



CAL POLY

Search for the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, California

California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) seeks a strategic and collaborative leader to serve as the next dean of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA). The CLA has a unique array of disciplines that have contributed to a distinguished reputation of innovation at Cal Poly. The dean will build on this successful legacy to continue to support Cal Poly's distinct mission, values and clear vision of being the nation's premier comprehensive polytechnic university. The new dean will lead a vibrant College dedicated to interdisciplinary excellence, equity and inclusion, and forward-thinking programs that develop and inspire whole system thinkers who can help change the world.

Founded in 1901 as one of 23 universities in the California State University system, Cal Poly is located in San Luis Obispo, a coastal city halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco and 15 minutes from the Pacific Ocean. Cal Poly has consistently been named the best public masters-level university in the West by both *U.S. News & World Report* and *Forbes Top Colleges*, and *Money* magazine awarded Cal Poly a 5-star ranking, an honor that places Cal Poly among the top 34 universities in the nation.

For over a century, Cal Poly has been recognized for its ["Learn by Doing" philosophy](#), which prepares students to be leaders and problem solvers in an increasingly complex world. The CLA is central to this mission, offering a diverse range of degree programs in 17 departments across the humanities, social sciences, and arts that engage students in critical thinking, creativity, and global problem-solving.

The next dean will join Cal Poly at a significant inflection point with several major initiatives underway, including the conversion from quarters to semesters in fall 2026, the transition to year-round operations in summer 2027, growing enrollment to fulfill new CSU system aspirations, and achieving Title V federal designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution. With its wide range of disciplines and by housing one third of general education courses, the CLA is uniquely positioned to capitalize on these initiatives to advance the College's mission and contribute meaningfully to the university's evolution. The new dean will collaborate with faculty, staff, and students within the CLA to achieve new levels of recognition and accomplishment within the polytechnic context.

The next dean will be a visionary academic leader with a passion for the liberal arts and a proven ability to lead through change. They will bring a strong track record of teaching, scholarship, and supporting research, a collaborative leadership style, and the ability to inspire and engage a diverse community of faculty, staff, and students. The new dean will also be expected to provide critical strategic leadership in addressing the following key opportunities and challenges:

- Lead the strategic evolution of the CLA to enhance their distinctive polytechnic liberal arts education and support Academic Affairs and university-wide goals
- Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion to further drive student access, engagement, and success efforts
- Lead a highly collaborative CLA faculty and staff committed to the teacher-scholar model and achieving interdisciplinary goals and objectives
- Strengthen CLA's influence through strategic partnerships and community engagement
- Thoughtfully steward and augment CLA's financial resources and infrastructure through fundraising and revenue generation

A list of the desired qualifications and characteristics of the dean can be found at the conclusion of this document, which was prepared with the assistance of Isaacson, Miller, a national retained executive search firm. All confidential applications, inquiries, and nominations should be directed to the parties at the conclusion of this document.

ABOUT CAL POLY

Each year, more than 20,000 top-tier students come to San Luis Obispo to put knowledge into action, taking their learning outside the classroom as they prepare for careers in the humanities, engineering, agriculture, science, business, and the built environment. Cal Poly's hands-on philosophy, small class sizes, and close student-faculty mentorships result in graduates ready from day one to impact their communities, California, and the world. At the heart of all that Cal Poly values is a core commitment to student success. Cal Poly students graduating with undergraduate or graduate degrees are expected to have met the following learning objectives:

- Think critically and creatively
- Communicate effectively
- Demonstrate expertise in a scholarly discipline and understand that discipline in relation to the larger world of the arts, sciences, and technology
- Work productively as individuals and in groups
- Use their knowledge and skills to make a positive contribution to society
- Make reasoned decisions based on an understanding of ethics, a respect for diversity, and an awareness of issues related to sustainability

To learn more about Cal Poly, please visit: <http://www.calpoly.edu/>.

To learn more about Cal Poly leadership and the CSU System, please see the Appendix.

ABOUT THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

The College of Liberal Arts is an integral and highly valued component of Cal Poly. The College emphasizes critical and creative thinking, human understanding, innovative action, combining disciplinary depth with interdisciplinary knowledge and experiences. CLA empowers its graduates to tackle the complex challenges of both global and local communities by engaging with the historical, ethical, aesthetic, technological, and social dimensions that shape our world.

Driven by core disciplines in the arts, humanities, communications, and social sciences, the College of Liberal Arts is organized into 17 highly selective departments offering 18 majors (including Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, and Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees), 40 minors, and four master's degree programs in English, History, Public Policy, and Psychology. Departments include [Art and Design](#), [Communication Studies](#), [English](#), [Ethnic Studies](#), [Graphic Communication](#), [History](#), [Interdisciplinary Studies in the Liberal Arts](#), [Journalism](#), [Liberal Arts and Engineering Studies](#), [Music](#), [Philosophy](#), [Political Science](#), [Psychology and Child Development](#), [Social Sciences](#), [Theatre and Dance](#), [Women's, Gender and Queer Studies](#), and [World Languages and Cultures](#). The College is home to the [Center for Expressive Technologies](#), which provides students with unique Learn By Doing experiences through classes and research opportunities that prepare them for new careers that bridge tech, arts, and social good.

In addition to its strong commitment to disciplinary depth and excellence, the College has established itself as a leader in interdisciplinary collaboration. This is exemplified by the Liberal Arts and Engineering Studies major, a degree program focused on expressive technologies jointly administered with the College of Engineering. The Interdisciplinary Studies degree further reflects this commitment, allowing students to integrate the perspectives or methodologies from multiple disciplines. The College's four explicitly interdisciplinary minors further expand opportunities for students to engage in interdisciplinary learning and group "Learn by Doing" projects. These minors are organized under the umbrella of a [Science, Technology, and Society](#) program in the College: Ethics, Public Policy, Science and Technology (EPPST); Gender, Race, Culture, Science, and Technology (GRCST); Media Arts, Society and Technology (MAST); and Science and Risk Communication (SRC).

The College offers a robust representation of international issues and perspectives throughout its curriculum and provides strong support for study abroad opportunities. The CLA faculty regularly teach in faculty-led Global Programs, such as the Cal Poly in London, Cal Poly in Thailand, Cal Poly in Spain (Valladolid), and Cal Poly in Australia programs. The College also participates in the Cal Poly in Peru program, which provides service learning that complements the minor in Latin American Studies. Numerous CLA faculty propose discipline-specific programs as well. These and other study abroad programs are administered by the Cal Poly International Center. In addition to current and emerging direct international exchanges, the College is piloting First Year *GO* for entering students in Seville, Spain, and expanding its focus on virtual exchange, fostering global connections by enabling students and faculty to collaborate with peers around the globe. Cal Poly was ranked as a top study abroad-sending institution

among master's-level universities for the 2021-22 Academic Year, and the College of Liberal Arts accounted for 21% of students going abroad that year, the largest cohort among the six colleges.

The CLA provides a wide range of learn-by-doing opportunities across its disciplines. Students from all majors can engage in musical ensembles, theater productions, and dance performances. Students, particularly those in the social and behavioral sciences, have opportunities to gain research experience and participate in internships with local, state, and national government agencies, as well as with community organizations, social services, and educational institutions, serving diverse populations. Students also showcase their academic achievements through publications like [Intertidal](#) (English), [The Forum](#) (History), [Paideia](#) (Political Science), and [Sprinkle](#) (Women's, Gender & Queer Studies)—many of which are printed by the student-run University Graphic Systems.

Rounding out the College are the [Spanos Theatre](#), a performance venue and educational center for the Department of Theatre and Dance; Center for Expressive Technologies; Ethics + Emerging Sciences Group; and [Cal Poly Arts](#), the primary presenting body for the beautiful, nearly 1,300-seat Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo, which is the site for performances by the Department of Music. As a division of the non-profit Cal Poly Partners, Cal Poly Arts is the major presenter of performing arts events on the California Central Coast, receiving funding from Cal Poly and Cal Poly Arts Inner Circle, ShowBiz, and Center Stage contributors. The College also houses the [University Art Gallery](#), a superb pre-school learning lab, 35 sponsored student organizations, including the CLA Student Ambassadors, and three award-winning, student-run media operations: [Mustang News](#), [KCPR Cal Poly Radio](#), and [University Graphic Systems](#).

Through its disciplinary excellence and interdisciplinary collaborations, the CLA plays a vital role in Cal Poly's identity as a truly comprehensive polytechnic institution, ensuring the liberal arts are fully integrated with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. With approximately 167 tenure-line faculty and 193 part-time and full-time lecturers (120 FTE lecturers), CLA faculty are distinguished for their commitment to teaching, scholarship, and service, frequently earning University Distinguished Teaching and University Distinguished Scholarship Awards. The College is also a leader in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, continuously adding academic and extracurricular programs which embrace diverse identities and are supported by faculty and staff throughout the college. With 3,600 undergraduate majors and a broader impact across the University through minors, elective courses, and contributions to General Education and Honors programs, CLA is a cornerstone of Cal Poly's academic community, preparing students to be ethical leaders and innovators in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

CLA Diversity Action Plan

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have long been central to the mission and vision of the College of Liberal Arts. Since 2016, with the establishment of the first collegewide Faculty Diversity Committee and Student Diversity Committee in 2016, followed by the creation of the associate dean for diversity and curriculum position in 2017, CLA has significantly expanded its efforts to promote DEI across the

departments and throughout the entire College. These initiatives have yielded tangible results, including increased diversity in student enrollment and faculty composition.

The College leads in advancing equity, inclusion, and cultural enrichment within both the University and the broader community. Events such as the frequent speaker series, film screenings, and other programs reflect its commitment to fostering a vibrant intellectual and cultural environment. The CLA also partners with Student Diversity and Belonging in the division of Student Affairs to offer training for facilitating Intergroup Dialogues, promoting cross-cultural understanding. The College has also had many recent hires bringing a wealth of diverse perspectives and expertise to the College.

While proud of its accomplishments, the CLA acknowledges the need for continued progress. The College will revise its [Diversity Action Plan](#) in 2025, informed by data analysis, community feedback, and best practices. This revision will include specific, measurable objectives aligned with CLA's academic mission, ensuring DEI remains central to the College's pursuit of excellence in liberal arts education.

CLA Strategic Research, Scholarship & Creative Activities Priorities

The CLA is committed to fostering a vibrant culture of research, scholarship, and creative activities that enrich the academic community and contribute to society. In response to evolving academic landscapes and the growing importance of interdisciplinary work, the CLA has developed the following strategic priorities in 2023-2024:

1. Increase resources to widen and sustain opportunities to participate in Research, Scholarship & Creative Activities in all disciplines in the College of Liberal Arts (college, university, external) and aligned with university commitments to the Teacher-Scholar Model and Learn by Doing pedagogy
2. Value, support, and grow capacity for diversity, equity, inclusion in Research, Scholarship & Creative Activities in all disciplines in the College of Liberal Arts
3. Develop and implement a more effective communication strategy focused on both opportunities for and successes of Research, Scholarship & Creative Activities in all disciplines in the College of Liberal Arts (college, university, external)

By focusing on these strategic priorities, the CLA aims to create a more robust, inclusive, and impactful research environment that prepares students for future challenges and contributes meaningful knowledge to academic fields and society at large.

Current Context

In October 2021, the University began the process of converting from a quarter calendar to a semester calendar system. This transition will occur at the start of the 2026-2027 academic year. The conversion presents an opportunity to achieve greater pedagogical depth, rethink how to balance teaching and research for faculty, review and discuss the curriculum, and simplify academic pathways for transfer

students. As part of this transition, the campus is currently in the process of finalizing curriculum proposals and performing curricular review. After Cal Poly converts to a semester calendar, the entire California State University system of 23 campuses will be operating on semesters.

Looking ahead, enrollment is expected to grow in the coming years to support CSU system goals and to align with system-wide financial incentives while meeting or exceeding Governor Newsom's funding [compact](#) goals. Cal Poly also has the goal of achieving recognition as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) soon. The most recent [campus master plan](#) calls for growing the maximum student headcount on campus to approximately 25,000 by 2035. This growth will be supported by the introduction of Year-Round Operations (YRO), which will be implemented in the 2027-2028 academic year. YRO will allow new students to matriculate during the summer and spring terms in addition to the traditional fall term. Cal Poly also intends, as part of YRO, to engage as many continuing students as possible in credit-bearing high-impact practices (e.g., study abroad and internships) during both their off-term and on-term semesters.

In alignment with these goals, Cal Poly launched its first 2+2 program in partnership with Allan Hancock College in the fall quarter of 2024, allowing transfer students to pursue bachelor's degrees in sociology through the CLA. This initiative aims to reduce barriers to higher education for local students and address workforce gaps in the region. Building on this momentum, there are significant opportunities for the CLA to lead the University's efforts in becoming more transfer-friendly, particularly in strengthening partnerships with community colleges around general education and other majors within CLA.

ROLE OF THE DEAN

Reporting directly to the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, the dean will act as the lead academic and administrative officer for the College. The dean devises and executes strategic planning and visioning for the College and fosters an organizational culture that enables the recruitment and retention of diverse and talented faculty, staff, and students, including faculty support in their teaching, scholarship, professional engagement, and service to the university, college, and industry. The dean is responsible for the quality of academic programs and managing the fiscal, human, and physical resources and facilities of CLA. As the main spokesperson for the College, the dean will build deeper connections internally with leaders across campus and alumni, and externally with industry and government officials. This will include ensuring close alignment around academic and industry needs and fostering mutually beneficial partnerships across the University in support of CLA, Academic Affairs, and University-wide goals and objectives.

The dean oversees an administrative team composed of an associate dean for student success, associate dean for operations, associate dean for diversity and curriculum, and a director of research engagement. They also have 70 staff members and manage a state budget of approximately \$58 million (including benefits), expendable foundation funds of approximately \$2 million, endowment funds of approximately \$14 million, and fee-based corporation funds of approximately \$1 million.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DEAN

The new dean will be joining a college that already has a solid foundation, values collaboration and communication, and prides itself on a diverse range of disciplines with talented faculty, staff, and students who are all committed to make an even greater impact. The College is uniquely positioned to capitalize on its many disciplines, its Learn by Doing Philosophy, and the university's commitment to student success. Working closely with this CLA community, the dean will have the opportunity to be transformational by addressing the following key opportunities and challenges:

Lead the strategic evolution of the CLA to enhance their distinctive polytechnic liberal arts education and support Academic Affairs and university-wide goals

With many university-wide initiatives underway, the College will be looking to this dean to thoughtfully and strategically steward the CLA at a time of significant change and evolution, including ample opportunity for innovation. Working closely with the CLA community, the incoming dean will shape current initiatives in line with CLA's values while continuing to enhance its distinctive polytechnic liberal arts education in support of Cal Poly's mission, values, and aspirations. The dean will build enthusiasm and maintain open communication channels to ensure all disciplines are heard and valued while building a CLA for the future. The dean will be able to build community in the college by working across disciplines to accomplish goals and solve challenges together. They will be data-informed in their decision-making, ensuring student access, success, DEI efforts are taken into consideration, with the goal of having the CLA continue to serve as a model for the university around access and inclusion. Simultaneously, the dean will work with the office of the provost and executive vice president to ensure the CLA continues to support the strategic objectives of Year-Round Operations, university-side DEI efforts, the transition from the quarter-to-semester system, and enrollment growth.

Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion to further drive student access, engagement, and success efforts

Building on CLA's strong foundation in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), the dean will spearhead the development and implementation of the College's second DEI Action Plan. Collaborating closely with CLA faculty, staff, students, and other colleges, the dean will prioritize student success programs supporting the university's Hispanic Serving Institution and Black Student Success initiatives. The dean, in collaboration with the office of the provost and executive vice president, will explore partnership opportunities across the university to expand transfer pathways, similar to the 2+2 Sociology program with Hancock College, to become more transfer-friendly and address regional workforce needs. Additionally, the dean will work to eliminate curricular barriers and broaden access to transformative experiences, such as study abroad programs. By doing so, the dean will foster an inclusive environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and personally.

Lead a highly collaborative CLA faculty and staff committed to the teacher-scholar model and achieving interdisciplinary goals and objectives

The CLA faculty are especially eager to grow and evolve as teachers and scholars, and they will be looking to the dean to support these efforts. The dean will also play a key role in fostering collaboration across colleges, cultivating new opportunities to engage with other academic units around shared goals. By encouraging joint teaching efforts, promoting interdisciplinary scholarship, incentivizing innovation, and understanding the unique needs of each discipline, the dean will help achieve new levels of academic, scholarly, research, and inclusive excellence. This commitment will extend to partnering with the appropriate university entities to create, foster and/or sustain professional development opportunities that include leadership training and mentorship, cultivating a culture of professional growth and innovation across disciplines.

The dean will be tasked with continuing to attract, retain, support, and develop a talented faculty and staff. They will develop strategies to recruit in a competitive market, establish and maintain professional development opportunities to support the continued career growth of all faculty and staff. In addition, the dean will support research, scholarship, creative activities, and service, ensuring faculty's time is valued and contributions are recognized. The dean will also support the success of faculty, staff and an ever-more diverse student body.

Strengthen CLA's influence through strategic partnerships and community engagement

The dean will be a visible and influential leader both within the university and externally, cultivating meaningful connections and extending the CLA's and Cal Poly's reach and impact locally, within the CSU system, nationally, and globally. This will include promoting new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations across the university, augmenting international engagement opportunities, strengthening connections in the surrounding community, and expanding industry and alumni relations. The dean will serve as an excellent spokesperson for the liberal arts, recognizing and promoting CLA's contributions across the university and more broadly. This will include sharing and marketing the value of a liberal arts degree. By actively promoting the College's achievements and effectively fostering strategic partnerships, the Dean will elevate CLA's profile and ensure its continued impact and prominence in California and globally.

Thoughtfully steward and augment CLA's financial resources and infrastructure through fundraising and revenue generation

As Cal Poly transitions to multi-year planning and budgeting, the dean will apply strong resource management and fundraising skills to ensure the CLA is positioned to meet its goals. This will include expanding programming for enrollment growth, leading successful fundraising efforts in support of CLA and the upcoming university capital campaign, serving as a valuable university partner, and optimizing existing resources to support faculty, staff, and student success. The dean will support CLA's

infrastructure—physical facilities, human resources, technology—for future enrollment growth; faculty, staff, and student success; inclusive pedagogy; and furthering Cal Poly’s Learn by Doing mission. The dean will further engage the Dean’s Advisory Council to build mutually beneficial partnerships that may also generate new funding for the College. With success, the dean will expand the College’s capacity to fulfill its educational objectives and contribute to Cal Poly’s broader ambitions.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will have the credentials appropriate for a tenured appointment at the rank of full professor, including a distinguished record of teaching, scholarship, and supporting research, as well as an earned doctorate or terminal degree in a discipline within the College.

They will also possess the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A leadership style that inspires and fosters communication, community building, and mutually beneficial partnerships
- Experience in the design and continuous implementation of strategic planning
- Demonstrated experience and/or commitment to supporting faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities
- Demonstrated commitment to the importance of hands-on experiences for students and an enthusiasm for Cal Poly’s Learn by Doing philosophy and the CSU’s mission
- The ability to work effectively with a diverse campus community and to support equity and inclusive excellence for faculty, staff, and students
- Demonstrated commitment to and/or a record of being a good university citizen and working towards shared goals with a variety of university partners
- Demonstrated ability to manage resources effectively in a complex environment, an aptitude for fundraising, and the ability to develop partnerships and secure external support for programs, facilities, and personnel
- Understanding of the value of industry relations and a clear commitment to maintaining and enhancing relationships with a diversity of industry partners
- Success in resolving personnel issues in a complex and/or unionized environment
- Excellent communication skills in a wide range of settings

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The anticipated salary range for this position is \$270,000 - \$280,000 annually. Note that the offer is calculated based on the background and relevant years of experience of the individual selected. Cal Poly offers a best-in-class benefits program, including health, dental and vision insurance, retirement participation in the Public Employees’ Retirement System, and educational benefits for eligible

employees. All rights associated with the appointment are governed by the [Management Personnel Plan](#) adopted by the [CSU Board of Trustees](#).

Cal Poly is located in San Luis Obispo (SLO), California, a coastal city halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Nestled between rolling hills and the Pacific Ocean, SLO is sheltered by volcanic peaks and surrounded by protected open spaces, vineyards, agriculture and ranch land. With a population of approximately 44,000, the city enjoys a vibrant economy based largely on agriculture and tourism. The region has a temperate climate many describe as “Mediterranean-like,” which residents enjoy year-round. The city has numerous attractions, such as a weekly Thursday night Farmer’s Market, close proximity to many excellent vineyards, many hotels and bed and breakfasts, restaurants, and opportunities to enjoy local produce and goods. The San Luis Obispo Regional Airport offers commercial air service provided by Alaska, American Airlines and United, connecting to hundreds of destinations, as well as Amtrak rail service to various California locations.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, and referrals should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search at <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/california-polytechnic-state-university-san-luis-obispo/dean-college-liberal-arts>. All applications should be submitted through the Cal Poly portal for the search at [LINK](#)

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At California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, we believe that cultivating an environment that embraces and promotes diversity is fundamental to the success of our students, our employees and our community. Cal Poly’s commitment to diversity informs our efforts in recruitment, hiring and retention. California Polytechnic State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

APPENDIX

Leadership

Dr. Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore joined Cal Poly as Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs in August 2020. Prior to Cal Poly, Dr. Jackson-Elmoore served as the dean of the Honors College at Michigan State University, where she oversaw the university-wide program for high-achieving undergraduates, as well as the Academic Scholars Program, the National/International Fellowships & Scholarships Office, and the MSU Debate Program. Dr. Jackson-Elmoore was also a professor with affiliations in the MSU School of Social Work and the Global Urban Studies Program. She also co-chaired a university level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Steering Committee and was appointed to the MSU Strategic Planning Committee. In her time as Provost thus far, Dr. Jackson-Elmoore has led the curricular charge for a semester conversion, championed diversity, equity, and inclusion action planning, and supported the teacher-scholar model that is vital to Cal Poly's success.

President Jeffrey D. Armstrong began his tenure as Cal Poly's ninth permanent president on February 1, 2011. Before joining Cal Poly, Dr. Armstrong served as dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University, as head of the Animal Sciences Department at Purdue University, and in various roles at NC State University. He participates in numerous California State University (CSU) committees, including the CSU Agricultural Research Initiative, CSU Water Resources and Policy Initiatives, CSU Technology Steering Committee, and CSU Council on Ocean Affairs, Science & Technology (COAST). Dr. Armstrong will join the APLU Food System Leadership Institute (FSLI) Commission in 2024. Cal Poly is one of three FSLI partner institutions (along with North Carolina State University and The Ohio State University) hosting a week-long residential session. As a first-generation college graduate, Dr. Armstrong is particularly passionate about nurturing a campus climate that embraces inclusion and diversity and has focused on improving graduation rates and bolstering student success, particularly through expanded university-industry partnerships.

California State University System

The California State University (CSU) system spans the state of California and has an annual budget of more than \$7 billion. It is not only the largest four-year university system in the nation, but also one of the most diverse and affordable. With 23 campuses, more than 350,000 students, and 53,000 faculty and staff, CSU is a leader in high-quality, accessible, student-focused higher education. A student success initiative in the CSU system, the Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI 2025), is the CSU's ambitious effort to increase graduation rates for all CSU students while eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps.