



## Journalism alumni working at NMSU

by Frank Ambriz



From left: Justin Banister, Angela Simental, Amanda Bradford, Jocelyn Apodaca, Julie Hughes, Isabel Rodriguez, Jeany Llorente-Ontiveros, Eddie Morelos  
Photo by Dana Beasley

When students of a journalism program walk on stage during their graduation ceremony or receive their degrees in the mail, they often see a future where they work in huge chaotic newsrooms, anchor for a local television station or travel the world covering life-changing stories.

Few probably imagine themselves working from a small office at the school they graduated from, writing press releases, coordinating events or teaching other students. However, that is what many of New Mexico State University's journalism program alumni are doing. Graduates from all eras and disciplines of the program now work at various departments within the university.

One popular destination for journalism alumni at NMSU is the department of University Communications. It is a natural fit as these former students can put their journalistic skills to good use for the university.

Journalism alumni who now work for the department include Justin

Banister, Jocelyn Apodaca, Amanda Bradford and Julie Hughes, a 1995 graduate who has worked her way up the NMSU ladder to the position of Director of Internal Communications and Public Affairs.

Angela Simental and Isabel Rodriguez, who graduated in 2008 and 2012 respectively, are news writers for University Communications. Simental writes for the Department of Agriculture and Rodriguez for the College of Arts and Sciences.

"I also do a column for the Albuquerque Journal on the economic impact of the research being done on agriculture at NMSU," said Simental.

"I worked on a story about [the Creative Media Institute] and it turned into one of the coolest stories I worked on," said Rodriguez.

Their stories are published in a variety of NMSU publications and local newspapers, such as the Las Cruces Sun News and Albuquerque Journal.

Outside of University Communications, one former student does communications work for the College

of Engineering. Tracey O'Neil, who graduated in 2009, works as the program coordinator for the college.

"I coordinate several different events, including homecoming and two robotics competitions for K-12 groups. I also work with the dean's advisory council and student development efforts," O'Neil said.

While some find work relating to their field at NMSU, others work in areas unrelated to journalism as instructors of varied subjects.

Gabriela Moreno, a 1999 graduate, is an assistant professor of Spanish for NMSU's Department of Language and Linguistics. Moreno was first hired as an adjunct professor in 2002 and returned as an assistant professor in 2012, working specifically in the Spanish for Heritage Learners program.

"My main priority is teaching Spanish courses," said Moreno. "I also take on an administrative role within the program in which I recruit, advise and mentor students and [teaching assistants]."

Also teaching at NMSU is Jacinda Hinkson, a 2009 graduate of the journalism program. Hinkson is a part-time instructor for the Department of Agriculture and Extension Education. She started out by filling in for a professor.

“Because of my journalism back-

ground, last semester they asked me to teach an [agriculture] communications class,” said Hinkson. “This semester I’m teaching an independent study class where [students] put together a newsletter called the Bull Sheet.”

“After a year of working outside the college, a position opened up in the dean’s office where I worked,” O’Neil said.

For Moreno and Hinkson, they returned to NMSU because they saw

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*- Isabel Rodriguez*

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There are many more former NMSU journalism students working at various departments throughout the university. These include Milen Bartnick in the Registrar’s Office, Michelle Lebsock in Instructional Innovation and Quality and even Frank Thayer, emeritus professor and former department head for the journalism program.

These journalism alumni have varying reasons for returning to NMSU. For Simental and Rodriguez, working for the University was a natural transition as both previously interned here. In similar fashion, O’Neil interned as an editorial assis-

tant for the dean’s office at the College of Engineering.

opportunities to work in areas they were passionate about.

A former dual-major in Spanish, Gabriela Moreno was already familiar with the Heritage Learners program and wanted to give back to today’s Spanish-speaking students.

“I feel an obligation to my students and to my community to give back,” said Moreno. “I’m so lucky that I got this far in my education and it’s my turn to help others attain that.”

Hinkson received her master’s degree in agriculture and extension education, a program her mother also graduated from. She said she has always had a passion for New Mexico agriculture.

“I grew up in an agricultural area and it’s always been a part of my life and passion, so it was a pretty natural fit for me,” Hinkson said.

While these alumni have entered into various disciplines, one thing

they have in common is that they did not imagine themselves working for the university after graduation.

“It wasn’t really part of the plan to come back here, but I saw an opportunity and I think it will serve me well,” said O’Neil.

The rest of the former students echoed this sentiment, as they all feel NMSU has provided them with a great opportunity.

“I think I was very fortunate to be hired to work for the university,” said Rodriguez. “It’s a really good work environment and I get to learn a variety of different things that I otherwise wouldn’t be, working at a newspaper.”

Regardless of their positions, all of these alumni make good use of what they learned during their time at the journalism department. The communication and writing skills they acquired helped them in their career pursuits.

“In the journalism classes, I was able to develop my language and learn to speak to people and feel free expressing myself,” said Moreno. “When I came back to interview for this position, I think what sold them was how well I spoke in front of the class.”

“Being able to write under deadline pressure is probably one of the best skills I got out of the journalism department,” Hinkson said. She currently tries to instill good writing and communication skills to her students.

For Simental and Rodriguez, working at NMSU has also provided them with the opportunity to learn new skills in addition to what they learned from their journalism classes.

“We are learning how to do multimedia packages for print, online and TV,” said Simental. “We didn’t anticipate doing anything other than print,” Rodriguez said.

The journalism department’s current emphasis on multimedia is a relatively new effort. Like Rodriguez

and Simental, the other alumni were not as exposed to multimedia as today’s students.

“Now with how quickly things are changing and with how small budgets are, you pretty much have to be able to do everything. Back then, not as much,” said Hinkson.

“It was something they were trying to figure out how to integrate into the curriculum, but it seems like they have come a long way since that started,” said O’Neil.

The program, however, was described as being varied and offering many disciplines.

“What I really liked about the program was that you had a lot of options. You could pick and choose the things you were most interested in,” said Hinkson.

“We did a little bit of broadcasting, radio, newspaper, magazine so we can get a broad overview of everything,” O’Neil said.

Working at NMSU has also allowed the alumni to view the university

from a new perspective. Working with students and departments outside of journalism has allowed Simental to learn new things about the university.

“As a student, I was so involved in the journalism department that I didn’t see what was going on at the rest of the university,” she said. “You get to see what is being done at NMSU outside of a student’s lens.”

These alumni shared fond memories of their time with the journalism department, mostly remembering their positive interactions with colleagues and professors.

“I really enjoyed my time with the journalism program because it was so fun,” said Moreno. “When I got married, KRWG came and recorded my wedding.”

“Dr. Mac and Dr. Thayer had a big impact on how I went through college and my career choices later,” said Hinkson.

Ultimately, it was the friendly and familiar environment that brought these former journalism students

back to NMSU. Being in Las Cruces, on campus and around familiar faces makes these former students feel at home.

“I’ve always enjoyed the atmosphere [of NMSU],” said O’Neil. “When the opportunity presented itself, I jumped at it because I wanted to be back on campus just for that feel.”

“It’s good to have a place where you can feel comfortable,” said Moreno. “It feels like home.”

These former journalism graduates are unsure of whether they will be working for NMSU in the future. However, they all said they made the right choice and enjoy working for the university.

“If I’m not working here in the future, I would like to work in an environment that is very similar to this,” said Rodriguez. “I know a couple of people who have graduated from the program and I can tell you they aren’t having as much fun as we are at their jobs.” — F.A.



Isabel Rodriguez, a 2012 NMSU graduate, and Angela Simental, a 2008 NMSU graduate, working in their office at University Communications. Photo by Dana Beasley