Applause rang through a small town in Haiti. It was a sound very similar to the ringing bell towers of a church rebuilt by Cal Poly students after the devastating 2010 earthquake.

When graduating architectural engineering senior Caleb Dunne described his experience working in Haiti with Structural Engineering Students for Humanity, nothing could hide the passion in his voice.

“Theyir church had been completely demolished,” Dunne said. “When we had finished rebuilding the bell towers, there was this very emotional ceremony where the entire town came out and they rang the bells for the first time.”

Dunne worked with a non-government organization doing aid work to design and implement a project in Haiti. The project was to take three 500-pound bells from the debris of the demolished church and give them life again. Along with this first experience with Structural Engineering Students for Humanity, Dunne went back to Haiti as an intern for Build Change in Port-au-Prince, an organization that provides engineering services, training and education. Instead of rebuilding things, they taught Haitians how to do it themselves.

According to Dunne, these are the experiences that have shaped him at Cal Poly.

“I realized that a lot of what I’ve done at Cal Poly has not just been getting through my courses and keeping my head down,” Dunne said. “There’s been a lot of personal enrichment with all of the groups and experiences I’ve been involved in at Cal Poly.”

Dunne’s “personal enrichment” is also due to his role on the board of the Structural Engineers Association of California (SEAOC). John Lawson, associate professor for architectural engineering, has taught Dunne in two of his courses — foundation design and a design lab — and knows Dunne best through the SEAOC.

“He is confident in the roles he’s placed in,” Lawson said. “Someone that you can always invite into a formal or professional situation and never worry about what he’s going to say or do.”

In the SEAOC, Dunne was in charge of planning the Structural Form, the department’s biggest off-campus event. The event incorporates keynote speakers while different companies pay to attend.

“I was the Structural Forum chair,” Dunne said. “I was in charge of organizing Structural Forum, which is a huge conference for architecture, civil engineers and architecture-engineering students.”

Even with all of his time put toward his major and being involved, Dunne never hesitated to mix it up a bit.

“I play the tenor drums in the drum line for the Cal Poly marching band,” Dunne said. “It’s a huge group and performing with that many people has been a wonderful experience.”

But Dunne was not always this excited about being involved — it was not until he entered Cal Poly as a freshman that he realized he’d missed out on past opportunities.

“In high school I just went to my classes and was in the drum line and that was it,” Dunne lamented. “I looked back at the end of high school and decided when I came here I would get involved in as many things as possible.”

But with the urge to be involved and step out of his comfort zone, Dunne also discovered that college is very much a balancing act.

“When I first came to Cal Poly as a freshman, I wanted to try everything, but I eventually found that I had a breaking point.”

It seems Dunne has come full circle in his quest to be involved and try new things. As he graduates at the end of the fall quarter, Dunne is excited to start his own life.

“I definitely feel excited to go out into the world. I’m itching to go somewhere and do something totally different.”

And even if his endeavors were to take him somewhere completely unexpected, Dunne is game.

“I’ll be up for any opportunity that comes my way. If a project were to take me to Antarctica, I’d be all for it,” he said.

For now, Dunne is looking forward to being in the real world and having a job. He plans to be a consulting engineer and work for a firm.

“I’m most excited to go out and start my own life,” Dunne said. “When we graduated high school, we still weren’t in the real world yet; it’s still this little bubble. Finally getting out in the real world and starting a whole new life is exciting.”

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