

CAL POLY COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

impact

LEARN / LEAD / LIVE / FALL 2025

ART FOR ALL

Cal Poly Arts brings world-class performances to underserved audiences.

Courtesy of Cal Poly Arts

INSIDE:

- New 2+2 Sociology Program Opens Doors for Transfers
- Faculty Discuss AI in the Classroom
- The Value of Hands-On Internships



CAL POLY

Message From the Dean

As a history professor, I often asked my senior project students: “Is this a story of continuity or change?” The stories in this Impact magazine are a bit of both.

This past year brought significant change—on campus and beyond. At Cal Poly, that included integration with Cal Poly Maritime Academy. In these pages, you’ll meet several outstanding Cal Poly Maritime faculty members who are now part of our English Department and the



International Strategy and Security (ISS) program, newly housed in the Philosophy Department. While they remain based at the Cal Poly Solano Campus, we’re thrilled to welcome them into our college.

Over the last two years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly reshaped what it means to study the liberal arts. Yet in the ways that matter most, continuity prevails. We continue to emphasize critical and creative thinking, collaboration across differences and a Learn by Doing mindset. As you’ll read in the faculty op-eds, AI has only underscored the enduring importance of the liberal arts.

The college also continues to expand how we serve our broader community. This year, we’ve seen the continued growth of Cal Poly Arts’ outreach programs — made possible by generous donor support — and the launch of the new Sociology 2+2 Program in partnership with Allan Hancock College.

This year brought change for me too; I became CLA’s permanent dean in July. While the title may be new, the sense of purpose and inspiration I draw from our students, faculty, staff and alumni remains constant. I’m proud to be part of a college that embraces change while holding fast to what matters most.

Thank you for being part of *that* story.

Best wishes,
Kate Murphy
Dean, College of Liberal Arts



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Do we have your current contact information?
Send us your new contact information:
cla.calpoly.edu/update.



Scan QR code to connect with the CLA on social media:



On the cover:
Dance students attend a masterclass with MOMIX thanks to Cal Poly Arts.



Scenic campus view from Dexter Lawn

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Students work on making the costumes for their winter production of Clue: The Musical.



Students run through a dress rehearsal for their winter production of Clue: The Musical.

WINTER MUSICAL BRINGS CLASSIC BOARD GAME TO LIFE

The Theatre and Dance Department’s production of “Clue: The Musical” transformed the classic whodunit board game into a comedic, interactive experience — with student actors, designers and builders behind every twist and turn. From constructing the set to sewing the costumes and running the tech, students earned academic credit while gaining hands-on experience in all facets of live theatre.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JOE JOHNSTON, SARAH DINETZ, ISHA CHUDASAMA, JOE JOHNSTON

NAILAH DUBOSE NAMED INAUGURAL STUDENT WINNER OF DOLORES HUERTA AWARD

Nailah DuBose (Psychology, ’25 and current M.S. in Psychology student) is the first-ever student winner of the Office of University Diversity and Inclusion’s (OUDI) Dolores Huerta “Si Se Puede” Award for Transformational Leadership. DuBose was honored for her exceptional leadership, integrity and compassion. During her time at Cal Poly, she served as an OUDI intern, BEACoN researcher, CLA Student Diversity Committee member, president of the Black Student Union and president of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority.



Dubose, second from left, posing with the award.



Psychology Student Receives CSU Trustees’ Award and \$7,000 Scholarship

Maileen Mamaradlo (Psychology, ’25), a first-generation student and mother, was named Cal Poly’s 2024 California State University Trustees’ Scholar for Outstanding Achievement. Selected for her academic excellence, personal accomplishments, community

service and financial need, Mamaradlo, who attends university alongside her children, was one of four William Randolph Hearst Scholars to receive a \$7,000 scholarship.



Between rehearsals and their Carnegie Hall performance, students made the most of their time exploring NYC.

PolyPhonics Choir Hits a High Note at Carnegie Hall

On April 6, Cal Poly’s PolyPhonics choir stepped into the spotlight at the world-renowned Carnegie Hall, performing alongside the choirs of St. John’s and St. Mary’s Colleges of Minnesota with accompaniment by the New England Symphonic Ensemble. The unforgettable weekend was filled with rehearsals, a once-in-a-lifetime performance and plenty of time to explore the Big Apple.

Mustang Media Group Inducted into Hall of Fame, Earns 45 Awards

Mustang News was recently inducted into the Associated Collegiate Press Hall of Fame, a prestigious honor that celebrates excellence in student media. In addition, Mustang Media Group earned the title of College Media Company of the Year for the third consecutive year and brought home an additional 44 national awards from the College Media Business and Advertising Managers, Associated Collegiate Press, and College Media Association.



MMG staff at the annual college media convention in Long Beach last March.

Sociology Professor Explores Family Support in Brazil

Sociology Associate Professor Sara Lopus spent the summer in Brazil as a Fulbright Scholar, joined by her husband and their children. The family lived in Belo Horizonte, where Lopus collaborated with Maria Carolina Tomás at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais to research how families use intergenerational support to assist first-time mothers and single parents.



STUDENT TEAM WINS DESIGN COMPETITION FOR FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

A team of graphic communication students achieved a remarkable milestone at the 2024 Xplor Summit, securing their fifth consecutive victory in the Xplor Communication Design Competition. In addition to taking home the Victory Cup, each participant attended educational panels and sessions and networked with industry professionals and exhibitors.

(L to R) Amelia Petroff, Hailey Jones, Olivia Cooper, Ella Williamson, Malia Mccaig



Henry posing in front of the White House in Washington, D.C.

DUAL-MAJOR PATRICK HENRY SERVES AS 2024 PANETTA CONGRESSIONAL INTERN

Political science and history double-major Patrick Henry served as Cal Poly’s 2024 representative for the prestigious Panetta Institute Congressional Internship Program. After completing two weeks of training at CSU Monterey Bay, Henry spent 11 weeks conducting legislative research, drafting constituent correspondence, and attending congressional hearings and briefings in the Washington, D.C., office of CA Representative Jim Costa (CA-21).

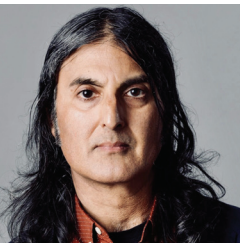
Ethnic Studies Dept Awarded Mellon Foundation Grant

The Ethnic Studies Department is among 11 programs selected by the California State University (CSU) system to receive a 2024–25 Advancing and Expanding Ethnic Studies grant. This funding supports the development and expansion of credit-bearing programs that integrate ethnic studies with gender and sexuality studies. The award underscores the essential contributions of ethnic studies faculty in high-quality instruction and intersectional education throughout the CSU.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: AIDAN GARAYGORDIBIL, DINÁ VEES, SARA LOPUS, BRADY TEUFEL



'Nessie's Lakeside Laughs' marks Cal Poly's 76th entry into the parade.



James Tejani wins 2025 Bancroft Prize

Cal Poly history Professor James Tejani has been awarded the prestigious 2025 Bancroft Prize—and a \$10,000 award—for his groundbreaking new book, “A Machine to Move Ocean and Earth: The Making of the Port of Los Angeles—and America.” Presented by Columbia University, the Bancroft Prize is one of the most distinguished honors for scholars of American history, recognizing exceptional works for their “scope, significance, depth of research and insightful interpretation.”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: TOM ZASADZINSKI, MARION HART, JOE JOHNSTON, JAY THOMPSON, MICHAEL DELEÓN AND W. W. NORTON

From Excavation to Exhibit, Students Tell Family's Forgotten History

Cal Poly anthropology and geography students brought local history to life with “A Dream Interrupted,” a student-curated exhibit exploring the story of the Yoshida family, a Japanese American family displaced during World War II. The display featured artifacts unearthed during a 2024 excavation on the Pecho Coast, paired with oral histories and family photos. “Being able to connect with the Yoshidas and bring attention to their family story has been such an honor — and truly the best part of my college experience,” said Lacey May (Anthropology and Geography, 2025).



Members of the Yoshida Family posing in front of the students' exhibit.



A newly reconstructed artifact unearthed during the four-day archaeological excavation.



Students Host Spanish-Speaking Voter Info Sessions

Last September, a group of students — guided by Communication Studies Department faculty Victoria Zamora and Marion Hart — hosted community workshops for Spanish-speaking voters in San Luis Obispo County. As part of the Latino Voter Engagement Project (LVEP) a collaboration with the County Clerk-Recorder’s Office, the students explored barriers to voter participation and developed strategies to boost civic awareness and turnout.



Alondra Vianey Cardoso presenting for the LVEP at the San Luis Obispo Library.

History Lecturer Co-Leading Efforts to Uncover the Legacy of African Californios

History lecturer Cameron Jones is co-leading a groundbreaking effort to uncover the nearly forgotten legacy of California’s African-descended population between 1769 and 1850. In collaboration with computer science Professor Foaad Khosmood and students, Jones is using digital tools and census records to map detailed family trees, digitize census records, and produce interactive visualizations. The project, presented at the annual conference of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organization, is now accessible to the public at AfricanCalifornios.org, offering new insights into the state’s diverse and complex past.



Cameron Jones (right) with computer science graduate student Anthony Colin Herrera at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, Washington DC in August 2024.



Nichols performing at Kazamier Stockroom, Liverpool, UK.

English Lecturer Caleb Nichols Named SLO County's Poet Laureate

Caleb Nichols (M.A., English, '20) has been named San Luis Obispo County’s 2025-27 poet laureate — a role that perfectly reflects his lifelong dedication to the arts. From touring internationally with the indie rock band Port O’Brien to earning a doctorate in creative and critical writing from Bangor University in North Wales, Nichols’ life has always orbited creative spaces. Now, he’s focused on cultivating a thriving local network where writers and readers can connect and grow.



First Year GO Program students participating in a bike tour of Seville.

STUDENTS EXPLORE SPAIN THROUGH INAUGURAL GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

Last spring, the Cal Poly International Center launched the First Year Global Opportunities (GO) Program — an immersive international experience in Seville, Spain, created specifically for first-year students. The CLA represented 30% of the 30-student inaugural cohort, sending students from seven majors. Participants connected with local Spanish students through interviews, took part in traditional cooking workshops and explored the country through a variety of cultural excursions.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE CAL POLY INTERNATIONAL CENTER, DEBORAH DENKER, COURTESY | CALEB NICHOLS, FOAAD KHOSMOOD

COURTESY | COLIN DEWEY

CLASS ACTS

As part of Cal Poly-Cal Maritime Integration, two Cal Poly Maritime Academy departments are joining the CLA. While faculty will continue teaching at the Cal Poly Solano Campus on the shore of San Pablo Bay, their students and programs will benefit from blending Learn by Doing with Cal Poly Maritime Academy’s hands-on seafaring tradition.

Cal Poly Maritime Academy’s former Culture and Communication Department has fully integrated into the Cal Poly English Department, while the International Strategy and Security (ISS) program will be housed as a separate major within Cal Poly’s Philosophy Department.

Meet some of the CLA’s Cal Poly Maritime Academy faculty advancing Learn by Doing at the Cal Poly Solano Campus.



Dewey posing on the dock of the Port of Oakland.

COLIN DEWEY (he/they)

DEPARTMENT: English

SPECIALTY AREA: British poetry of the 18th century; maritime culture; 21st century globalized logistics

YEARS AT CAL POLY MARITIME ACADEMY: 13

Q: What drew you to study English and maritime culture?

A: I came to higher education as a non-traditional community college transfer student working full-time as captain of the San Francisco pilot vessel “California.” I enrolled full time at UC Berkeley and later in the English graduate program at Cornell University where I combined my passion for literature with my extensive experience as a seaman. My advisor asked, “Why don’t you just write about the sea?” And so, I did, and I’ve never looked back.

Q: What is a recent or cool project that you’re especially excited about?

A: I’ve been developing and defining the field of Oceanic Humanities. Collaborating with a group of scholars led by Stanford University Professor Margaret Cohen, we’re imagining a truly interdisciplinary humanities curriculum integrated with ocean science. The Cal Poly Solano Campus is an ideal laboratory for this work, since we have dedicated oceanic studies faculty in humanities, oceanography and maritime practice — the three legs essential to a comprehensive oceanic studies curriculum.

Q: What is the most unique class that you teach?

A: Maritime Culture is an upper division course examining aspects of seafaring life that the general public assumes to be true, like burly, rowdy sailors who drink too much alcohol and get in fights; myths like “women are bad luck on ships”; the idea that sailors are always patriotic, loyal protectors of their nation and more. This class started as a direct challenge to students’ misconceptions about the profession that I knew to be false, harmful or both.



CHRISTOPHER CHIEGO

DEPARTMENT: Philosophy, ISS program
SPECIALTY AREA: How people and states learn from war and conflict
YEARS AT CAL POLY MARITIME ACADEMY: 5

Q: What drew you to this particular area of study?
A: I’ve always been fascinated by why people fight each other over political issues, and what the legacy of that conflict is today. I’m particularly interested in why some wars appear to decisively resolve the issues at stake, while others are followed by repeated or renewed conflict.

Q: What kind of real-world problems do students tackle in your courses?
A: Simulations are a core feature of education at Cal Poly Maritime Academy, and I incorporate them heavily into my courses. In Model United Nations, students engage in multiple simulations, representing countries or individuals in varied contexts. In U.S. Foreign Policy, students research members of the National Security Council and role-play them in a weeklong simulation responding to a chemical weapons attack. In Polar Politics, students simulate the Arctic Council, navigating consensus building among member states and indigenous groups.

Q: What is a recent project that you’re especially excited about?
A: Over the past year, I have been working on a project to catalog every sea-borne invasion in an international or internal war within the past 200 years. A team of volunteer undergraduate research assistants has helped me sort through a large number of historical cases and materials as we seek to understand why some seaborne invasions succeed and others fail.



AMY SKOLL

DEPARTMENT: Philosophy, ISS program
SPECIALTY AREA: External intervention in civil conflicts; international migration; maritime foreign policy
YEARS AT CAL POLY MARITIME ACADEMY: 4

Q: What are your research or scholarly pursuits?
A: I primarily research external intervention in civil conflicts, which stems from my longstanding passion to understand why conflicts occur and how we can prevent and resolve them.

Q: What is your favorite class to teach?
A: I have the pleasure of teaching our senior-level civil conflict course, which requires students to dive into quantitative scholarly research on civil conflicts. The semester culminates in a final presentation where students must apply research to a real-world case of civil conflict and present the policy recommendations and/or implications to their classmates as if it were a professional policy presentation.

Q: What meaning or purpose do you find in teaching?
A: While I have a wide range of research interests, teaching and mentoring students remain at the heart of my work. I’m deeply committed to preparing the next generation of leaders who are prepared to tackle the world’s biggest challenges. As a Cal Poly political science 2013 alum myself, I am excited to return to my alma mater to continue building up the next generation of leaders alongside my new CLA colleagues.



SARAH SENK (she/her)

DEPARTMENT: English
SPECIALTY AREAS: Memory studies; 20th century and contemporary literature and poetry; film and visual culture
YEARS AT CAL POLY MARITIME ACADEMY: 9

Q: What topics are you most passionate about exploring in your work?
A: My work primarily falls within the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, exploring how societies remember and make meaning from the past. I often use the term “commemorative practice” to describe my focus on how art and cultural expression respond to large-scale tragedies such as wars, genocides, natural disasters and pandemics, as well as more prolonged forms of structural violence and neglect.

Q: What is a recent or cool project that you’re especially excited about?
A: I recently teamed up with my colleague Taiyo Inoue to launch a new podcast, “My Robot Teacher.” Funded by California Education Learning Lab, the show explores the intersection of artificial intelligence and education — from its practical use in the classroom to its impact on the roles of students and educators. Find us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and YouTube. Learn more by visiting clearninglab.org/myrobotteacher/. I also advise the national nonprofit, Marked By COVID, in creating a national virtual reality (VR) COVID-19 memorial. Snapchat partnered with us to fund a VR lens pro bono, available for download at markedbycovid.com/memorial.

Q: How does Learn by Doing shape your approach to teaching?
A: Cal Poly Maritime Academy is deeply rooted in experiential learning. In my classes, students are constantly engaging in multiple lines of interpretation and inquiry, learning to assess and evaluate them with objectivity. Before the rise of AI, students often collaborated on essays to develop critical thinking and communication skills. Today, we’ve adapted by incorporating tools like ChatGPT to foster AI literacy, which I believe is an essential skill in our current world.

NICOLE STAUFFER, KELSEY MARLETTE

SARAH SENK



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Read the faculty members’ full responses in the online version of Impact magazine.



2+2 Sociology Program Brings Bachelor's Degrees Closer to Home



Left to Right: Chris Tidd, Lata Murti, Katherine Grose, Tawny Lino, Norma Salinas and Amgel Tacbas.

Students face many challenges, but the 2+2 sociology degree ensures that geography is less of a barrier.

A partnership with Allan Hancock College is bringing Cal Poly's renowned education to students in northern Santa Barbara County. Through this program, students will complete a two-year associate degree for transfer at Allan Hancock College, apply to Cal Poly as transfer students, and then complete two additional years in Cal Poly's sociology program, but on Allan Hancock's campus.

In fall 2024, the first student cohort joined the Mustang family. While 2+2 students are Cal Poly transfer students, the

program offers a flexible structure tailored to students balancing school with work and family obligations. Cal Poly faculty teach required courses in person on the Santa Maria campus, and classes are block-scheduled to accommodate students' busy lives.

"I probably wouldn't have gone back to school if this program wasn't available," said Tawny Lino, a student in the inaugural cohort. "Logistically, it wouldn't have worked for me. I have two young kids. I work eight hours a day — the commute alone would have made it very difficult. A bachelor's degree probably wouldn't have been in my future, but now I'm thinking of getting my master's degree and working with the VA as a licensed clinical social worker."

Lino also credited Cal Poly advising staff for helping her navigate her academic plan. "They were able to rearrange my schedule because I had a lot of transfer credits, so I'll graduate a little bit earlier than my cohort."

Once admitted, 2+2 students become fully enrolled Cal Poly students with access to the university's support services and resources — many of which they can access virtually. "I was surprised by how they want to bring everything to us," added Angel Tacbas, another cohort member. "I thought we would have to come to San Luis Obispo to figure out financial aid or come to meetings, but they reach out to us over Zoom. Knowing that we can still enjoy Cal Poly's campus resources like the library makes the experience better, but I can feel

that the university wants to bring everything to us."

While the 2+2 sociology program is Cal Poly's first, it reflects the university's broader mission to expand access for qualified transfer students by reimagining what access to a four-year degree looks like. This fall, the Bailey College of Science and Match and Cuesta College are launching a similar program for liberal studies students pursuing careers in teaching, and another Allan Hancock 2+2 business administration program with the Orfalea College of Business has been announced for 2026.

"This program is a great example of what can happen when we rethink traditional models and work to remove barriers for students," said Al Liddicoat, Cal Poly's



Students from the first cohort visited Cal Poly for the 2025 Social Sciences Career Expo and met with Dean Murphy.

"This program is a great example of what can happen when we rethink traditional models and work to remove barriers for students"

interim provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. "By partnering with community colleges like Allan Hancock, we're expanding access to Cal Poly's exceptional programs while maintaining the Learn by Doing experience and student support that define us."

The cohort-based model encourages students to form lasting connections with peers while easing logistical burdens like course registration. According to faculty and students alike, this tight-knit environment has been one of the most meaningful aspects of the program.

"Connecting so well with my cohort makes things so nice because you have this sense of family when you're doing the program together," said Norma Salinas, another 2+2 student. "You don't feel like you're the only one stressing out over these deadlines. That aspect of the program surprised me, but I think it makes things a lot easier as opposed to taking a bunch

of classes with different people. In that setting, you don't make those same connections."

Graduates of the program will be equipped for careers in social work, education, criminal justice and nonprofit organizations — many with plans to stay and serve their local communities. Students have shared goals that range from earning master's degrees to becoming licensed clinical social workers or teachers.

"This is an amazing group of students," said Lata Murti, sociology lecturer and 2+2 recruitment and retention coordinator. "I'm learning as much from them as I hope they're learning from me. In Santa Maria, there aren't many opportunities for higher education, so we're looking at challenges as possibilities. I think this program is going to make a bigger impact than we can see right now."

Faculty Sound Off

what role does **AI** play in your classroom?

In April 2025, California State University launched ChatGPT Edu, a private version of ChatGPT funded by the Chancellor's Office to encourage innovation. Between AI's availability on campuses and prevalence in the news, the technology and surrounding issues have become too big to ignore.

We asked faculty from across the CLA how they are using and/or critiquing AI in their classes.

- How are they teaching students about the risks and limitations?
- What opportunities does AI provide in their specific fields?
- How are they engaging with AI's ethical implications?

Their individual opinions provide a snapshot of their views at this point in AI's development. It's important to note that they do not reflect Cal Poly's position on AI, and that their opinions may change as the technology continues to evolve.

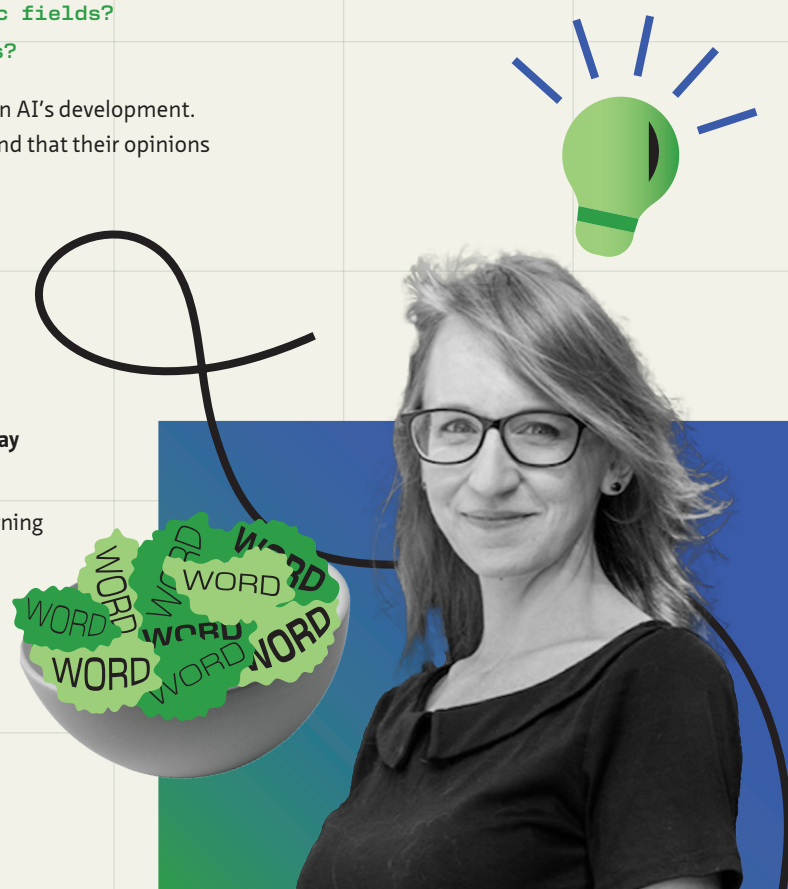
CASEY MCDONALD-LIU

Assistant Professor, Journalism

Watching that lightbulb moment, when they realize they nearly gave away their voice to a computer, is one of my greatest joys as an educator.

In my strategic communications class, I use AI to eliminate hurdles to learning (like formatting citations) and as a tool to stand out in the online crowd by comparing AI slop with a genuine conversational human voice. But while AI is creating the ultimate generic writing, I show my students how to use it as a jumping off point to stand out through comparison.

AI can be fantastic for ideation and clarity. But nothing turns off a reader faster than empty professional word salad. In the attention economy, that dead-eyed, uncanny valley writing AI often generates is like white noise, which can kill my students' careers before they start.



I use AI to structure my ideas, too, but I have worked in my field long enough to know when AI is giving me garbage. Most people can feel it, even if they don't understand why. The type of effective communication that will make my students irreplaceable in the workforce is everything that makes them human. My students don't have that kind of long perspective. Worse, they don't think they're smarter than AI, which is a tragedy.

All this to say, if they really believe the AI "slop" is preferable, one of my favorite classroom strategies is having students use AI to write a short statement about their "why." Then, I ask them to write it again, entirely from scratch. The AI version may inform the structure of the second draft, but their own words are always more powerful, passionate and much more pleasurable to read. The best part is when I read both aloud to the student. Their version feels like a warm hug, and they can hear the difference.

STINA ATTEBURY

Full-Time Lecturer,
Interdisciplinary Studies
in the Liberal Arts

I hope my classes help develop critical frameworks to think about the cultural, political and economic impact of any new technology.

I work to demystify generative AI in my courses on technology, media, art and popular culture. There's a lot of speculation about AI reshaping the future, but much of this hype glosses over how these programs function. I have banned generative AI use for all my course assignments, while scheduling readings and discussions about how it works to encourage critical thinking about AI.

It's worth noting that students are scrutinizing faculty's AI use as much as we are observing theirs, and that overreliance on Large Language Models (LLM) risks devaluing the kind of mentorship that many students want. When I ask students about their own experiences with LLMs, some report feeling upset when their professors tell them to consult ChatGPT instead of coming to office hours or use ChatGPT to grade student work.

I introduce students to a variety of texts to help contextualize their personal experiences. The reading I use most often is "ChatGPT is a Blurry JPEG of the Web" by Ted Chiang, published in The New Yorker in February 2023. Chiang does an excellent job explaining how generative AI compresses data and interpolates possible missing pieces of text to create a "blurry" version of the original texts. This reading helps reframe LLMs as "lossy text-compression algorithms" rather than "artificial intelligence" — an important first step in grappling with what these programs can and cannot do. Our discussions teach students to think critically about technology: the tech industry pressures to continually market novelty; the history of de-skilling, labor and automation; and the impact of LLMs on students' own capacity for critical thought.



Faculty Sound Off

If an LLM can help streamline writing or research, it can only do so for people who already know how to do these tasks unassisted. It takes a certain level of expertise to know that generative AI is hallucinating or oversimplifying information. LLMs are only useful for people who have already built up the experience to use them skillfully — not students. Students need a supportive space to struggle with new information and skills.

MARC HALUSIC

Part-Time Lecturer, Psychology and Child Development

We still find value in bouncing ideas off other humans even if we don't expect them to have 100% factual knowledge, and that should be the approach we take with AI.

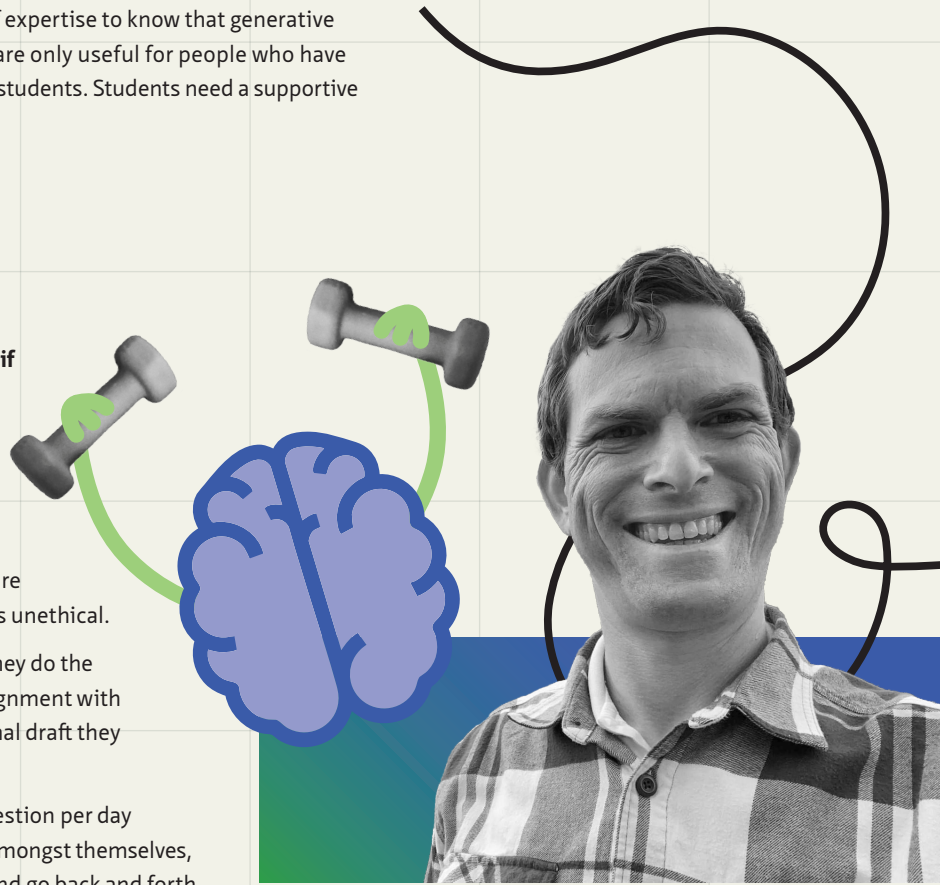
I use the metaphor of my class assignments training students' brains like lifting weights would make them stronger. If they use AI like a personal trainer who gives them pointers, I fully support and encourage them. If they're using AI like a machine to lift their weights for them, that is unethical.

Students may use AI for written assignments, but only if they do the assignment on their own first and submit the original assignment with their conversation with AI to improve it, followed by the final draft they made with AI pointers and feedback.

To teach this style of thinking, I have one AI discussion question per day in my classes. Students break into small groups, discuss it amongst themselves, and then feed their group answer into AI to get feedback and go back and forth to get a better answer. They learn to find a better answer iteratively. Going forward, I also intend to assign the podcast episode Less Chat More Bot on the excellent podcast You Are Not So Smart, which does a phenomenal job of breaking down better and worse ways to use AI.

I am also finding creative ways to use AI with our new access to chatGPT. I have started creating custom GPTS for my students that will quiz them on the material for each exam in a conversational way. I instruct my students to use the GPT in Voice Mode, and then it does a decent job of simulating a fellow student or tutor asking questions and giving feedback on the accuracy and quality of answers.

If you are using AI just to get factual answers, you are using it in the worst possible way. AI should be treated as a smart but imperfect conversation partner who can push on our ideas and challenge us to think more creatively.



AVA THOMAS WRIGHT

Assistant Professor, Philosophy

Writing is a form of thinking, and the goal of AI use in writing must be to empower autonomous thinking, not undermine or corrupt it.

In all my course exams, students evaluate AI-generated answers to short-essay questions. Students judge each AI answer as "exactly right," "partly right," or "wrong," and then explain why. LLMs tend to provide the most popular answer, even when it rests on a misunderstanding or error. Students working through the exam learn how persuasive AI can be, even when its answer is vague, incoherent, hallucinated or outright wrong. Genuine critical thinking skills are required to see these kinds of flaws in logic or evidence when the answers are couched in such fluent language.

In my Ethics, Science and Technology course (PHI 323), we explicitly examine the ethical risks of pursuing artificial general intelligence (AGI) — the goal of developers such as OpenAI. Powerful AGI must be programmed to "align" its objectives with human objectives and values; otherwise, the AGI may act in unethical ways that we cannot foresee or control. These are known as the "value alignment" and "control" problems in AI ethics, and we review some prominent attempts at solutions.

In my 2025-26 Philosophical Research and Writing course (PHIL 300), along with two colleagues and three student assistants, we will conduct a systematic review of how AI should be used for writing argumentative research essays, supported by a CSU AIEIC grant. I also direct the AI Ethics Lab, interdisciplinary, collaborative faculty-student research and writing lab for AI ethics topics. The lab is still small but growing.

In PHIL 300, students experiment with using ChatGPT to assist in each stage of the writing process, reflecting on best practices as we go. However, it is crucial that students learn the writing process themselves before they resort to using AI.



Faculty Sound Off



Keep reading online: Hear from faculty in art and design, graphic communication, communication studies, and philosophy at cla.calpoly.edu/faculty-sound-off

INTENTIONAL

STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE COLLEGE ARE WORKING IN THEIR FIELDS



Ella Jane Tune

GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

As an artist's apprentice for Minga Opazo, a fourth-generation textile crafter, Ella Jane Tune (Graphic Communication, '25) learned to appreciate the creative chaos behind professional art.

During the internship, Tune collaborated with Opazo to create artwork, actively exploring solutions to the fashion and textile industry's negative environmental impact. Opazo, an Ojai-based artist with Chilean roots, produces works that explore the relationship between climate change, textile production and Chilean textile history and design.

After graduation, Tune plans to continue working with Opazo, assisting her in both studio practice and design work.

"Working in the professional art world has helped me overcome many of the fears and imposter syndrome I used to carry," Tune said. "Through working closely with Minga, I have seen what it truly looks like to build a life around creativity, and I have learned that it is not only possible but also deeply fulfilling."



Brendan McCann

HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

As a collections and research intern at the historic Hearst Castle, Brendan McCann developed a deep appreciation for public service.

Hearst Castle, newspaper and media mogul William Randolph Hearst's hilltop estate, overlooks San Simeon, less than 50 miles north of San Luis Obispo. McCann, a fourth-year history and political science double major, assisted with day-to-day operations: cleaning artifacts, opening tour routes and completing several research projects.

One project involved tracing the journeys of 22,000 artifacts housed at the castle. McCann examined original receipts, shipping logs and correspondence to reveal the individual story behind each item.

"My favorite part of the internship was the castle itself," McCann said. "Each day felt like stepping onto the set of a film, from the scenic drive up the hill passing by zebras and having to navigate around Barbary sheep, to the hands-on experience of helping unfurl a massive, centuries-old tapestry. The setting made every task feel meaningful and memorable."

ELLA JANE TUNE, BRENDAN MCCANN

INTERNSHIPS

BEFORE THEY GRADUATE, BUILDING THE SKILLS TO BE READY DAY ONE.



Giovanni Albarez

POLITICAL SCIENCE

During his internship with Invariant, a bipartisan business advisory and public affairs firm, Giovanni Albarez witnessed the dynamic process of public policy actions.

Albarez, a third-year political science major with a concentration in pre-law studies, worked as a consumer products government relations intern, contributing to a wide range of public policy-related assignments. His work ranged from monitoring how federal legislation and regulatory developments affect major businesses like Toyota and Home Depot, to attending congressional hearings and drafting reports for Fortune 500 companies.

His experience at Invariant strengthened both his desire for a career in policy analysis or government affairs, and his confidence in pursuing roles that bridge the gap between public and private sectors.

"It was eye-opening to see how much interns can support real client work and how much our contributions are valued when we take initiative and pay attention to detail," Albarez said. "It made me realize how important it is to be proactive and well-informed, even as a student stepping into the professional world."

GIOVANNI ALBAREZ, CLEO COWELL



Cleo Cowell

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

During her internship with Amy's Kitchen, a Northern California food manufacturing company, Cleo Cowell (Interdisciplinary Studies, '25) gained insight into the organic food industry.

As a marketing and communications intern, Cowell worked to promote the opening of Amy's new headquarters in Petaluma. She wrote compelling product descriptions and press releases, managed nonprofit partnership to optimize community outreach and spearheaded a project charter for the company's campus ambassador program.

Cowell was pleasantly surprised to see that Amy's Kitchen, a multi-million dollar brand, still prepares recipes by hand.

"My internship opened my eyes to how a company can grow without ever compromising its values," Cowell said. "Seeing how Amy's stays family-owned and independent showed me that profit doesn't have to come at the cost of integrity, community or sustainability. It inspired me to build a career helping companies sell authentic stories and do good for people and the planet, not just the bottom line."

INTENTIONAL INTERNSHIPS



Lyla Runkel

SOCIOLOGY

As a two-time intern for the Marin County District Attorney, Lyla Runkel gained a new perspective. The fourth-year sociology student with a criminal-justice concentration worked with both the criminal prosecutions team and the special victims unit, analyzing firearm possession charges, listening to jail call recordings, reviewing evidence, assisting in court and more. Throughout both internships, Runkel particularly enjoyed working with violent crime victims and providing them comfort throughout the trial process. “It changed the way I live my day-to-day life, what I want to pursue in my future and how I treat people,” Runkel said. “One of the most important things I learned during this internship is that you truly never know what someone else is going through. Every individual has hardship in their life, and therefore, everyone deserves equal respect.”



Trey Bernard

ART AND DESIGN

As a marketing intern with Cal Poly Athletics, Trey Bernard is combining his many passions: sports, photography, graphic design and live production. In this role, Bernard’s responsibilities include working alongside the game day operations team to organize halftime promotions and presentations, communicating with the film and live productions team to perfect camera angles, and creating graphics for social media, advertisements and merchandise. While the third-year art and design student initially hoped to pursue a career in architecture, this internship has allowed him to unlock new aspirations. “Now that I have had the opportunity to dive into a different industry and see the tremendous impact and work that goes behind the scenes at games and events, it is something that I am passionate about,” Bernard said. “That is something that I think is so valuable: being able to get hands-on, real-world experience on campus.”

LYLA RUNKEL, TREY BERNARD



Cal Poly Arts is redefining what access to the arts looks like for the San Luis Obispo community. From professional musicians and Broadway actors to photojournalists and circus performers, Cal Poly Arts ensures these artists engage directly with the community. Its programs help everyone to experience world-class performances, regardless of income or background.



POLY ARTS FOR YOUTH: BRINGING THE STAGE TO STUDENTS

Through the Poly Arts for Youth program, local K-12 students experience inspiring performances and hands-on workshops in their own schools, all at no cost. With support from generous donors, these events allow students to learn from globally recognized artists. In the 2024–25 season, students across San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties heard a talk by award-winning photojournalist Ami Vitale, juggled with the co-founders of ARC Circus and enjoyed a spirited performance of Mariachi Garibaldi de Jaime Cuéllar.

Lightwire Theater, a company that fuses puppetry, technology and theatre for a unique storytelling experience, taught students choreography from their show “Dino Light.” “We are fortunate to have these opportunities free of charge,” said Teri Block, a fourth-grade teacher at Los Ranchos Elementary School. “The PAFY program is essential to expanding access to the arts. These experiences not only augment the curriculum but ignite a love for learning and creativity.”



PASSPORT TO THE ARTS: ACCESS FOR ALL

Launched in 2022, the Passport to the Arts initiative breaks down barriers by offering free or deeply discounted tickets to low-income SLO County residents. In partnership with organizations such as Housing Authority San Luis Obispo and Court Appointed Special Advocates, Cal Poly Arts connects hundreds of community members with transformative live arts experiences. During the 2024–25 season alone, more than 1,100 discounted student tickets were sold and over 1,480 free tickets were distributed to underserved communities. Eight artist-led workshops and talks reached more than 750 people.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

You can ensure these programs continue transforming lives for years to come by supporting the Cal Poly Arts endowment. Reaching the \$2.5 million goal will provide \$100,000 annually in stable, long-term funding.

An endowment allows Cal Poly Arts to weather economic uncertainties, continue attracting top-tier talent, take creative risks, innovate and evolve, ensuring the arts continue to inspire and connect our community.

“As we celebrate our 40th anniversary, we’re thinking not just about where we’ve been, but where we’re going,” said Molly Clark, Cal Poly Arts director. “The endowment is about building a legacy. It’s an investment in future generations of students, artists and audiences. Every gift brings us closer to a sustainable future where the arts are accessible to all.”

For those who believe in the power of the arts to educate, inspire and unite, this is a chance to make a lasting difference.



CAL POLY’S LEARN BY DOING ETHOS

Cal Poly students gain exclusive access to master classes and behind-the-scenes opportunities with visiting performers. These hands-on experiences bring the university’s Learn by Doing philosophy to life.

KCPR radio students met with “This American Life” host Ira Glass in a Zoom workshop, learning compelling storytelling techniques.

Theater students participated in an audition workshop with Hatty Ryan King, lead actress in the Broadway tour of “Dear Evan Hansen.”

Dance students studied with performers from MOMIX, a company of dancer-illusionists, Complexions Contemporary Ballet and “Hadestown,” learning choreography from the productions.

The Cal Poly Drumline worked with The Pack Drumline, a Chicago-based percussion group known for high-energy performances, to blend movement with rhythm.

The Cal Poly Big Band participated in a Q&A with the jazz ensemble Brandee Younger Trio about the realities of life as a professional musician.



ENRICHING COMMUNITIES

Beyond these established programs, Cal Poly Arts is always finding ways to engage more with underserved communities.

In 2025, The Pack Drumline visited youths at SLO County Juvenile Hall to teach the value of dedication and teamwork through percussion. The Pack Drumline itself began in 2014 as an after-school program for at-risk youth in Chicago.

Tap dancer and choreography Caleb Teicher led a Lindy Hop class at the Academy of Dance, followed by an open swing night at Madonna Inn.

At Pacheco Elementary, storyteller and musician David Gonzalez shared bilingual folk tales from Puerto Rico, Colombia, Africa and beyond.



Poly Gives 2025

Thanks to donors like you, the Dean’s Advisory Council and the department advisory boards, the CLA will continue increasing Learn by Doing opportunities:

TOTAL DOLLARS RAISED: **\$78,235** – a nearly **15%** increase from 2024

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL DONORS: **252** individual donors – the **highest** among Cal Poly’s six colleges for the second-straight year

\$22,500 IN CHALLENGE GIFTS:

\$7,500 Dean’s Advisory Board Challenge

\$5,000 Political Science Advisory Board Challenge

\$5,000 Graphic Communication Advisory Board Challenge

\$5,000 Mustang Band Challenge

Enabling Excellence

Gifts from friends and alumni enable the CLA and its departments to provide high-impact Learn by Doing practices, projects and extracurricular programs. Thank you to all our supporters for helping CLA sustain the margin of excellence that Cal Poly students expect and deserve.



Scan this code with your smartphone camera to donate online. Make a one-time or recurring gift online at giving.calpoly.edu.

Dean's Advisory Council

Special thanks to members of the Dean’s Advisory Council for their contributions to the College of Liberal Arts.

- **Sarah Carvalho Khan**
(English, '98)
Vice President of People Operations and Talent Management, Codexis
- **Laura Diaz**
(English, '80)
News Anchor, KTTV Fox 11 News

- **Melissa Figueroa**
(Journalism, '02)
Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer and Lange
- **Dan Rivoire**
(Philosophy, '07)
Executive Director - Leadership Development, SLO Chamber of Commerce

- **Samantha Schneider**
(Speech Communication, '98)
CEO and Principal, AmpersandPeople, Inc.
- **Junior Tauvaa**
(Political Science, '96)
Senior Vice President - Sales and Services, Visit Anaheim

- **Christopher Trapani**
(Political Science, '90)
Founder and CEO, Christie’s International Real Estate Sereno
- **Matt Edling**
(Political Science, '02)
Partner & Co-Founder, Sher Edling LLP

LEADING BY LOOKING FORWARD

2024 Honored Alum – Sarah Carvalho Khan

Sarah Carvalho Khan (English, '98) is the vice president of People Operations and Talent Management at Codexis, a San Francisco-based enzyme engineering company focused on improving pharmaceutical manufacturing. She has brought her expertise in leadership to the CLA Dean's Advisory Council since 2016, where she helped reimagine the board's mission, in addition to extensive volunteer work in her community.

Khan has built a career by aligning work with her personal values. She began her journey of self-discovery as a Cal Poly transfer student, where she forged connections during Week of Welcome. "The community saved me, in a way, because there was a lot of positive peer pressure," Khan said. "I met people who encouraged me to form deep relationships, and that changed everything for me."

These friendships helped her find her place on campus as one of Cal Poly's few students of color in the 1990s. "I didn't see a lot of people who looked like me, but it was a bigger challenge for my dad when he came here in the 1960s," she said of her father, Shafiq A. Khan (Electrical Engineering '71), who encouraged her to attend. "Cal Poly was a solid bedrock. It opened doors I would not have expected," she said.

Khan went on to earn a master's in organization and leadership from the University of San Francisco, blending a humanities foundation with strategic leadership training. "Right out of grad school, I realized the importance of values driving my decisions," said Khan. "I chose the biotech field because the work aligns with my values, helping people and the planet," she said. "I stay in this industry as a conscious choice."

After a brief stint as a consultant, Khan took a sabbatical in Europe, studying French and reassessing her goals. When she joined Codexis as a senior director in 2024, she was quickly promoted to vice president. Now, she builds systems to support employee development, equity and wellness. "I'm creating processes to track high-potential employees and help them grow," she said.

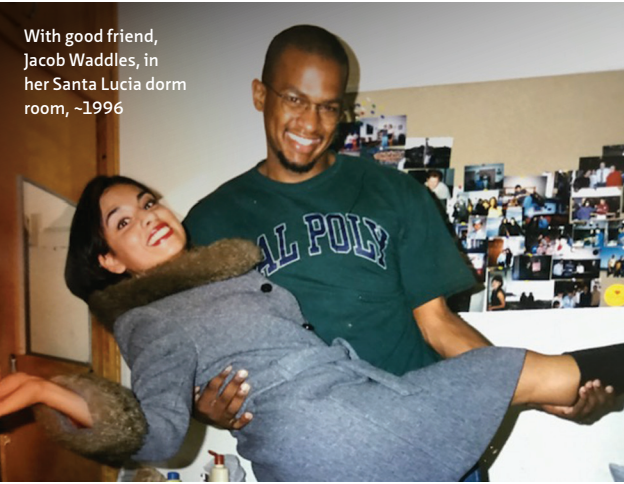
"Over the years, I've learned how to use my voice," Khan said. "I'm not afraid to speak up, and I think more people need to know they have that right. Everyone has a voice and should use it."



Sarah Khan



With Linda Haliskj, CLA dean, at Cal Poly's English department graduation, June 1998.



With good friend, Jacob Waddles, in her Santa Lucia dorm room, ~1996

CLASS NOTES

Share your recent news in the next Impact magazine at cla.calpoly.edu/update.

1970s

Walter Harris (Sociology, '73) was honored with the Cal Poly Office of University Diversity and Inclusion's 2025 MLK Legacy Award for his work advancing equality, opportunity and justice in the campus community. Harris retired in 2012 as Cal Poly's associate director of admissions and recruitment, capping a 39-year career.

Sherry Shahan (Social Sciences, '78) was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry and the Pushcart Prize in Short Fiction, Best American Short Stories and Best of the Net. Her art has appeared in 134 national and international literary journals since 2021.

1980s

Leslie Baker (Child Development, '83) is the CEO and president of Therapy2Thrive, a marriage and family counseling center in Pleasanton, California. In 2024, Baker co-edited the 2024 book "Assessing and Treating Suicidal Thinking and Behaviors in Children and Adolescents."

MaryAnne Talbott (Journalism, '89) and her husband, Chris Lopez, established the Alamosa Citizen, an online news outlet serving Colorado's rural San Luis Valley with digital news, podcasts and video content. In recognition of their work, Alamosa Citizen received a two-year, \$100,000 grant from Press Forward, administered by the Miami Foundation, to support

the organization's growth and development.

1990s

Lisa Travis (Political Science, '92) is a career public servant and attorney who has returned to campus as part of the Political Science Alumni Advisory Board.

Greg Manifold (Journalism, '99) was promoted to head of visuals for The Washington Post. In this role, Manifold coordinates visual production across all aspects of The Post and leads the design, photo and graphics departments.

2000s

Emily Bernard (Sorensen-Lindsey) (Psychology, '05) completed her doctorate in clinical psychology with honors in July 2024. She then went on to publish her doctoral project and is now a registered psychology associate.

2010s

Nestor Veloz-Passalacqua (Ethnic Studies, '11, Master of Public Policy '16) joined the City of Raleigh, North Carolina, as the director of equity and inclusion in December 2024, bringing more than a decade of experience.

Froggy Phevoli (Journalism, '15) published their first novel, "Side Effect," a science fiction young adult novel in October 2024.

Carol Wang (Psychology, '15) currently serves as a research advisor for We Are Here, a startup transforming the landscape of cancer navigation for patients

and their support team. She was also selected as the new director of education and research at Central Health in Austin, Texas, which serves over 150,000 patients a year.

Mitchell Judson (Political Science, '17) returned to Cal Poly as the alumni outreach programs specialist for Alumni Engagement. Prior to this role, Judson was a social studies teacher and later worked for San Luis Obispo County.

Allison Newlee (Psychology, '17) is the assistant coordinator of the San Diego State University Pride Center.

Jeremiah Hernandez (Comparative Ethnic Studies, '18) is coordinator of the Cal Poly Latine/x Center for Academic Success and Achievement (La CASA). Hernandez's goal as coordinator is to provide the same care and support for Cal Poly students that he received from his mentors, advisors, counselors and professors.

Leah Castillo (Journalism, '19) is the lead customer service success manager at Gong, which uses proprietary artificial intelligence technology to enhance customer interactions. Castillo was recognized as the Commercial CSM of the Year at Gong in early 2025.

Oscar Velasco (History, '19) has been recognized as one of Santa Barbara County's 2025 Distinguished New Educator Award recipients. A dedicated teacher at Santa Maria High School, Velasco was nominated by his peers and selected by a countywide panel of educators, administrators, business and community partners.

2020s

Taryn McLaughlin (English, '20)

started a new position as a law clerk for the U.S. District Court, Southern District of California, supporting a federal judge through legal research, opinion drafting and administrative tasks.

Campbell Warren (Communication Studies, '20) returned to Cal Poly this spring as a personnel analyst for University Development and Alumni Engagement, assisting with recruitments, compliance and trainings and division recognition programs.

Kylie Clark (Communication Studies, '20) was named policy and advocacy manager for the Silicon Valley Council of Non-profits in January 2025.

Izzy Pascua (Graphic Communication, '23) was promoted to product designer at CNN. As a junior product designer in 2024, Pascua helped create interactive maps for CNN during the 2024 presidential election.

Adam Kemp (Communication Studies, '23) is co-owner of Thrifty Beaches, a sustainability-focused vintage clothing and furniture store with locations in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara.

Catherine Allen (Journalism, '24) joined POLITICO in January as a data and graphics reporter covering energy and environment.

Amy Contreras (Comparative Ethnic Studies, '24) was one of five spring interns for the Los Angeles Times. Contreras worked on De Los, the Los Angeles Times vertical that explores Latine culture and identity.

Cristian Ulisses Reyes (Child Development, '24) was selected as the 2025 Dallas Martin Endowment Policy Intern for the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

LET'S MEET AT THE LIBRARY

**ROBERT E. KENNEDY LIBRARY IS NEWLY
RENOVATED AND RE-OPENED!**



FIND EXPERT ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The new Digital Scholarship Studio, located at the center of the first floor, is a one-stop shop for research support.

- Find peer-to-peer research help with basic questions.
- Work with expert staff and students on data, digital tools, visualization and more!
- The Digital Scholarship Studio can help through the entire research process for course assignments, senior projects, master's theses or creative inquiry

MORE INFORMATION:

guides.lib.calpoly.edu/DPL
guides.lib.calpoly.edu/research-helpdesk

ENJOY BOOKS AND PRINT MATERIALS

Check out the print collections for liberal arts subjects.

- The third floor houses the new books shelf and the main collection books for philosophy, psychology, history and social sciences.
- The fourth floor houses nearly all main collection books classified as literature, or P, in the Library of Congress call number system, with PS (American literature) spilling up onto the fifth floor.
- Self checkout has arrived! Use the first-floor kiosk or download the Cal Poly Library Self Checkout app to checkout books from your phone.

QUESTIONS? TRY THE FAQ:

calstate.libanswers.com/calpolyslofaq

CREATE COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

The improved library's new features make it a comfortable "third space," distinct from home or work, where visitors can collaborate, socialize and build community.

- The entire building is now air-conditioned!
- 24/7 study space throughout the entire first and second floors, accessible with a student Poly Card.
- Fuel up at the Café Lounge, now at the front of the library.
- Enjoy the new soft seating study area on the second floor, sponsored by donors.
- Study in the open spaces and collaborate in reservable "fishbowl" spaces.

EXPERIENCE CAL POLY HISTORY

Visit Special Collections and University Archives on the fourth floor.

- Scholars can explore physical and digital archives that bring Cal Poly history to life.
- Faculty may work with archive staff to bring classes to the archives, where students gain hands-on research experience.
- Special Collections and Archives acquires, preserves, interprets and provides access to primary research materials in their original formats to support discovery, education and re-search across disciplines.

MORE INFORMATION:

guides.lib.calpoly.edu/archives