



2025
NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

JAMES F. COLE MEMORIAL
AWARD FOR SERVICE

CYNTHIA BEJARANO, PH.D. '95, '97



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—Cynthia Bejarano,
Ph.D. '95, '97

“At the end of the day, it’s all about creating possibilities for people to live dignified lives,” says Cynthia Bejarano, Ph.D. '95, '97.

A fourth-generation New Mexican, Cynthia grew up in Anthony, NM, a then-colonia that dealt with many challenges including chronic poverty. Amidst many difficult situations, her parents were role models, not only for Cynthia and her sister, but for their community. Cynthia notes, “I saw them perform acts of kindness on a daily basis,” and she shared their desire to serve her community. Over two summers as a college student, she would wake up at 4 a.m. to volunteer with the Centro Legal Campesino to help laborers fill out worker compensation documents before they boarded converted school buses to nearby agricultural fields.

Cynthia’s path to study criminology was set when her father was brutally assaulted by a youth gang when he intervened in the theft of an elderly neighbor’s car. This experience ignited her interest in foundational questions about violence and “structural impediments that prevent access to mainstream opportunities.”

She chose NMSU for her bachelor’s and master’s, following in the footsteps of her father, who had graduated from NMSU through the GI Bill, and her maternal grandfather, who was a custodian at NMSU and earned his GED while working there. Cynthia counts high school mentor Dr. Joe Graham and NMSU professors Diana Bustamante, Dennis Giever, and Peter Gregware as instrumental in shaping her academic interests. She obtained her doctorate at Arizona State University (ASU) in 2001 and returned to NMSU as a professor in the Criminal Justice and later Gender and Sexuality Studies departments. In 2018, ASU recognized her as an Outstanding Alumna.

Cynthia’s undertakings include research, civic, and humanitarian projects, for which she has received awards ranging from being named an NMSU Regents Professor to the Governor’s Award for Outstanding New Mexico Women to the E. Kika de la Garza Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for her farmworker advocacy.

At NMSU, she is best known for establishing the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) in 2002, for which her team has generated \$14 million in external and state funding. CAMP recruits and retains students from eligible farmworker families, and, to date, has served 674 students. In 2015, CAMP was recognized as a White House Excellence in Education for Hispanics Bright Spot. Cynthia says, “Knowing we have worked to create passage for students who otherwise may not have come to NMSU assures me that I am exactly where I need to be.”

Among her volunteer activities, Cynthia co-founded Amigos de las Mujeres de Juárez to raise awareness about gender-based violence. She has also served on several regional immigrant advocacy organizations.

Her advice to students? “Don’t be afraid to ask for help or guidance. Be strong in your convictions at NMSU: Know that you belong and take everything you can from the opportunities you can find here.” ▲