

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

5 Questions with *Robert Crockett*

Interim Dean, College of Engineering

What are some of your goals as the interim dean of the College of Engineering?

An interim dean could take on many different roles depending on the situation. Sometimes, it's about polishing things up and preparing for the next dean. Other times, it's about fixing things that are broken. I'm fortunate to be inheriting this role at a time when the college is running as smoothly as I've seen it in my 25 years here. Amy Fleischer did an amazing job of getting the house in order — managing the budget, hiring the right people, working with departments and creating student initiatives. Everything across the board is running really well. During this interim period, my role is to keep that trajectory going and ensure we don't lose momentum, so the new permanent dean inherits an incredible foundation.

What is your favorite part of your job?

I really enjoy working with the students — that's a given. One of the things you have to be mindful of in an administrative position is not losing that connection. I still have a research group I'm working with, and I'm still teaching a class. As interim dean, it's my intention to get out there and actively engage with student clubs, IRAs and all the activities happening around campus, because, ultimately, the reason we're all here is the students.

Tell me about your research background and interests.

My research background is a bit different from that of some of my colleagues. I generally bridge the worlds of entrepreneurship and education. Over the years, I've started a number of companies in areas like haptics, biomedical devices and various diagnostic products, and that's what really energizes me. But it's challenging to do that while

teaching. So, I'll usually take a sabbatical to start a company, then come back to Cal Poly and apply what I've learned to the classroom. After that, I might take another sabbatical or spend some time outside the classroom. That's been my world — moving back and forth between startup companies and bringing that experience back into the classroom.

How do you encourage engineering students to make an impact on the community?

The encouragement is really to reach out to the community, whether it's local, regional, national or even global. It's important to step outside the campus bubble and start applying the tools you're learning to solve real-world problems, even as a new student. That's what engineers do: they solve problems. And the more you engage with the community, the better you'll become at identifying the problems that truly need solutions.

How do you work to support the college's commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion?

What delights me is that the College of Engineering is on a trajectory to become increasingly inclusive, more diverse and a place where people truly feel heard, appreciated and valued. This culture was fostered by Amy Fleischer and teams at every level — not just the Dean's Office. My goal isn't to make radical changes but to maintain that momentum. The key to any successful evolution is to listen to what people are saying. Even with good intentions, you might miss the mark if you're creating programs without first deeply empathizing and listening to the people who make up our Cal Poly family.



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