

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE, CREATE AND TRAVEL

MEET SOME OF THE 2022 LIBERAL ARTS AND ENGINEERING STUDIES PROGRAM GRADUATES AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR SENIOR PROJECTS

Since its inception in 2007, the liberal arts and engineering studies (LAES) program has forged its own path in novel interdisciplinary study as one of the few Cal Poly programs created and housed within two colleges. Students essentially create their own majors by combining two concentrations, one from each college, and study abroad/global perspectives courses.

Faculty co-directors David Gillette (English) and Michael Haungs (Computer Science) spearhead the program from the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Engineering, respectively, with invaluable support from Program Coordinator Luna Larsen. Gillette says LAES alumni have gone on to work for Apple, Disney, Microsoft, Sony and Tesla as well as various companies abroad.

“The LAES program now has many graduates successfully pursuing master’s degrees with some of the best graduate programs in the country, researching advanced system design, computer science, psychology, community development and environmental studies, along with a few currently completing their Ph.D. studies,” Gillette said.

“Our students are very passionate about their education and choose LAES to gain the flexibility they need to build a curriculum that is laser focused on the careers they want to have. While our students choose widely varying careers, such as user experience [UX] designer, product manager, game designer or audio engineer, they all require knowledge and experience that comes from blending engineering and the arts,” Haungs said.



▶ LORENZO ‘ENZO’ SISON

Enzo Sison leveraged his LAES education and his passions for surfing, the environment and people to create an app for his senior project, “Memory Surf.”

“The goal of the project is to deploy technology to make surfing a more enriching experience, encourage people to surf more often, and to build and share cherished memories,” Sison said.

Sison can’t go into too much detail on the app just yet as he is currently developing his project into a business — a pursuit with which he is very familiar.

In middle school, Sison started a YouTube channel where he recorded himself playing video games, receiving 5.6 million views and earning more than 25,000 subscribers. Sison credits his channel with fostering his interest in building brands through the intersection of liberal arts, engineering and business.

“When I was looking for schools, they specifically needed to meet those criteria of art, business and engineering,” Sison said. “It was really hard to find schools that had a mixture of those, and Cal Poly did. I think that Cal Poly really hit the nail on the head with this major.”



▶ ALESSANDRA GARDNER

Alessandra Gardner's experience with the LAES program began with a fortuitous trip to South Africa as part of the alternative breaks program. There, she met co-director David Gillette and participated in an eye-opening "collaborative, storytelling project" that sealed LAES as her perfect major.

For her senior project, she combined her childhood interests of science, art and movies into an educational storytelling project, making full use of her minors in sustainability engineering and interactive communication with a cinematic focus. Gardner, alongside two other students, worked on the LAES Seeds in Stem program to present an interactive, virtual STEM workshop to elementary and middle school students in Santa Maria, California.

Gardner's role in the project included research into the community, the creation of the alien character "Airam," and ideating the story concept the students would follow throughout the workshop.

Post-graduation, Gardner took her multidisciplinary skills and applied them as a production assistant on local commercial sets. She now has her sights set on finally combining her childhood passions into one job: working for a science media company.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF ALESSANDRA GARDNER; JONATHAN FISHER

▶ JONATHAN FISHER

With a background in both mechanical and software engineering, Jonathan Fisher enrolled in the LAES program so he could "have one foot in engineering yet exercise [my] creative freedom."

To flex his creative side, Fisher joined a senior project team of seven other multidisciplinary students to develop a wine inventory management system for restaurants called "Bottleship."

"Inventory management for wines in the restaurant setting is very complex and wasteful. A lot of times restaurants have hundreds of thousands of dollars tied up in wine just sitting in storage and not being used," Fisher said.

Fisher's role in the project was to develop the digital wine menu and scanning App Clip Code, which allows patrons to download a menu, click into the available wines and learn more about them, including their ideal food pairings.

Post-graduation, Fisher is taking his user experience/user interface skill set with him to Massachusetts to pursue the medical technology industry.

