A Partner in Learn by Doing

Political science graduate Tim Humphreys gives back

In 1972, right around the time of the Watergate break-in, Tim Humphreys graduated from Cal Poly with a bachelor's degree in political science. He quickly landed a job helping his local state senator win reelection, but after the campaign he wanted time off from politics and took the opportunity to have knee surgery. During his recovery, he shared a hospital room with the manager of systems and programming for Crocker Bank. When the manager learned that Humphreys had taken a Cal Poly course in COBOL, a computer programming language designed for business, he offered him a job as an applications programmer trainee — and Humphreys' career was forever changed.

He had only taken one or two programming classes while at Cal Poly, but Humphreys said the Learn by Doing model gave him confidence in his ability to "figure things out."

And figure things out he did. By 1978, he had started his own consulting firm, Trident Services. In 1988, the company launched its first software solution, and over the past three decades, Humphreys has turned the business into a nationally recognized operating systems software development and services firm that supports major clients in the government and private sectors. "My background in political science has been invaluable to me in building the client relationships that are so necessary in the business world. It has also helped me understand the complexities involved in the use of information technology to meet the demands of our local, state and federal government clients."

Humphreys was in the first cohort of students to graduate with a degree in political science from Cal Poly, and the program holds a special place in his heart. He has served as chair of the Political Science Alumni Board and has been a member since its founding in the mid-2000s. He travels to San Luis Obispo from his Santa Cruz home at least twice a year to attend meetings and mentor students.
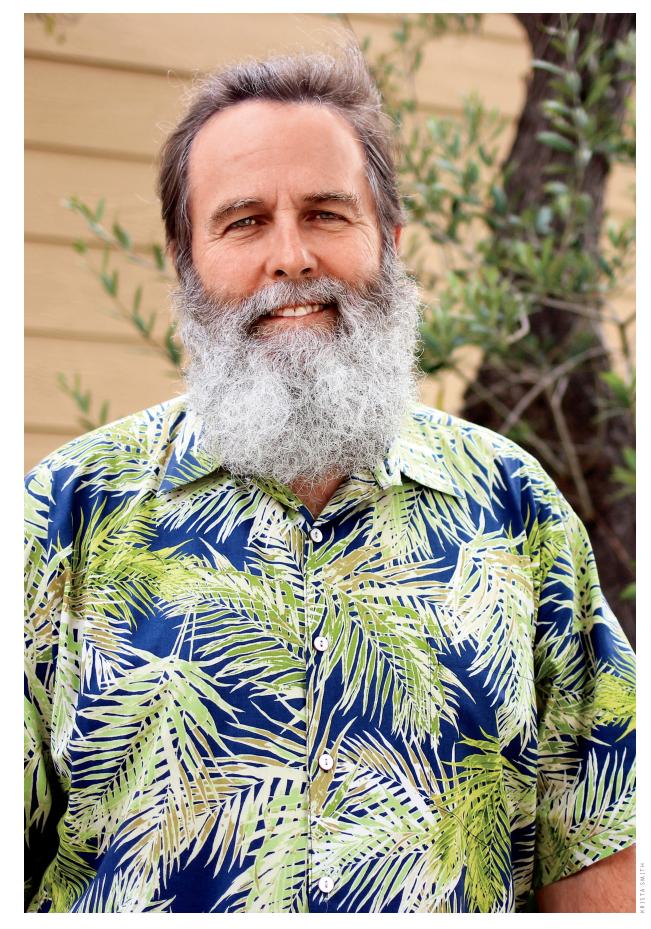
Humphreys and his wife, Pamela, made their first donation to the department in the early 2000s, and over time their generosity has enabled students to travel to conferences and competitions; supported the publication of a student journal, Paideia; and helped faculty complete and present cutting-edge research.

"Beyond the financial support that Tim has provided over the years, it is his unwavering passion for students, his dedication and his positive outlook that I appreciate most," said Department Chair Elizabeth Lowham. "Tim's primary focus has always been to help us provide the best possible learning and cocurricular experiences for students by making sure we have the resources to help them excel."

Humphreys has seen a lot of change in the department. There's now a Master of Public Policy program and successful Mock Trial and Model UN teams. He is most proud of the prestige the university currently experiences. "I wouldn't be able to get into Cal Poly today!" he said jokingly.

And although he has fond memories of campus — when the student union had just been built and there was only one option at mealtime — his most memorable moment was at a department awards ceremony in 2016, when students spoke about how much his support meant to them and presented him with a Partner in Giving Award. "That made me feel great," he said.

Even though Humphreys got out of politics, he continues to support the Political Science Department because he believes an understanding of politics is universally valuable. "Political science is the art of selling ideas, actions, philosophy, etc.," he said. "It's useful in a variety of settings — sports, playgrounds, classrooms, business of all sizes, boardrooms, within all levels of government and with the electorate. Politics is in every part of our social experience."

KRISTA SMITH

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Above: Joi Sullivan (Political Science, '14; Master of Public Policy, '16) and Katie Magnus (Political Science, '15) with Tim Humphreys after a political science alumni panel at Cal Poly.