



# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



## 4 Questions with Dr. Wil Tsai

Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator, Mechanical Engineering at Maritime Academy  
Interim Department Chair, Engineering Technology at Maritime Academy

### **What brought you to Cal Maritime?**

My brother is a 2012 mechanical engineering graduate from Cal Maritime. The following year, I was looking for an opportunity in the Bay Area and applied for a faculty position at Cal Maritime. I knew that this was a small institution with an emphasis on undergraduate education. I also knew how transformational the education at Cal Maritime was and saw this as a worthwhile pursuit. In my 12 years here, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to mentor and educate amazing students, collaborate with wonderful staff and faculty, and continue my own learning and growth.

### **What is your background and the path that led you to your role at Cal Poly Maritime Academy?**

I was born and raised in Los Angeles and am a product of the Los Angeles Unified School District. Growing up, I was always interested in aircraft and remember my days running through the terminals of LAX. After high school, I attended the University of California, Berkeley, where I earned my bachelor's (2003), master's (2006) and Ph.D. (2009) in mechanical engineering. In graduate school, my research was in experimental fluid mechanics. Upon graduating, I worked for three years at the Aerospace Corp. in El Segundo as an engineering specialist in the fluid dynamics group. I enjoyed the work, but for family

reasons I pursued opportunities back in the Bay Area. This led me to discover the opportunity at Cal Maritime in 2013, where I've been proud to serve as a faculty member in the Mechanical Engineering Department. I now look forward to a new chapter at Cal Poly and the new opportunities it creates for both campuses.

### **How does engineering apply to your daily life?**

In my daily life, the aspects of engineering I use most are problem-solving and design. It's not just technical problems that can be solved with this approach — you would be surprised how taking the time to understand a problem, develop solutions and test them out (or think them through) can help with nontechnical problem-solving.

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

The skills you learn as an engineering student allow you to contribute in many ways. As a student, keep an eye out for opportunities to mentor youth considering becoming engineers. This could take the form of community engagement, outreach activities for a club or volunteering at a local museum. Share your knowledge and experiences, including times when things did not go according to plan, with those looking to learn. You would be surprised how sometimes it's your smaller actions or statements that have an impact.