Cal Poly, 1967-1975." This exhibit in honor of Black History Month included dozens of fascinating photos from the pages of the Mustang Daily, and was invaluable in bringing to light the oft-forgotten history of the civil rights movement here.

During this era of turmoil, rage, and hope, Cal Poly hosted several important leaders of the national civil rights and black power movements, such as Black Panther Party chairman Bobby Seale, Myrlie Evers-Williams, Alex Haley, Jesse Owens, Dick Gregory, and Ike and Tina Turner.

Sorveti explains, "The research told a story that was more important than I first anticipated. Widely recognized politicians, entertainers, and civil rights



Clipping from *Mustang Daily* article on campus talk by Black Panther leader Bobby Seale, 1972.

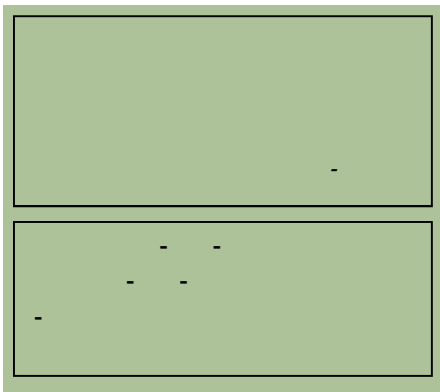
leaders brought the national movement to the university. A committed number of students maintained and inspired change on campus. The Black Student Union, established in the late 1960s, successfully lobbied for ethnic studies courses and hiring the first black professors at Cal Poly. The final product highlighted the importance of the Civil Rights movement at Cal Poly and in the local community as a professional and organized student-led movement."

"Our goal," Sorveti continued, "was

to make the exhibit available to the public in a manner that allowed viewers to arrive at their own conclusions. It was a unique experience in which pre-conceived opinions were challenged, and we used the 'learn-by-doing' motto in developing a more comprehensive approach to Cal Poly history."

Harmon summed up the endeavor by stating, "This project was eye-opening for me. It exposed both the tumult of the late 1960s and the power of a determined group of people to effect positive change in their community. I think it has been interesting to see people's reactions to the exhibit. Often, they had no idea that Cal Poly students participated in such important events for our community, campus, and country. I hope that the campus and community start to recognize and explore the diverse history of the area, and hopefully be inspired by the students, faculty, and community members who challenged the status quo and changed their world."

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