One of Cal Poly's most valuable assets is the ten thousand acres of University land acquired over its hundred-year history and central to its unique identity. A large parcel surrounds the central campus; another is located a few miles to the west, and the remainder, encompassing redwood forest and ocean beach, is situated in Santa Cruz County. A resource for education, applied research and conservation, Cal Poly Land provides laboratories, supports ecosystems and life forms, grows food and fiber, and serves for recreation and renewal.
The University's Centennial Celebration in 2000-2002 renewed attention to this land. An innovative Master Planning process for long-term development inventoried and classified its varied regions as "outdoor teaching and learning facilities." And the University Provost sponsored the creation of the Cal Poly Land Project, an ongoing endeavor to understand, conserve, and celebrate the place where we reside.

The Project began as a Seminar, which enlisted the University Architect and nineteen faculty members from fifteen departments to meet monthly and teach one another about aspects of the land in which they specialize. These included Geology, Climate, Vegetation, Wildlife, Hydrology and Soils, Archaeology and History, Agriculture, Natural Resource Management, Recreation Administration, and Land Use Planning.

With the help of the Kennedy Library's Multimedia Center, the Seminar participants created an extensive website – http://polyland.lib.calpoly.edu --to archive and display their research.
The seminar also developed a General Education course, Humanities 330, titled "Cal Poly Land: Nature, Technology and Society." Interdisciplinary and team taught, the course includes weekly lectures, discussions and hikes that result in student group contributions to the evolving Cal Poly Land website.
The mission of the Cal Poly Land Project is summarized in this excerpt from the book's Preface, written by Paul J. Zingg, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs:

"What we are about through the agency of our lands is 'leaping a fence' of our own – that is connecting the formal curriculum of our lectures and laboratories, studios and seminars, to the informal curriculum of the land itself, a land that awaits exploration and study, discovery and consideration from the perspective of a myriad of academic disciplines that can be brought together for the task. …The land, in other words, is both teacher and subject. It affords reason for our work, inspiration for its undertaking, and an opportunity to examine and shape personal, institutional and societal values in the verdant, sometimes rough or muddy, process."

Bull test arena and Caballo Peak. Photo by Sky Bergman