Our faculty, staff, and students continue to excel. For example, Sierra Strebe, a Genetics and Biotechnology major, and a member of the Plant and Environmental Sciences Fall 2018 graduating class, won a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Germany.

The department continues to foment activities that support the undergraduate student learning experience. HortForum, the undergraduate student horticulture club, along with one of its faculty advisers, Rachel Gioannini, spent their spring break learning more about plants. The Environmental Science Student Organization along with its advisor, Dr. April Ulery, learned and practiced sustainable construction.

Last fall, several of our students graduated and our student data revealed that most of our students found jobs or have enrolled in graduate programs. As these students transition from the Department, we will need to bring in a new cohort of students. Hence, our faculty and staff continue to participate in numerous recruitment activities.

In February, Dr. Mary O’Connell retired. Mary built a research, teaching, and outreach program that spawned collaborations across multiple levels. In this newsletter’s faculty profile, we summarize a few of Mary’s accomplishments. We sincerely thank Mary for being a mentor and role model to many faculty, staff, and students.
Faculty and staff gladly serve up ice cream to PES students and all who wished to partake.

Mingling students get acquainted with faculty, staff, and fellow students, forging long lasting friendships as they enjoy the refreshments, ambience, and good company.
Before her retirement in February, Regents Professor Dr. Mary O’Connell steadfastly dedicated her time and talents to NMSU for 34 years. Dr. O’Connell joined the NMSU faculty in 1985 as an assistant professor in horticulture, where she quickly established herself as an integral part of the community. She was promoted to associate professor in 1991 and promoted to professor in 1996 – the role in which she dutifully served until her retirement.

In addition to her service as a professor, Dr. O’Connell helped establish the Partnership for the Advancement of Cancer Research, a successful program funded by the National Cancer Institute to advance cancer research in minority communities. As a lead investigator, Dr. O’Connell ensured the successful renewal of the grant for 16 years, which brought in more than $15 million in cancer research grants to the NMSU community. Even upon her retirement, Dr. O’Connell continues to assist in leading the program and ensuring a future of cancer research at NMSU.

In her positions as a professor and investigator, Dr. O’Connell earned numerous achievements, including a Distinguished Research Award, the NACTA Teaching Award of Merit, Distinguished Achievement Professorship, Regents Professorship, and the Westhafer Award for Excellence in Research.

While her research and teaching activities alone made Dr. O’Connell an invaluable member of our Department, her commitment to students and the community left lasting impressions. Many of her former students and colleagues say they admired Dr. O’Connell for her resilience, work ethic and mentorship, among other things. Throughout her time at NMSU, Dr. O’Connell served as a mentor in student training programs such as Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC), Minority Biomedical Research Support/RISE, and the Bridges to Native Americans program. Her dedication to mentorship also earned her the Outstanding Faculty Mentor award from the Teaching Academy.

Thank you, Dr. Mary O’Connell, for your unparalleled service and contributions to our department and the university. Best wishes in your retirement.
The Environmental Science Student Organization (ESSO) combined forces with the NMSU Rotaract club (the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences Rotary chapter) to learn how to build a structure using only soil, sand, straw and old tires, and bottles. They volunteered at Foxhole Homes in Alamogordo on Saturday, March 10 to work on a material storage facility using cob-coated tire bale construction. Foxhole Homes has a mission to build sustainable housing and provide a community for veterans in need. We had 15 students from both clubs helping with construction and learning about a practical function of soil in the environment.

The HortForum club is an educational organization that enjoys teaching about the desert’s beautiful succulents. As the semester winds down, a new crop of plants is waiting for our spring sale. It is through our sales and contributions that we’re enabled to go on trips such as these, and continue to keep our greenhouse brimming with life.

The HortForum spent three days in Tucson with a visit to the Tucson Botanical Garden, hiking a trail in Saguaro National Park East that is peppered with ancient Saguaros, and explored the most amazing Arboretum in Florence, Arizona – the Boyce Thompson Arboretum (pictured).
Ms. Sierra Strebe, 2018 PES alumna and genetics major, was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to Germany. Congratulations on such a prestigious award!

Gaurav Jha attended the International Conference on "Soils Across Latitudes" and was awarded the first place for 5-minute Rapid oral presentation and poster presentation by Soil and Environmental Quality Division. He was also recognized by the Society for his research excellence and was selected as top ten student research finalists for the society-wide presentations during the conference.

Seven PES Undergraduate ASHS Award Recipients

Adam L. Hopper, Dagoberto Matta, Eduardo A. Rascon Aldana, James O. Martin, and Amador G. Gonzales, were named 2019 American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS) Collegiate Scholars; award that honors junior/senior undergraduate students for academic achievement. Rachel A. Herrington was named 2019 ASHS Outstanding Undergraduate; this award recognizes exceptional undergraduate horticulture students. Congratulations!

Dr. Paul W. Bosland New Mexico State University Regents Professor of Horticulture, Distinguished Achievement Professor and Chile Pepper Institute Director has been honored with the Lifetime Achievement award from the International Pepper Conference. Go to for complete story: http://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/13478/nmsu-chile-expert-receives-lifetime-achievement-award-at-international-pepper-conference

Dr. Ian Ray was re-appointed to the Billy and Lois Melton Endowed Professor. The Chair occupancy will be for a 5-year term; the appointment became effective December 11, 2018.

Dr. F. Omar Holguin won the lightning round of the "First Friday Kickoff." One of nine PES/ACES researchers, he emerged the victor in the rapid, five minute science communication event.

April Ulery, the ACES Media Learning Lab, and Kenneth "KC" Carroll created and posted an online https://scienceofsoil.com/ instructional video called Soil Infiltration: Soil Porosity testing that has won a Gold award from the Association for Communications Excellence professional association. The animation was first in its class among "Motion graphics/augmented reality/virtual reality/animation."
**Dr. KC Carroll’s Research Group**

From left, recent PhD graduate Naima Khan, MS student Chris Kubicki, Kenneth "KC" Carroll, and PhD student Peter Chia-Hsing Tsai

The Carroll research lab group contributed several presentations and organized three sessions at the 2018 American Geophysical Union (AGU) conference in Washington DC Dec. 10-14, 2018.

**Keynote Speaker**

Dr. Rolston St. Hilaire was the Keynote speaker at the “La Semana Del Agua” conference that was held in Juárez, Mexico, on March 22, 2019, to celebrate the United Nations World Water Day (March 22 this year). The conference was convened by Consejo Ciudadano de Cultura del Agua of Juárez. Dr. St. Hilaire presented materials from his book “Landscape Plants for the Lower Rio Grande Basin” and discussed low water use landscape plants suited to Juárez and its environs.

**PES Faculty Visits India**

Dr. Manoj Shukla visited A.N.G. Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU), Bapatla Andhra Pradesh, India during February-March, 2019. He met with students, faculty, Deans and the Vice Chancellor. The trip was organized to both recruit students as well as start teaching, research, training, and faculty-student exchange. Currently a memorandum of understanding is under development between New Mexico State University and A.N.G. Ranga Agricultural University.

**Navajo Nation Outreach**

Front row, L to R: Yoshira Ornelas (U of A); Dr. Karletta Chief (U of A); Navajo Nation), Duane ‘Chili’ Yazzie (Shiprock Cha Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock Council Delegate to the pter House President), Dr. Paloma Beamer (U of A), Back Row (L to R) Gaurav Jha (NMSU PES), Brandon Francis (NMSU-ASC Farmington), Al Yazzie (U of A), Mae-Gilene Begay (Navajo Nation Director of CHR Program), Dennis McQuillan (NM Department of Environment), Dr. Kevin Lombard (NMSU-ASC Farmington), Neilroy Singer (Dine’ College Cooperative Extension)

Gaurav Jha is working on his Ph.D and his research focuses on long-term monitoring of contaminations in the agricultural system of Animas watershed after the Gold King Mine Spill. He is also involved in outreach and extension of his research to Navajo Nation.