

What is Poly Projects?

Poly Projects is an online network of Cal Poly students who are looking to collaborate on or search for a senior project, or work with other students on independent projects. For our senior project we wanted to bring Cal Poly students together who wish to work with other majors in interdisciplinary fields. For this to be possible, Cal Poly needs to implement a place where students can communicate in order to discover ways for how they can use their skills and knowledge with other students in different majors. Poly Projects' goal is to bring Cal Poly students together to ensure that they have the knowledge and resources from other students to create and complete a senior project or non-credit, innovative project successfully.

Background

The idea for Poly Projects came about during a Communication Studies Department review when faculty members from other departments and several Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) members came to gather feedback on the major from the students. One of the points that everyone agreed upon was the desire for an easily accessible campus resource where students can seek out senior project assistance and easily collaborate with students of other majors or disciplines. Many students are often unsure of what they want to do when it comes time to deciding on a senior project or, once they have a project idea, do not have the resources readily available to advance their idea to the next step. There are many students who wish that they could create an applied communication project with a group of people from different majors to combine skill sets; however, students often find this difficult to follow through with because it can be a tedious task to track down reliable potential partners by traveling to each department themselves. Unfortunately, students frequently give up on this

desire to create a large-scale, innovative project when they realize the time and effort that goes into it. After realizing that Cal Poly does not already offer a single place for people to place their project ideas or have access to other students', we began the process of launching a website like this ourselves.

The story behind our forming of this project is the perfect example of the project collaboration and cooperation that Poly Projects would provide. While we had to intensively search for other students through our professional and personal networks to find students with the skills necessary to assist us with this project, once Poly Projects is up and running, this process will become much simpler for its users.

Purpose

Poly Projects was designed to incorporate all majors between and within colleges for students. This can be accomplished by either finding a collaboration partner(s), or as a search site for Cal Poly students to find other students who need assistance with independent projects for classes or personal projects. This site will be the place for Cal Poly students to get involved in projects around campus: for senior project collaboration, class credit, portfolio building, résumé boosting, payment, volunteer work, or any other type of incentive. Poly Projects is uniting all Cal Poly majors to the forefront of multidisciplinary innovation.

We proposed this particular project because it will benefit the entire Cal Poly campus, helping to ensure that students complete senior projects in a more efficient manner. It will also serve as a location for driven students to find other students with specific skills to help with their senior project or other ventures. In addition, if students do not know what they want to do for a senior project, the Poly Projects website will give them the opportunity to combine their skills

with other's on a project they are interested in based on a provided project description. This site will allow students who are interested in different fields, but have no formal education or network in that discipline, to become involved in that particular project.

We wished to open communication between colleges and majors to allow projects to take the next step in order to be successful. Cal Poly is one of the most innovative campuses in California, if not the country, and helping bring students together to share and expand ideas into actual projects will benefit the students, the faculty, and the reputation of Cal Poly. This can also be a place for faculty advisors of all colleges to point students in the right direction for senior project collaboration or independent project contracting. Poly Projects will act as an effective form of communication between colleges and departments, saving people the time and energy of having to visit each department to track down the assistance that they are seeking. It also alleviates faculty members' jobs by no longer having to go out of their way to help students connect with each other for senior project assistance. The website will save time by eliminating unnecessary phone calls, and will allow Cal Poly faculty to better monitor project initiation and facilitation between the students. College advising centers' contact information and senior project resources will be listed on the site, sorted by college and department, for one-stop senior project assistance so that students know exactly who to go to.

We initially decided to meet and form a list of how this Poly Projects website will benefit its various users. First, it is a great way for Cal Poly students of all majors to collaborate on senior projects. It is also an effective form of communication with people of other colleges and departments, saving people the time and energy of having to visit each department and track down the assistance that they are seeking. It is a great resource for students even after they complete their projects because they can post this completed project to be continued or passed on

to other students. Ideally, students will become more satisfied with the senior project process because Poly Projects will have access to projects that they are genuinely excited to seek out.

Since Poly Projects will also encourage students to start their senior project research process earlier by having more information at their fingertips, more senior projects can be completed sooner, thereby leading to a timely graduation. The Return of Investment (ROI) is high because encouraging earlier senior project initiative can save Cal Poly money by eliminating extended graduation because of incomplete projects.

Design/Process/Implementation

What started as a solution to Cal Poly's lack of senior project assistance in a Communication Studies Club evaluation quickly turned into a plan for our senior project through brainstorming ideas in our Undergraduate Seminar course during the Winter Quarter of 2012. In mid-January, we met with our advisor, Dr. Michael Fahs, to request his approval to begin this project. Together, the three of us established some main goals for the project, including a meeting schedule, expectations, and project timeline. We also created a basic outline for the website itself, including sections such as Poly Projects' mission statement, description of who we are, disclaimer/terms of use, to do list/steps to be taken, goals, and a list of reasons why Poly Projects qualifies to be a Communication Studies senior project. Our mission statement, which sets the tone for the rest of the project, is as follows: "To bring Cal Poly students together through a university wide social network to share, collaborate, and/or search for projects—committed to all majors, all ideas, and all advantages."

We also wanted to include a section on the actual website that describes exactly what the project's purpose and description is. We decided to title this section "About Us." Poly Project

users can easily access this informative page via a link located on our main navigation bar. Also in planning the site, we decided that it would be necessary to include a disclaimer, so that people are aware of the terms of use for a Cal Poly website, and that every project does not guarantee advisor approval for senior project credit. The rough draft that we have of the disclaimer as of now is:

All students who engage and participate in Poly Projects agree to the terms of use by Cal Poly as a legal contract between the individual and Cal Poly. The TOU include and incorporate additional terms (“guidelines”) applicable to particular categories or services available by students as set forth to users upon access to such categories or services. You are also required to comply with, and to ensure compliance with, all laws, ordinances and regulations applicable to your activities on Poly Projects.

Our goal originally was to make a senior project website for students to collaborate on ideas. After several meetings and discussing the project idea further with our advisor and the Department Head, we decided to expand Poly Projects. This led to ‘Senior Project Collaboration’, where both students get senior project credit, and ‘Student Cooperation’ where students can find other students with specific skills to aid in independent projects for classes, a senior project, a potential product, etc.

After we decided on what the content of the site would include, we put our theory of the project to practice. We used our professional and social networks to contact a Graphic Design student, and with her assistance we created rough compositions of what we wanted the website to look like. We wanted to be sure to follow the Cal Poly guidelines for a website because we knew that we wanted the site to transcend our senior project into an actual site run by Cal Poly.

At the beginning of Spring Quarter, we began extensively researching who exactly we needed to present our idea to in order to start the implementation process. We first approached a connection through the Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) Student Government who directed us to Kiyana Tabrizi, the current ASI President. At this stage of our project, we were

hoping that ASI would be able to house Poly Projects. Understanding that Poly Projects would be a website by students, for students, the Cal Poly student government seemed like the ideal choice for housing Poly Projects website. We thoroughly explained to Kiyana what Poly Projects is, how it can be used, and what the design could look like. We also discussed with ASI how we planned to help promote the site during Spring 2012 before our graduation in June. This would include working with a Public Relations student to set a clear plan of how to spread the word about Poly Projects. Once we decide on the central brand of Poly Projects, ideally we would be promoting the site through ASI. This would be achieved by on campus posters, press releases through Mustang Daily and Cal Poly news via the Portal and the Cal Poly website, speaking directly with faculty advisors and professors, and giving presentations to clubs and organizations on campus. By eventually consulting and promoting Poly Projects directly, we aim to communicate the site's specific goals, how to use it, as well as the incentives it promotes.

ASI then informed us that there was a more fitting venue to approach with the idea of housing Poly Projects. Thanks to Kiyana, we were able to meet with Kimi Ikeda, the Associate Vice Provost for Systems and Resources at Cal Poly. After pitching our idea of Poly Projects to Kimi, in a short, fifteen minute meeting, we were able to set up a future meeting with Erling Smith, Cal Poly's Vice Provost for Programs and Planning, and Darren Kraker, the Coordinator of Application Direction for Cal Poly's Information Technology Services (ITS). On April 26, 2012, we met with Darren and Erling and officially pitched the Poly Projects concept to Cal Poly. Through the half-hour meeting with the two individuals, we explained as much as possible in a clear and concise briefing. Erling was cautious that we were not stepping on anyone's toes at Cal Poly, and after we reassured him there were no conflicting interests, they agreed to formally take on Poly Projects and incorporate it into the Cal Poly Web Portal and website.

Forecast

With the Cal Poly Web Portal currently undergoing major reform, Erling Smith and Darren Kraker agreed that Poly Projects will ideally be incorporated into the launch of the new site for the Fall Quarter of 2012. Darren was very enthusiastic about the idea that students were collaborating to form a website that is to be used for just that, so he suggested that work with Computer Science students who will create the actual Poly Projects website, as well as a team for marketing the site in the Fall. Darren also asked us to create a System Requirements Specification (SRS) rough draft to present to the Computer Science students so that they can gain a better understanding of the project to accurately code the website. Unfortunately, we fell out of contact with Darren in the bustle of the last weeks of the school year, but we hope to leave this project in the hands of Communication Studies students who are willing to see that the implementation of Poly Projects continues.

Communication Concepts and Variables

Poly Projects qualifies as a Communication Studies-relevant project because nearly every aspect of this senior project has been contingent on successful communication. From the conception of the idea to our final, official pitch to Cal Poly administrators, we have used multiple communication concepts to see that the project is completed in an efficient, effective manner. Communication Studies students are the perfect candidates for facilitating such a project because it requires reaching out to each college and department on campus, forming and managing relationships, as well as receiving feedback in a constructive manner.

Our senior project has given us the opportunity to apply what we have learned over the

past four years from our many different Communication Studies courses to successfully execute this project. This even includes the most basic concepts such as the Transactional Model of Communication. This model takes into account how the communication process is not a one-way track, and that messages are constantly being sent back and forth simultaneously between the “sender” and the “receiver” (Frymier, 2005). It is very important in meeting with each person to discuss Poly Projects that we keep in mind this Transactional Model of Communication and work with the other communicators to send easy-to-understand messages, without any barriers or noise affecting the messages’ clarity. We understand that the very message of Poly Projects is the key purpose of our senior project, and that if it is not communicated accurately, then we will have failed to persuade Cal Poly to accept Poly Projects into their system. In regards to transactional communication, Otis Baskin and Sam Bruno state in the *Journal Of Business Communication* that, “considerable advances in communication theory may be achieved when one begins to understand the relationship between human communication and personality theory” (1977, p. 65). As the senders of the Poly Projects message, if the receiver, Cal Poly, does not comprehend the message correctly, then the message will be distorted. In order to prevent this distortion of messages, we need to appropriately address each party on an individual basis and be sure to take into account their unique communication and personality styles.

Public Speaking also largely plays into our senior project because we have developed and delivered numerous oral briefings, adjusting each briefing to the appropriate audience—ASI, Cal Poly administrators, students, etc.—and will eventually need to publicize and market the site appropriately too. This is very similar to the Transactional Model of Communication. In our discussions with various campus entities, we have also utilized the Communication Accommodation Theory, which explains that one adapts communication styles according to the

people who he or she is speaking with. In the *Journal Of Applied Communication Research*, Howard Giles states that the Communication Accommodation Theory, “Fundamentally... advocates the goal of developing communicative practices that are evidenced-based, in both interpersonal and intergroup situations. Thus, while accommodative acts can be contingent on others’ personal uniqueness, they can also be determined by the social identities of those involved” (2008, p. 121). We used more of a convergence style because we wanted to match the style of the people who we were pitching our idea to at the time so that they felt comfortable accepting what we had to offer with Poly Projects. People prefer communication styles that are similar to their own, so this is what we tried to apply. We demonstrated rhetorical competence throughout the implementation of this project when we sent messages to others in order to reach our goals. When trying to send and receive messages, it is extremely important to be aware of the context surrounding the messages. We utilized the Communication Accommodation Theory and Transactional Model of Communication to send successful messages that inform, persuade, and are sensitive to others’ needs.

From Cal Poly’s Business and Professional Communication class, COMS 301, we obtained the tools and knowledge necessary to give multiple oral briefings on Poly Projects. In this class, we learned how to directly present facts and information to various receivers so that they may learn something new or understand more completely the applications surrounding a particular topic. This is exactly what we did with Poly Projects—delivered our message and pitched the idea to a variety of receivers. We usually had between five and ten minutes to collectively explain the idea and were always in a business-type setting. This required that we be specific and precise in condensing the information regarding Poly Projects. We presented it to a variety of groups in an efficient form and manner so that they learned everything necessary to be

brought up to speed on our website. We also had to dress in business professional attire while maintaining a conversational speaking style during our briefings, which are crucial, yet often overlooked aspects of effective business and professional communication. The key to each meeting we have or briefing we give is thorough preparation. So much of our time over the past two quarters has been all about preparing the site and all of our material. With each briefing on Poly Projects, we aimed arouse interest through being persuasively effective since the material is relevant to the working conditions or lives of the majority of people at Cal Poly.

We established our credibility through clearly communicating the need for a website like Poly Projects. This was done by using our experience as Cal Poly students through continuously applying active listening skills to understand what other students want when it comes to producing more rewarding and applicable senior projects at Cal Poly. We have witnessed the distress that comes with the senior project process from many of our peers, and we are determined to ease this process for all stakeholders.

In addition, we understand that it is necessary and imperative to communicate the Return on Investment (ROI) produced by Poly Projects. For an individual like Erling Smith, whose job is to see that Cal Poly's strategic initiatives are carried out, clearly and concisely communicating the ROI to him was essential. We qualitatively explained that when Poly Projects is up and running, more students will utilize the site to collaborate on senior projects that they will actually enjoy, instead of dreading the inevitable senior project that some feel the process brings. In addition, the site will help other students begin the brainstorming phase for senior projects at an earlier time while at Cal Poly, thereby assisting them in completing their senior projects sooner. With a faster rate of project initiation and completion, students will no longer need to be concerned about delayed graduation due to incomplete senior projects. The ROI also promotes

Cal Poly students' happiness factor. As discussed in COMS 213, Organizational Communication, an employee—or in our case, a student—who is happier in the workplace—or on campus—will have higher self-esteem, more self-confidence, and will be more productive. In Gavin and Mason's article "The Value of Happiness in the Workplace", they explain, "If we are to create and maintain healthier, happier and more productive workplaces, organizations are well advised to place more emphasis on positive psychology" (2004, p. 390). With Poly Projects, we envision students' positive psychology to increase due to the decrease of senior project stress. Students will find comfort in knowing that there are resources available, especially this website that was produced enthusiastically by students and faculty who know how difficult the senior project process can be.

The heart of our project is being able to clearly define the meaning of Poly Projects as an idea, and what it intends to promote, so that it can be fully implemented. We hope to instill a clear, lasting definition of what Poly Projects will achieve for all of the site's stakeholders. We understand that for this to be done, that we need complete competency of the project. Maria Gatti states in her *Journal of Business Communication* article, "The Language of Competence in Corporate Histories for Company Websites," that, "The overarching theme of competence is the importance placed on knowledge as a process referring to the ability of an enterprise to organize, manage, coordinate, and govern..." (2011, p. 484). By understanding that the knowledge of the site and its intentions are a process, we will see the foundational development of Poly Projects throughout Spring Quarter of 2012 before it is passed on to Cal Poly in mid-June.

Also, since this is a dual-senior project, it is important to take into account both of our dominant communication styles. After we both completed the Communication Styles Self-Assessment, we learned that we share the same two dominant styles: people and action. Thus far,

Poly Projects has been a smooth operation for us because we are similar in our communication styles. We are both very teamwork-oriented, understanding of each other's schedules, and extremely cooperative. It also helps that we both possess the action communication style because we are both very results-oriented and on top of our schedules and productivity, which keeps us moving toward a common goal and maintains efficient time management.

In addition, our areas of career interest both involve sales, account management, and client services. We learned through Poly Projects that team-oriented, cooperative drive is essential for a successful sales career. Hunt and Yimaz found that "as a result of the growing importance of cooperative selling, research in sales force management has begun to focus on understanding the dynamics of a salesperson's interpersonal relationships with co-workers" (2001, p. 335). Our teamwork from the initial, to most recent meetings has continuously led us to learning our dynamism so we can work productively and successfully. We work effectively and efficiently to find the solutions necessary to get our job completed in the correct organizational manner so Cal Poly can adopt Poly Projects with minimal administrative setbacks.

The curriculum that we learned from COMS 322, Persuasion, also plays an extremely large role in this senior project because we need to persuade many different types of people to use and promote this site. We need to recruit and inform users, sell the idea of the site, and convince Cal Poly that the Poly Projects is important and needs to be implemented by using social psychological principles of influence. We learned in Persuasion how to analyze various forms of persuasive material, including social influence and propaganda. This knowledge allowed us to more effectively formulate our approach for pitching the idea Poly Projects.

As discussed earlier, our project will provide many benefits to students and faculty members alike. From this senior project, we personally will take on a new understanding of

applied communication in the organizational, social, and educational settings. Everything that we have learned from our work with Poly Projects we will be able to apply to our future career and dealings with a variety of people in various settings. We are very enthusiastic that, should we accurately execute our portion of this senior project, Poly Projects will become a successful, frequently used Cal Poly site that will be beneficial for present and future students and faculty at Cal Poly.

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Appendix A

Poly Projects Compositions

Appendix B

System Requirements Specification (SRS) Rough Draft