

NMSU Alumni Association Outstanding Graduate | College of Arts & Sciences

Marco Martinez

Marco Martinez didn't like school—although he was good at it—and didn't even want to go to college.

Today, this first-generation student is one of our Computer Science (CS) department's top three fall graduates.

Born in Deming, NM, Marco's father was a migrant field worker. His parents believed in the power of education and encouraged him to do well in school and in sports. Marco credits his high school wrestling coaches for his mental toughness. As team captain, he discovered that he likes being a leader—or, as he says, a “voice of the people.”

His high school guidance counselors facilitated his applications to NMSU and for scholarships. Marco's first major was engineering, but after a C grade on an algebra midterm, he knew he had to get tough on himself to succeed in college. Determined to improve, by the end of the semester he had earned an A, but realized he didn't enjoy engineering.

Searching for his true academic home, he switched to English and then marketing. One day, Marco was paging through the NMSU course catalog and came across computer science classes. The next semester he was a CS major. “It felt like what I was meant to do.”

Computer science faculty quickly recognized Marco's academic and leadership skills. He served as student advocate for the Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, mentoring students on conference etiquette, using the “hallway track,” and approaching people you want to talk to. Marco was also a teaching assistant in AI4ALL's College Pathways program and participated in Google's Latinx Student Leadership Summit. His performance in Discrete Mathematics, a “barrier” course for CS students, led to his selection as a peer leader to help and motivate other students. As Dr. William Hamilton notes, Marco is “not only a social leader but a technical one.”

Marco was key to establishing the CS Programming Club. Tapped for the presidency, Marco hesitated because others were better at coding, but his leadership met with enthusiasm. Marco threw himself into the role, because “a leader needs initiative and to spearhead what the group wants to do.” He recruited members, organized events, and led the way to the club's status as an official student organization. When the Programming Club merged with a club for which the corporate sponsor sought control over the leadership choice, Dr. Joshua Reynolds says Marco “courageously refused to concede.”

Marco's favorite NMSU memory is helping revitalize the CS student population: “We built a community and changed the space.” On a personal level, Marco says “the CS community knows and accepts me—I haven't found that anywhere else.”

Marco will soon have more time for another passion: dancing! His whole family loves to dance, and Marco especially enjoys social dancing, particularly tango, salsa, and cha-cha. Although he plans to attend graduate school “eventually,” he says his first goal is to get into the work force to “see the fruits of my labor” and help support his family.