

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
Also (And Best) Known As Cal Poly Pomona

Impressions From Our Campus Visit

June 20, 2008

First and foremost, thank you for this exciting opportunity and for being such gracious hosts during our visit.

The purpose of this document is to succinctly share the “top tier” observations and understandings gleaned from our meetings and interviews. As we begin to develop our creative recommendation (theme, design, etc.), the validity of all potential concepts will be measured by how clearly they mirror these impressions. One reminder, these thoughts are not scientific findings. They are built on anecdotal evidence.

Our most powerful impression – and the one we expect to lead the creative process – is *Wow, who knew?* Every meeting yielded a revelation about Cal Poly Pomona. Every turn of the tour uncovered yet more surprises about Cal Poly Pomona. Even though we had done our prep work, we found the comprehensiveness and uniqueness of the institution to be amazing – and far beyond what we anticipated. (Key the cliché – **you have to see it to believe it.**) *Bottom line – the story is here. We don’t have to search for content. We simply have to “startle” readers/viewers of the new publications with the surprising “nowhere like it” distinction of Cal Poly Pomona.*

The second most telling impression, in our estimation, was the discovery that most people in Cal Poly Pomona’s current/primary constituency (local area) – and most certainly those in its aspirational audience (expanded geographic area) – also don’t know what we didn’t know. People who live, work and attend high school in the region know Cal Poly Pomona is there, but they don’t appear to grasp its breadth, or its wealth of opportunities, or its rigor. The feeling is that those who live outside the immediate area don’t know about the



school at all. As a result, we feel the primary marketing/admission challenge Cal Poly Pomona faces is much more about awareness than it is about the value of its education. (Particularly considering the University's new strategy of throwing a much wider net and promoting Cal Poly Pomona far beyond its customary boundaries – i.e., reaching into Northern California.) *Bottom line – to repeat ourselves, the story is here. We don't have to search for content. We simply have to “startle” readers/viewers of the new publications with the surprising “nowhere like it” distinction of Cal Poly Pomona.*

Now, on to other impressions that will carry a good deal of weight in our creative deliberations, but which will play a more supportive “messaging” role to the two above.

There is a perception issue and a reality issue. (Note we didn't say perception *versus* reality.) Both can be summarized in one word, *polytechnic*. Ask someone on the street to define polytechnic and, if he or she is familiar with the concept at all (and there appears to be few in this category), the likely response will be it has a lot to do with technology, it is practical, and the focus is on professional preparation. Now, ask someone closely associated with Cal Poly Pomona the same thing. No surprise really, they echo the other response – it has a lot to do with technology, it is practical, and the focus is on professional preparation. Fundamentally, both are right on target. The missing point – and it is a huge one – is that Cal Poly Pomona is far from the fundamental polytechnic university. Yes, it is all about being “hands-on.” However, at Cal Poly Pomona that “hands-on” tradition is not limited to “expected” programs like agriculture, engineering, and architecture. It is also the overarching approach in the humanities, arts, business, and tightly focused programs like hospitality. *Bottom line – all the ways polytechnic comes to life at Cal Poly Pomona must be clarified.*

We sense there is an inferiority complex at Cal Poly Pomona. Of course, that's somewhat understandable considering the California system of higher education ranks – literally and figuratively – UC schools above CSU schools. It was interesting how many students told us they originally wanted to attend a UC school but, for various reasons, came to Cal Poly Pomona and discovered how challenging and rewarding it is. Now, they are converts. (Cue



the next cliché – **you have to experience it to appreciate it.**) Beyond the State’s us-versus-them setup, there also appears to be an internal reluctance to be boastful. As one interviewee said, “We’re very good. We’re just not good at telling people we’re good.”

Bottom line – there are endless pride points at Cal Poly Pomona that need to be put in the spotlight.

Cal Poly Pomona faces a balance quandary as it tries to maintain its historic (and required) accessibility and, at the same time, improve the excellence (achievement level) of incoming students. On one hand, there is a large segment – including many first-generation students – who see Cal Poly Pomona as their primary (and most dependable) connection to a higher education. The institution has no desire to change that. On the other hand, there are top students, many from more prosperous backgrounds, who are not inclined to look at either a CSU in general or a polytechnic school in particular. That’s too bad, because Cal Poly Pomona has much to offer them. *Bottom line – we have to talk to both of these groups at the same time without talking out of both sides of our mouth. The key will be to find “the best hook” messages/attributes that are compelling to all concerned.*

Finally, we were overcome by the upbeat spirit of everyone we met at Cal Poly Pomona. (Understandably, you introduced us to the best of the best. But our impression is that this high-energy mindset is pervasive at Cal Poly Pomona.) We are including this observation because it says to us that Cal Poly Pomona, as a whole (from first-year students to the President), is ready to support a shift in perception, is ready to stand up and say “look at me,” is ready to do the work required to build its prestige among a much wider audience. *Bottom line – that’s terrific.*

