
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.

Photos courtesy of University Archives.

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** (*center of photo*) 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** (*left of photo*) 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** (*right of photo*) 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.

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.

June 15, 1906



1907

First three campus buildings



1910

Farmer's Picnic



Photos courtesy of University Archives.

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. *(Photo: Poly Royal, 1935)*

Photos courtesy of University Archives.