Esteban Herrera’s success story is one of hard work and determination. Esteban attended school for Agronomy at La Escuela Superior de Agricultura “Hermanos Escobar” in Cuidad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. He began his graduate studies at New Mexico State University, but his financial resources were depleted after his first semester. He considered abandoning his studies, until the horticulture department head at NMSU offered him a research assistantship, which was the beginning of a long, fruitful relationship with the university. Esteban completed his Master of Science in horticulture at NMSU in 1974, then went on to earn his Ph.D. in horticulture from North Carolina State University in 1977.

After completing his doctorate, Esteban returned to La Escuela Superior de Agricultura “Hermanos Escobar” in Mexico. Esteban’s efforts led to the establishment of a graduate program at the college and was its first Dean. In 1978, he began his 25-year career with NMSU as an Extension Horticulturalist specializing in apples, pecans, grapes, and pistachios.

His work with NMSU Extension and research has improved orchard management techniques in New Mexico and across the Southwest. Throughout his career, Esteban has written over 400 research and extension publications. For 25 years he coordinated the annual Western Pecan Growers Association conference. In 1992 he began the publication of the Pecan Handbook, which contained 60 publications (40 of which he was the author) covering effective growing practices and orchard management. He has participated in pecan growers meetings and orchard management courses across the world in Australia, Egypt, South Africa, Argentina, China, Mexico, and Brazil. Pecan production improved in New Mexico during his tenure at NMSU. In 1999, Esteban was named the Outstanding Hispanic Faculty Member by the NMSU Chicano Programs. In 2000, he received the Extension Educator Award by the American Society for Horticulture Science.

In 1982, Esteban initiated the New Mexico Vine and Wine Society (NMVWS) Conference, which continues to be held annually. While serving as President of the NMVWS, he established the state’s first wine festivals, Bernalillo 1998 and Mesilla 1999.

Esteban retired from NMSU in 2002, but he remains involved in orchard management consulting and providing guest lectures. He and his wife, Armida Herrera, endowed the Esteban Herrera Scholarship to benefit students in the Plant and Environmental Sciences Department. Their son, Esteban Herrera, is an NMSU alumnus with a Bachelor’s in electric engineering and an MBA in Environmental Business Administration.
When asked why she is involved with New Mexico State University as an alumna, Irene Oliver Lewis responded, “I owe my professional, cultural, and personal growth to my time at NMSU.” Irene is a three-time Aggie, earning her Associates in 1974, Bachelor of Individualized Studies in 1975 and Master of Arts in 1978. Upon receiving her first degree, she was hired to create the first media campaign for DACC’s bond issue. She has remained committed to the university by serving on the KRWG Patron Board, Art Department Council, and as a loyal donor.

Irene has a passion for the arts and wanted a career that allowed her to share her passion with others, especially children. Throughout the 1970s, she participated in numerous theater productions throughout New Mexico and the U.S. with Isabel Crouch's Readers Theatre group, NMSU Theatre Department, and the Las Cruces Community Theatre (LCCT). People still remember her performance at LCCT as Angel in When You Comin' Back Red Ryder. In 1981 her career took her to Albuquerque, where she became the first cultural coordinator for Albuquerque Public Schools and created multicultural activities for children, youth, and teachers. In 1988, she founded ALMA Productions, a consulting company specializing in theatrical and film productions and arts in education. Irene had a nine-year career with La Compania de Teatro de Albuquerque as a director, producer, actor, and artistic director. Under her leadership, the company toured throughout New Mexico and the United States, and received an invitation to be featured at Joseph Papp's Festival Latino in New York City and the Edinburgh International Festival in Scotland. La Compania was recognized as one of 11 Latino theatre companies creating innovative and original theatrical pieces funded by the Ford Foundation. Irene played a significant role in starting the award-winning Longfellow Elementary School, the state's first arts based Spanish language elementary school.

Irene is a true leader in furthering the significance of the arts. While a theatre artist in residence in the Hatch Schools, she created arts projects for K-12 students and developed the summer programs to include arts education for bilingual students. In addition, she help start the Albuquerque Arts Alliance and assisted in the growth of the Fiesta Artistica (Arts Festival) that became the contemporary section of the annual Hispanic Arts Market in Santa Fe. In 1995, Irene came home to Las Cruces as the artistic producer and founder of the Court Youth Center, an arts-based youth program, and then started Alma d’arte Charter Arts High School in 2004.

Even though Irene says she is retired, she is busier than ever. Currently, she is assisting with the development of a film industry in southern New Mexico with NMSU’s Creative Media Institute, the Doña Ana Community College, and NMSU’s Arrowhead Center. She is also working on creating an Arts and Culture District with the City of Las Cruces.
Del Esparza has had a distinguished career since he graduated from NMSU with a Bachelor of Business Administration in 1991, including working for two Fortune 500 companies and starting his own business.

Del began his professional and leadership development journey with Conoco Phillips when he was accepted in the company’s Management Development Program. Upon completion of the program, he was placed in the marketing division. Del led recruitment efforts for western universities, including NMSU, where he knew there was tremendous talent. Following his time at Conoco Phillips, he moved back to New Mexico to work with Horizon Healthcare. He quickly rose through the ranks to become the youngest vice president at Horizon.

In 2000, Del founded Esparza Advertising. The company began as a small design firm with a team of three and has grown to one of the largest advertising agencies in the Southwest. The company provides promotional services to clients such as BMW, Hyatt Regency, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

Del knew he wanted to use his company in service of others. Through his service on the United Way board, an opportunity arose to help United Way of Central New Mexico with their fundraising efforts. Esparza Advertising provided a comprehensive advertising campaign that helped raise over $27 million. Del knew that other non-profit organizations could use promotional resources but often could not afford it, which led him to create Advocate, a program that selects one non-profit organization per year to receive a gift in-kind of a year-long comprehensive marketing and advertising campaign. Since the program began in 2010, over 200 applications have been received. Organizations that have benefited from Advocate include Cuidando los Ninos children’s homeless shelter and NM AIDS Services.

His notable career has been recognized by the community and in the industry. Del was the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Advertising Federation, an achievement he notes as one of the proudest moments of his career. In addition, he was selected as Albuquerque Business First’s top performing CEO in New Mexico.

Del’s philanthropic affinities include NMSU, where he funded an endowed scholarship for the College of Business and is also a loyal supporter of Aggie Athletics. He has served on the NMSU Foundation Board for 11 years. He often shares his industry experience with NMSU students as a guest lecturer.

Del has three children, Katelyn, Madison, and Andrew.
Distinguished Alumni College of Education
MaryLou Davis

From a young age, MaryLou Davis wanted to be a teacher. That dream became a reality when she completed her degree in elementary education in 1969. After graduation, she began her teaching career at University Hills Elementary School in Las Cruces.

While attending NMSU, MaryLou met her husband, Jack Davis ’68 ’73. In the 1970s, she and Jack relocated to Phoenix, Arizona where they still live today. MaryLou worked in the Phoenix Elementary School District for 15 years as a teacher and administrator. While in Phoenix, she furthered her education by completing an Associate of Arts degree in Child Development from Maricopa Community College and Master’s in Education from Grand Canyon University.

MaryLou’s professional excellence is driven by her conviction that everyone has a right to an education and her commitment to advocate for children. For 11 years, MaryLou taught and was the administrator of a private early childhood program. She began teaching at an inner city school in the 1990s so she could focus on the needs of students in low socio-economic communities. Due to her dedication to students and mentorship to other teachers, she was awarded Master Teacher status by the school district. MaryLou was appointed to the Maricopa County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, serving as an advocate for abused and neglected children in the court system. For 5 years, she taught English as a second language (ESL) and reading skills to incoming freshman at Phoenix College.

MaryLou made her life’s work to advocate for children and promote education for all. In 2000, she was one of the founders of Foster Angels of Arizona Serving Together (FAAST), a program committed to developing opportunities to help foster children break out of poverty and abuse. She served on several boards including Camp Fire Boys and Girls Club and Arizona Foundation for Women. Additionally, she was the past chairman on the board for Gompers Habilitation Center, a program that serves people of all ages with mental and physical disabilities.

Jack and MaryLou have been very generous supporters of NMSU. MaryLou serves on the NMSU Foundation Board as the vice chair. They have endowed scholarships in the College of Engineering and College of Education. As a lasting gift, MaryLou and Jack have provided a permanent legacy by leaving NMSU in their estate plans to ensure the work they have tirelessly devoted to students continues well into the future.
Although Eloy Torrez has lived outside of New Mexico since he graduated from NMSU with a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering in 1970, he is still deeply connected to the university. While working at Hughes Aircraft, he recruited Hispanic engineers from New Mexico, particularly NMSU, which kept him connected to his college and professors. Throughout the years, his involvement with the university has continued to grow. He has served on the Engineering Dean’s Advisory Board and as president of NMSU’s Klipsch School of Electrical and Computer Engineering Academy. In addition to his generous contributions to the Society of Women Engineers and the Dean’s Fund for Excellence, Eloy has endowed a scholarship in memory of his parents, Eloy Torrez and Savina Salcido. For his generosity and outstanding career, Eloy has been recognized by the College of Engineering as one of the “100 Engineering Outstanding Living Alumni.” Most recently, Eloy funded the Eloy Torrez Family Learning Communities in engineering, which offers tutoring to all engineering students.

Eloy has distinguished himself through a career of innovation in engineering and technology. He participated in the Howard Hughes Fellowship Program, receiving a Master of Engineering degree at UCLA in 1976, and became a registered professional engineer in control system engineering. Eloy spent the first 16 years of his career rising through the ranks at Hughes Aircraft Company. He took leadership roles on notable projects including chief engineer on the Maverick missile. In 1986, he moved to the Aerospace Division at International Signal and Control, first as the vice president then as the president. He then went on to serve as president of the Missile Systems Division at Ferranti International, where he directed all development and manufacturing operations on a contract with the United Arab Emirates Air Force.

In 1996, Eloy founded his own engineering firm, SEI Group Inc., which designs, builds, and maintains complex infrastructure and energy systems. The company provides engineering services to government agencies in the United States and corporate clients in various countries around the world. The Department of Defense is a client that has benefited from SEI Group’s energy efficiency designs and resource management technology to make the U.S. military greener. Eloy’s leadership and strategic management has brought SEI Group significant growth and top recognitions, including distinction as a Top 500 Hispanic Business and recipient of Boeing’s Gold Performance Excellence Award.

Eloy has 10 sisters and one brother. He and his wife, Sheila Torrez, have two daughters, Aubrey and Lauren.
This is a year of distinction for Sue Gerber. This spring, just months before being selected as an NMSU Distinguished Alumni, she was awarded the College of Health and Social Services Outstanding Public Health Sciences Alumni Award. Her commitment to creating a better world is evident in her career in public health.

Sue graduated from New Mexico State University in 1984 with a Bachelor of Arts in community health, but her education did not stop there. She went on to receive her master’s in public health from Walden University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This year she will add a few letters after her name when she completes her Ph.D. in public health and epidemiology.

Sue’s education at NMSU was the starting point of a meaningful career. For more than 24 years, she worked for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) managing immunization, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted disease prevention programs both nationally and internationally. She has taken on tremendous leadership roles in international public health mobilization. She has 10 years of experience with the CDC’s Global Immunization Division, where she developed programs for countries in Africa to assist with polio eradication, measles mortality reduction, routine immunizations, and other public health initiatives.

Currently, Sue is the senior program officer of the polio team at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She leads the global surveillance task force for polio and is engaged in eradication activities in countries of the Middle East, Horn of Africa, and Pakistan. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sue worked with UCLA and the Ministry of Health (MOH) on special studies to understand the levels of immunity against polio and other vaccine preventable diseases.

Her dream is to rid the world of polio. When asked to share the highlight of her career she stated, “The day that we can announce the world is polio-free.” She works tirelessly to improve polio surveillance and outbreak response and galvanize financial and political support for polio eradication efforts. Sue volunteered with the Peace Corps in Liberia supporting the country’s immunization program.

In addition to the service she provides in her profession, Sue gives back through service to her alma mater. This year she is participating in the College of Health and Social Services’ mentoring program, which allows her to share her vast experiences with students, faculty, and staff. She and her husband, Hector Alvarez, are also financial contributors to the HSS Dean’s Excellence Fund.