Horticulture & Crop Science

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Academic Programs

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The department offers the Agricultural and Environmental Plant Sciences major leading to the Bachelor of Science degree. Within this major are three concentrations: Environmental Horticultural Science, Fruit and Crop Science, and Plant Protection Science. Each concentration is well-grounded in the sciences and designed to prepare students for many attractive career opportunities.

Experiential Learning Opportunities and Facilities

The Horticulture and Crop Science Department has well-equipped laboratories for instruction in plant biotechnology, insect and weed pest management, postharvest technology, plant production, and landscape horticulture, including CAD capabilities and plant materials.

Students have hands-on experiences in the production and marketing of landscape and ornamental plants using comprehensive facilities at the 16-acre Environmental Horticulture Unit. This unit includes 35,000 square feet of greenhouses, a 5,000 square-foot retractable roof greenhouse, 7,500 square feet of shade houses, a 10,000-square foot U.S. Golf Association specification experimental green, an extensive field container growing area, and a five-acre arboretum. Additionally there are six horticulture laboratories, four of which are fitted with “smart-room” technologies for state-of-the-art teaching. The Leaning Pine Arboretum and Gardens is an outdoor teaching laboratory while the 200 acres of landscaped campus are planted with many interesting and unusual trees and shrubs from all over the world, as well as California natives.

The Crops Unit has 70 acres of productive citrus, avocados, grapes, deciduous fruit trees, and berries, with additional nonbearing acreage for instructional use. There are also approximately 35 acres of annual vegetable and forage crops, of which eleven acres are certified for organic production. There is a modern building containing two teaching labs with prep rooms, six greenhouses, coolers, hydroponic vegetable production facility and a state-of-the-art fruit and vegetable processing line.

The technological aspects of instruction are enhanced by an array of equipment required in crop and fruit production systems, postharvest handling, biotechnology, seed processing, pesticide application, nursery and greenhouse operation, parks and sport grounds maintenance and landscape construction. Field trips supplement instruction and are strongly encouraged for most classes.

Students are encouraged to gain experience and earn income by participating in the Enterprise project program or by working on the Department's farmland. Enterprise projects are run under faculty supervision but are student-operated. These projects provide students with a "no risk" glimpse of a commercial enterprise. The Department offers Enterprise projects in the production of vegetables, fruit, avocados, deciduous fruit and nut crops, floricultural crops, nursery plants, and forages. Available marketing outlets range from contract sales of vegetable seeds, wholesaling to area supermarkets, and direct marketing at local farmers' markets, garden centers, florist shops, and through campus outlets. Certified organic produce is marketed through a biweekly Farmers’ Market or farmed or it is sold to local restaurants and retailers.

The Department supports co-curricular activities for its students, including two student clubs: the Crops Club and the Horticulture Club. Student teams in horticultural science, flower judging, floral design and the landscape industry continue to win national championships.

Undergraduate Programs

BS Agricultural and Environmental Plant Sciences

The Horticulture and Crop Science Department at Cal Poly offers students an opportunity not just to learn, but to learn-by-doing. Our students benefit from a broad spectrum of opportunities ranging from hands-on experiences in our fields, groves, nurseries, and greenhouses to real world application through internships and other collaborations with our industry partners. We also excel in providing a foundational plant science background and instilling a passion for plants, as we produce the next generation of leaders in the agricultural and environmental plant sciences.

Students in this major begin with core courses that provide a thorough introduction to the various concentrations. Each concentration, in turn, has required courses, which may be shared by other concentrations. In their first year, students explore curricular and professional opportunities to enable them to choose a concentration. In consultation with professional and faculty advisors, students have the flexibility to select electives within the concentrations according to their career goals and interests.

Internships are readily available to students and are highly recommended. Interns are typically placed with private industry and public facilities all across the United States but may also take place in foreign countries.

Over $100,000 in scholarships are available to students as are several undergraduate student assistantships which are sponsored by industry.

Program alumni are employed nationally and internationally and are often leaders in their industries. Graduates of the department are in great demand. Typically there are more internship and job opportunities than there are students to fill them.

Concentrations

Each concentration offers introductory, intermediate and advanced classes. The concentrations offer their own course of study (including required courses and electives) as well as opportunities for cross-training and multi-disciplinary learning.
Environmental Horticultural Science
This concentration offers students a comprehensive preparation for positions in the nursery, turf, greenhouse, landscape, and floriculture industries, including public horticulture. Graduates are employed as business owners, growers, managers, researchers, educators, arboreta and botanical garden directors, landscape contractors and designers, landscape management professionals, pest control advisors, and park, sports field and golf course superintendents.

The curriculum stresses production and marketing of nursery plants, fresh flowers, and flowering and foliage plants, landscape contracting, design, installation and management, turf installation and management, integrated pest management, and horticultural education, native plant restoration, green roofs and walls, and the public display of plants.

Fruit and Crop Science
The Fruit and Crop Science concentration provides students with detailed knowledge of the production of tree fruits and nuts, grapes, small fruits, vegetables and other row crops, and forages. The concentration details factors influencing the growth, development, and productivity of these crops (e.g., site selection, cultivar selection, field and plant establishment, pest management, harvesting, and postharvest handling). The concentration also focuses on ongoing and newly emerging specialty industries and concerns such as beekeeping, postharvest technology, plant breeding and biotechnology, integrated pest management, and precision agriculture.

Plant Protection Science
Approximately one-third of the world’s food crops are destroyed each year by insects, rodents, diseases and other pests. Finding ways to reduce these losses is the challenge of the plant protection specialist. In this concentration, students learn a broad range of pest management subjects including entomology, plant pathology and weed control. Students develop an understanding of crop production principles, ecology, biotechnology, pesticide toxicology and environmental science. As environmental regulations continue to increase, employment opportunities will grow for those holding professional licenses, and this concentration prepares students to take the California Pest Control Advisor (PCA) and Certified Crop Advisor license exams.

Crop Science Minor
Designed for students majoring in related academic disciplines who desire careers in crop production or its associated industries. The minor offers a broad-based knowledge of the science and technology of agronomy and vegetable production, especially as practiced in California.

Fruit Science Minor
The minor is designed for students majoring in related academic disciplines who desire to seek careers in fruit production or its associated industries. The minor offers a broad-based knowledge of the science and technology of fruit and nut production.

Landscape Horticulture Minor
The minor provides students with an understanding of the landscape horticultural industry and provides basic skills to understand the design, installation, and maintenance of landscapes. Students develop a knowledge of landscape plants and plant care as well as the basics of landscape contracting, including construction processes and materials used in the landscape industry. Students may learn advanced skills and concepts in the areas of turfgrass for golf course/ sports field applications, ecological restoration, design/build, plant care (both interior and exterior), and arboriculture.

Plant Protection Minor
This program emphasizes both plant protection and plant production. Within the plant protection field of study, the student is exposed to a broad range of pest management subjects including entomology, plant pathology, and weed control. Within the production area the student may emphasize fruit production, crop production, ornamental horticulture, or natural resource management.

Interdisciplinary Minors
The department participates in offering interdisciplinary minors in Geographic Information Systems for Agriculture, Land Rehabilitation, and Sustainable Agriculture. Please see College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (http://catalog.calpoly.edu/collegesandprograms/collegeofagriculturefoodenvironmentalsciences) section for more information.

Graduate Programs
Cal Poly offers a Master of Science degree in Agriculture with specializations in Crop Science, Environmental Horticultural Science, and Plant Protection Science, among others. Please refer to the MS Agriculture (http://catalog.calpoly.edu/collegesandprograms/collegeofagriculturefoodenvironmentalsciences/#graduatetext) section of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences.