
A Century of Achievement

1901 -- 2001

While much has changed during Cal Poly's first century, certain enduring themes have survived and grown stronger. They help define the unique and distinctive character of a Cal Poly education.

Today's University, with its emphasis on education in applied fields, remains true in many respects to the original intent of its founding legislation, establishing in 1901 a polytechnic school to "at all times contribute to the industrial welfare of the State of California."

The founders' desire to establish a school that educates the hand as well as the head is still emphasized, in the University's continued commitment to a unique blend of traditional classroom instruction and applied learning outside of class ("learn-by-doing").

It is also preserved in Cal Poly's steady and enthusiastic commitment to an extraordinarily broad and varied co-curricular program – expressed in a myriad of student activities and organizations and a vibrant campus residential community.

The emergence of these distinctive and defining features of the Cal Poly experience is evident across three broad periods in the institution's history:

The School Years (1901 to 1940)

The College Years (1940 to 1972)

The University Years (1972 to the present)

The School Years: 1901-1940

March 8, 1901

California Polytechnic School established

Myron Angel

On **March 8, 1901**, Governor Henry T. Gage signed a bill establishing the **California Polytechnic School**. The event marked the successful culmination of a campaign led by San Luis Obispo journalist **Myron Angel** and leading members of the area's merchant, agriculture, dairy and ranching interests.

Angel, who initially came to California with the Gold Rush of '49, had sought to bring to the Central Coast "a place...for the practical application of the arts and sciences." His vision – an institution for men and women that would "teach the hand as well as the head" – defined the new school's focus and set its course for the future. Eventually restated as "Learn by Doing," Angel's concept for the school reflected progressive views about education that emphasized addressing society's critical needs.

June 1902

Leroy Anderson appointed first director

Leroy Anderson was appointed as the first director of the school in June 1902. On January 31, 1903, the cornerstone for the Administration Building was laid. Construction followed on the boy's dormitory, and land was designated for student farms and construction began on farm buildings.

October 1, 1903

First classes held

Guided by its initial directors and supported by the local community, the California Polytechnic School enrolled its first class of twenty students in 1903. Director Leroy Anderson is pictured at the far right, front row, with the **first faculty and students**. The student body tripled in size within two years, and tripled again three years later.

June 15, 1906

Eight students received diplomas in the **first commencement**, 1906, at California Polytechnic School.

From Cal Poly's first *Annual Catalogue*, May 1903:

The buildings are planned after a modified mission style of architecture and are two stories in height, with a well-lighted basement. The buildings are heated by steam and lighted by electricity.

The **Recitation and Administration Building** contains the Director's offices; the library; lecture rooms and laboratories for chemistry, physics, botany, and entomology; a photographic dark room; an assembly room; two drawing rooms; and two classrooms. The basement contains a temporary dairy room and carpenter shop.

The **Household Arts Building** provides facilities for the study of Domestic Science, including sewing, dressmaking, millinery, cooking, preparing and serving meals, and the home as to its construction, heating, lighting and care.

The **Boys' Dormitory** contains thirty single rooms, a parlor, dining-room, kitchen, laundry, and five bath-rooms. Each room is furnished with an iron bedstead, woven-wire spring, sanitary mattress, pillow, white spread, study table, two chairs, dresser and a rug covering most of the floor.

1907

First three campus buildings

1910

Farmer's Picnic

A robust calendar of sporting events and community activities enlivened the spirit and character of the School. A **Farmer's Institute and Basket Picnic** first held in May 1904, for example, attracted over three thousand visitors to the campus by 1910 and inaugurated an annual tradition that officially became known as Poly Royal in 1933.

1915-16

Military training

In response to State Legislation, compulsory **military training** for men was instituted in 1915. Military discipline and uniforms were required in the dormitories as well as the classrooms. An Academic Department for college preparatory work was added to the three original departments of Agriculture, Mechanics, and Household Arts. In 1917, students began to enlist to fight in World War I. Remaining students participated in war relief projects.

Drastic budget cuts in 1923 forced a reduction in the number of classes offered. Only classes in agriculture, mechanics and printing remained. Nine female students enrolled in printing classes after their former courses of study were eliminated.

1927

Aeronautics

In 1927, the School added a two-year Junior College Division to the four-year secondary vocational program. Engineering/Mechanics was the principal course of study. **Aeronautics** was also offered. The name "Cal Poly" came into popular use.

Women students were excluded from attending Cal Poly by legislative act beginning in 1930 because of lack of on-campus housing for women.

1933

Julian A. McPhee appointed president

Poly Royal

In 1932-33, the State Board of Education directed a major reorganization of the school, abolishing the Junior College Division and the high school courses designed for university transfer. The mission of the school was changed to a two-year technical and vocational school.

With **Julian McPhee** (1933-1966) at the helm, Cal Poly stood poised to move to a new stage of its development and place on the landscape of California public education. The first annual **Poly Royal** was sponsored by the Future Farmers of America.

The College Years: 1940-1972

Urged by alumni, prospective students and employers to seek collegiate status for Cal Poly, President McPhee succeeded in obtaining approval from the State Board of Education to initiate a full baccalaureate degree program in 1940. The California Polytechnic State College subsequently awarded its **first bachelor of science degrees** to twenty-six graduates in 1942.

1942

First bachelor's degrees awarded

In the meantime, the United States' entry into World War II inaugurated an important interlude in Cal Poly's history. During the war years, the college served as state headquarters for the Food Production War Training Program, providing instruction to 120,000 California farmers. Cal Poly also implemented **war-preparedness training programs**, for both men and women, in welding, machine shop, aircraft sheet metal and radio.

1940-43

War-preparedness training programs

From January 1943 through November 1944, Cal Poly served as one of 17 Naval Flight Preparatory Schools in the nation, graduating more than 3,600 naval aviation cadets. In July 1944, Cal Poly was chosen as one of eight colleges to conduct a new **naval aviation training** program, the Naval Refresher Unit. This program continued until February 1946, serving 1,121 trainees.

1943-1946

Naval aviation training

Immediately after World War II, enrollment expanded to 819 students due to an influx of veterans studying under the G.I. Bill.

1947

California State Polytechnic College

1949

Kellogg-Voorhis Unit

Cal Poly Rose Float

Master of Arts program

Dexter Library

At the war's end, Cal Poly returned to its peacetime educational mission. In 1947, the California Polytechnic School was renamed the **California State Polytechnic College**.

In 1949, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation donated an 812-acre horse ranch in Pomona to the college, which was located near the Voorhis campus. By 1950, the joint operation of the two campuses was known as the Kellogg-Voorhis Unit.

From the 1950-51 California State Polytechnic College Bulletin: "The **nonsectarian chapel on the Voorhis campus**, San Dimas, overlooks the vast citrus empire at the base of snow-capped Mt. Baldy."

The first **Cal Poly float** was entered in the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. This tradition continues today.

The prospect of higher enrollments influenced development of the College's first facilities master plan and inaugurated an ambitious building program on the campus. Enrollment rose to 2,909 students at the San Luis Obispo campus.

A **graduate program** leading to a master of arts degree in education began.

The **Dexter Library**, completed in 1949, offered two large reading rooms plus sixty study carrels that gave a seating capacity of 574. The stack rooms accommodated 120,000 books. By the mid-1950s, the north mountain dormitory complex had been built, signaling Cal Poly's commitment to a substantial residential program.

1956

In **1956, female students** were again readmitted to the College.

1959

Aerial photo of Cal Poly Campus

As the 1960's began, Cal Poly's enrollments and reputation continued to grow. The student body nudged toward 5,000 and would exceed 9,000 by the decade's end.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education included Cal Poly within the newly established California State College System.

Sadly, though, the new decade also witnessed the most tragic event in Cal Poly's history. On October 29, 1960, a chartered plane carrying the **Cal Poly football team** crashed on take-off in Toledo, Ohio, after a game against Bowling Green University. Sixteen Mustang players and six others perished in the crash.

Upon his mandatory retirement in 1966, Julian McPhee was succeeded by **Robert E. Kennedy**. Just as had been the case upon McPhee's assumption of the presidential mantel in 1933, Cal Poly was set for another major transition in its history.

October 29, 1960

1965

New Administration Building opened

May 1, 1967

Robert E. Kennedy named president

The University Years: 1972 – 2001

1972

California Polytechnic State University

May 22, 1979

Warren J. Baker named president

1989

Student projects

In 1972, the State Legislature changed Cal Poly's name to the **California Polytechnic State University**.

Following attainment of university status, over the next several decades, under two presidents, Robert E. Kennedy (1967 to 1979) and **Warren J. Baker** (1979 to present), Cal Poly remained faithful to its polytechnic mission and learn-by-doing educational philosophy. The annual rhythms of campus life preserved many well-established traditions. At the same time, Cal Poly developed in response to rapid change in the economy and society.

National championship academic teams and student projects like the first **human-powered helicopter** exemplified the enduring vitality of learn-by-doing. A significant portion of upper-division learning continued to occur outside the classroom and every graduate had to complete an independent senior project. In an era of dramatic scientific and technological breakthroughs, new curricula and research initiatives were launched. General education was revised and strengthened. Cal Poly developed a modern, robust university educational program.

Defining features of campus student life included the Week of Welcome for new students, a student residence hall community housing nearly 3,000 students, an inter-collegiate athletics program that transitioned to Division I status, and a vital student government with responsibility for running a multi-million dollar student corporation, more than 400 **student clubs**, the annual **Poly Royal** (briefly suspended, then reintroduced as Open House).

Students in the Agricultural Engineering Society [AES] built "Mustang Fever" for a tractor pull event during a recent Open House.

Faculty, student and alumni achievements brought growing recognition to Cal Poly, culminating in annual selection as the best public comprehensive university in the Western United States in the "America's Best Colleges" issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, from 1993 forward. The 1999 rankings declared Cal Poly's College of Engineering the best public largely undergraduate engineering school in the country. In fall 2000 the Computer Science Department was proclaimed best in the nation among its peers.

Over 20 major capital projects transformed the campus during the University Years. Individual, foundation and corporate gifts played a growing role in capital and program development. Among important examples: the industry-supported Dairy Products Technology Center; alumnus Al Smith's bequest of the **Swanton Pacific Ranch**; the partnership among the University, City of San Luis Obispo and private donors to establish the **Performing Arts Center's Christopher Cohan Center**; the foundation and corporate-funded **Advanced Technology Laboratories**; and the \$16 million gift from Kinko's founder **Paul J. Orfalea** and his family to benefit and name the College of Business and the campus Children's Center.

The composition of Cal Poly's student population changed to reflect the growing diversity of the state's population. By fall 1999, nearly 30 percent of Cal Poly's students were from non-white groups and Cal Poly had become among the nation's leading educators of Hispanic baccalaureate graduates in architecture, agriculture and engineering.

At century's end, a new campus master plan provided a comprehensive vision of the University's future. Cal Poly, while growing, would preserve its polytechnic, undergraduate, residential character and learn-by-doing educational philosophy. It would expand access for California's diverse students to opportunities in the new global, technological economy. Reflecting proudly on its first century, it would advance confidently into the new millennium, with *A Tradition for the Future*.

1993
Swanton Pacific Ranch

1996
**Performing Arts Center's
Christopher Cohan Center**

1999
Advanced Technology Laboratories

2000