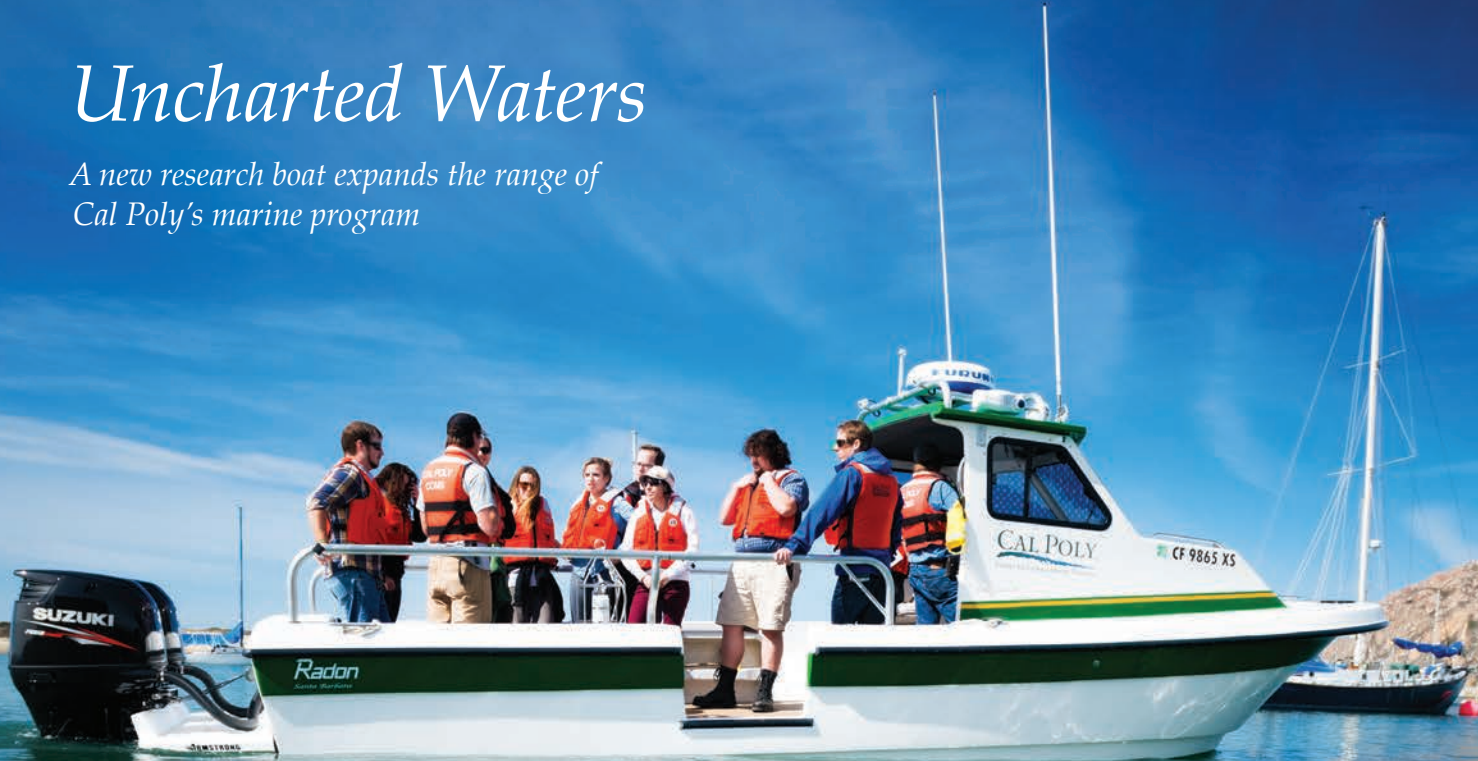


Uncharted Waters

A new research boat expands the range of Cal Poly's marine program



Don't call her pretty — she's beautiful. The Research Vessel TL Richards, a 26-foot, commercial-grade boat, became the newest addition to Cal Poly's marine program last year.

The boat is named in honor of Professor Emeritus Tom L. Richards, who taught marine biology at Cal Poly for 36 years. With a range of more than 200 miles, the TL Richards opens up entire new ecosystems for students to study. Research teams can now go as far south as the Channel Islands and access remote areas in Big Sur, and they don't have to wait for the rare calm day to do it — the Richards can handle significant chop in the ocean.

"The Richards changes the sorts of questions our students can ask," said Dean Wendt, interim director of Cal Poly's Center for Coastal Marine Sciences. "It enables our students and faculty to explore the most remote part of the California coastline."

Other research-friendly features include live wells for transporting fish and marine invertebrates and enough room to accommodate a team of six to eight divers. The boat also has the capacity for a 500-pound pole crane that can be used to load and deploy advanced instrumentation.

The TL Richards is decidedly high tech. State-of-the-art electronic navigation equipment allows for precise positioning and tracking. A FLIR infrared night-vision camera enables scientists to study nocturnal marine life.

In true Cal Poly style, the researchers on board during the maiden voyage were undergraduates in the Biology 328 Marine Ecology class.

"This is the best class I've taken at Cal Poly. It takes hands-on to a whole new level," said Chris Tremonti, a biology major concentrating in pre-med.

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Students got a double lesson as they explored the Morro Bay harbor area: in basic research and in boating safety. They learned not only how to test the conductivity, temperature and depth of the estuary's water but also basic marine safety and protocols, such as properly securing the scientific instruments on board.

"This is what I hope to be doing in the future. It's a wonderful opportunity to gain skills that I'll use later," said Lara Slatoff, a biology major with a marine concentration. "It's an opportunity I don't think I'd have gotten if I didn't go to Cal Poly." //