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NMSU Criminal Justice Newsletter

Fall2025 – Newsletter Content

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<u>Dr. Dennis Giever</u> CJ Department Head

Message from the Department Head

This message will be somewhat unique as I usually write about the wonderful accomplishments of our department over the past semester.

Instead, I must announce my retirement from NMSU and the Department of Criminal Justice. So, this will be my last Newsletter message to you. It is bittersweet as I have really enjoyed connecting with our alumni (some who were students at the same time as I was – many years ago) and seeing and learning about the impressive work you all have done. In fact, I can honestly say it was the highlight of my job over the past 8-9 years. The reason for my rather abrupt retirement is for health reasons (both me and my wife).

If you have not heard, I had what should have been routine back surgery in May of this year. I should have been back on the job in about three to four weeks. All went well and I was released from the hospital after just four days after the surgery – but that was when all hell broke loose.

Not to bore you with all the details, but I started with a spinal fluid leak and more importantly, a rather substantial infection (that we are still trying to deal with). I was in and out of the hospital through mid-October (mostly in the hospital) and needed four additional surgeries to deal with all the complications. As you might guess, this really took a toll on my body (I lost over 40 pounds) and was very difficult for my wife.

During this ordeal, Diane (my wife) and I decided I just needed to retire. As most of you know, my goal was to work at NMSU until I turned 70 (summer of 2028), but with all these complications and my wife's declining health, we just decided that it was time. This was not an easy decision as I really love what I do. We have an outstanding department with phenomenal alumni, and I will miss working with everyone. That said, I also didn't want to be one of those who worked too long and never got a chance to enjoy their retirement. As I tell everyone, I started working full-time when I was 12 years old – so it was time!! I know our department will continue to grow and thrive, and that our alumni will continue to offer their support and guidance for the department. We have so many alumni that are doing great things and I have enjoyed my encounters with each and every one of you. In fact, I cherish those interactions. I thank each of you for your support and wish you nothing but the best in the future. My wife and I plan to relocate to Gilbert AZ to be closer to both outstanding medical facilities (for my wife) and our daughter.

STATE

d. Shape the Future

If any of you are in the area, please look us up!!



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New Faculty



Dr. Ahram Cho Associate Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: <u>Dr. Ahram Cho</u>

We are excited to highlight Dr. Ahram Cho, an Associate Professor whose scholarship and dedication continue to strengthen the academic excellence of the Department of Criminal Justice.

Dr. Ahram Cho joined the faculty in 2019 after completing her M.A. and Ph.D. in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University. Her primary research interest centers on quantitative methods to facilitate the study of corrections, and crime and justice related to gender.

Dr. Cho created the NMSU's Clothesline Project, which is among many activities across Las Cruces that recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October every year.

Her recent research articles:

Gonzales, T. A., & Cho, A. (2025). Exploring Dimensions of Adult Drug Treatment Courts Related to Successful Completion. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *52*(1), 79-97.

Barnaby, C. Y., Updegrove, A. H., Cooper, M. N., Cho, A., & Dixon, A. (2025). "Err on the Side of Grace, for Yourself, and for Your Students": A Resource List and Advice for First-Time Race and Crime Instructors. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 1-27.





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New Faculty



<u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u> Assistant Professor

NM STATE

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College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Criminal Justice

CJ Faculty Focus: Dr. Jessica Corey

We are excited to highlight Dr. Jessica Corey, an Assistant Professor who transforms her CJUS 332 - Correctional Law class into a living simulation—challenging students to experience life behind bars, question perceptions of justice, and see the human side of incarceration.

Inside the Classroom: Correctional Law Gets Real

This fall, students in Dr. Corey's Correctional Law class got a powerful, hands-on look at what it means to lose one's identity within the correctional system. Under the guidance of Professor Corey, students took on the role of "inmates" for the semester—complete with ID badges, assigned numbers, and a set of "institutional rules." The immersive activity was designed to help students understand how identity, structure, and compliance operate behind prison walls. Many students described the experience as "eye-opening" and "uncomfortable in a good way," reflecting deeply on how even small restrictions can affect one's sense of self and autonomy.

Below, Jessica answers some questions about the inspiration behind this innovative teaching approach. alongside reflections from students who lived the experience firsthand.

What inspired you to create the "inmate ID" simulation for your Correctional Law class?

With every class I teach, I ask myself how I can help students *feel* what it's really like to be part of the system - whether that's working in corrections, being wrongfully convicted, or navigating incarceration. I've found that students connect with the material on a much deeper level when they can link it to a lived experience, even if that's a simulated experience. Many people assume inmates "deserve" whatever happens to them, but prisoners still maintain constitutional protections, even if they are limited by incarceration. When constitutional rights of prisoners are violated, it's not just a legal issue - it's a human rights issue. I want my students to recognize that these violations can happen to anyone, regardless of age, race, gender, or social status. By living as "inmates" in the classroom, students get a glimpse of what it's like to lose control, have limited speech, and navigate a system where their rights feel out of reach.

On the other side, the prison simulation also helps students understand how challenging it is for correctional staff to balance prisoners' rights while maintaining safety and order. Running a correctional facility means constantly walking a fine line - protecting inmate rights while operating under conditions of limited resources, high turnover, and immense security pressures.



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New Faculty



Dr. Jessica Corey
Assistant Professor



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College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Criminal Justice

CJ Faculty Focus: <u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u>

Ultimately, I want students to leave the experience understanding both perspectives: the humanity of those incarcerated and the immense responsibility of those who manage correctional institutions. It's one thing to read about constitutional rights in a textbook - it's another to *feel* what it's like when those rights are restricted and to realize how difficult it is, from either side, to uphold justice within the walls of a prison.

Can you describe how your Correctional Law class is structured this semester and what the classroom environment is like?

One major component of the prison simulation is that students are required to wear inmate ID badges in every class. Each badge displays their last name, first initial, and a random ID number, which they must use to identify themselves. These badges have been mandatory since the second day of class, and failure to wear one results in "non-compliance" points. Non-compliance points are assigned for breaking any classroom rule, ranging from minor more significant infractions.

At times, students may also be required to wear bright red name-tag stickers labeled "non-compliant" as a visible marker of rule violations. Disciplinary cases are issued for major infractions, such as being found with contraband items - like cell phones - that are restricted in real prison settings. To emphasize fairness and uniformity, all students receive the same classroom materials, including a pen, a tiny pencil, and the same colored notebooks, so no one has special items or privileges. Use of unapproved materials, such as colored ink pens or extra paper, also results in non-compliance points. While these points do not affect students' grades, they play a crucial role in reflecting on the power, structure, and consequences within correctional settings. At the end of the semester, we will conduct an activity that allows students to explore how these points could translate into real-life outcomes and the potential impact of procedural rules on inmates' daily lives.

What is one of the most interesting reactions you've seen from students as they experience being referred to by an inmate ID or last name?

One of the most interesting things that's happened is that some students now email me and identify themselves by their inmate ID numbers instead of their names. It really shows how much they've internalized and taken on that identity, even beyond the classroom setting. I find that especially interesting because it shows how deeply the simulation has resonated with them on a psychological level. Even though they know it's just a class activity, their continued use of inmate identities outside of class reflects how easily a label or assigned role can shape one's sense of self - mirroring what can happen in real correctional environments.



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New Faculty



<u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u> Assistant Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: Dr. Jessica Corey this exercise beloed students understand the psychological contents.

How has this exercise helped students understand the psychological and social impact of incarceration, especially the concept of identity loss?

In addition to wearing inmate ID badges, students participate in a variety of hands-on activities throughout the semester. Each week, they share reflections on class activities and content to demonstrate that they are making real connections between what we're learning about constitutional rights and how those rights affect incarcerated individuals. One of the most impactful experiences occurs with students placed in "solitary confinement." These students follow more restrictive rules than those in "general population." They are seated around the edge of the classroom, spaced apart from others, and are no longer allowed to speak or participate in class discussions - mimicking the loss of voice that prisoners often experience in solitary confinement. They must reflect internally on class activities and cannot collaborate with others, simulating the loss of human connection. Additionally, they are not allowed personal items such as watches, cell phones, or books. This mirrors the deprivation and loss of autonomy that incarcerated individuals experience when their access to personal belongings and daily comforts is taken away.

My students have provided powerful insights as to how being in solitary impacts them psychologically. For example, many students who are typically very vocal find it frustrating and disorienting to have no voice or interaction. Those who are usually quieter report wishing they could contribute to discussions, realizing the value of their voice only once it is removed. Students also report a distorted sense of time without access to watches or phones; the minutes seem to drag on endlessly. Some students have even become restless, fidgeting with items or posters on the wall due to boredom and lack of engagement.

To ensure this immersive learning remains psychologically safe, I check in with students after class and through reflection questions to monitor their responses. I remind them that while the simulation is meant to be impactful, they should not compromise their well-being; they can get up for the bathroom, take emergency calls, or arrive late if needed. Even with these safeguards, the exercise continues to demonstrate just how deeply incarceration affects one's psychological state, social relationships, and sense of identity - particularly under the isolating conditions of solitary confinement.





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New Faculty



<u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u> Assistant Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: Dr. Jessica Corey

Looking ahead, do you plan to expand or adapt this simulation in future semesters?

Yes! I'd love to expand this simulation in future semesters. The feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive. Many have shared that the hands-on activities help them better understand the laws, rights, and concepts we discuss in class. I've also received several creative and insightful suggestions from my current students that we just don't have time to implement this semester, but I'm excited to incorporate them in the future.

If you could summarize the impact of this assignment in one sentence, what would it be?

In just once sentence I would say that this prison simulation has stripped away the comfort of a traditional classroom, leaving students with a raw, (hopefully) unforgettable glimpse into the tension, power, vulnerability, and fragile balance of constitutional rights that shape life for both inmates and staff behind bars.

Here are the quotes from students who participated in the class:

What has it been like to take on the role of an "inmate" in this class?

"Taking on the role of an inmate this semester has created a truly immersive experience. Instead of a traditional lecture and classroom setting, this class has shown all the tedious regulations that make the prison life what it is. I do believe it has taught me more than I realize in a non-traditional manner. Feeling reduced down to a number or receiving non-compliance points for little to no reason feels unfair, but that is what it is really like for the inmates."

"Taking on the role of an inmate in class has been very different from my other classes. Having ID badges and rules makes me think more about how it will feel to have every move watched and even judged. Even though it is just a classroom setting, the structure makes me imagine what it would be like to live with limited freedom and controlled behavior."

"It's interesting how quickly you start to notice things like how very small privileges feel like rewards or how easy it is to get frustrated when rules limit your choices. It's definitely made me more aware of how structure and authority shape behavior."





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New Faculty



<u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u> Assistant Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: Dr. Jessica Corey

"Being an inmate has made me see things from a very different perspective. At first I found it to be a strange dynamic, but as the days went by, I understood that the goal was to put us in the shoes of the people who actually live within the correctional system. Assuming that role made me feel limited, controlled, and lacking the freedom to act as I normally would in a classroom. At times, I felt watched or judged which made me think about how difficult it must be for those who live under such strict rules every day."

"Being an inmate really makes me want to learn more about the correctional system and rights, because I am a prisoner myself."

"Taking on the role of an inmate has really been a unique experience. I thought that I would never get non-compliant points, but its really easy to get those when doing what seems like 'nothing wrong.' Progressing through the semester I've adapted to the strict rules of the simulation, however, I am still paranoid in doing something wrong unintentionally, but this is what makes class really interesting and engaging. It definitely makes me think more deeply about what inmates go through on a daily basis."

Do you think the structure of this class (badges, points, rules, etc.) helps you understand *correctional law more* deeply than a traditional classroom setup?

"I think the structure of the class helps me understand correctional law better instead of just reading a book or listening to lecture slides. I am actually experiencing a small version of how prisons and rules operate. It deepens my understanding of why certain rules exist, how discipline is handled, and how inmates feel when power is taken away from them."

"The rules, the ID badges, the semi-public embarrassment of the bright red non-compliance stickers, the random searches, and the placement of unapproved items are all immensely helpful in pointing out the many disparities and possible injustices and the ease that correctional officers can abuse their power. The frustrations I have felt throughout this semester are just a fraction of the frustrations felt by inmates all over the world and the set-up of this course has certainly helped establish this perspective."

"I personally believe that the setup and structure of the class has helped me understand correctional law more deeply because it allows us to truly experience some things that inmates have to deal with on a daily basis. Although it's not as extreme and harsh for us, it still shows us how limited things are to inmates while they are incarcerated. Simple slip ups, items that aren't allowed, and even conversations with others can be held against you and that gets truly exhausting.





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New Faculty



<u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u> Assistant Professor

NM STATE

Be Bold. Shape the Future. **College of Arts and Sciences**Department of Criminal Justice

CJ Faculty Focus: <u>Dr. Jessica Corey</u>

What part of this "inmate" experience has been the most impactful for you so far, and why?

"This inmate experience has been impactful because I never thought what the inmates feel being trapped. I always thought since they are in jail they don't have the same rights as us, but now I do know that a lot of these prisoner's rights can be violated and ignored."

"Instead of just reading about laws and policies, we actually experience a small piece of what it's like to live under a correctional system. Every rule, privilege, and consequence connects directly to real-life procedures we study."

"Having the requirement to wear an ID badge helps me understand how someone could feel like a number and dehumanized."

"The most impactful thing is having to put on an inmate badge before class every single time. It really makes me feel like I'm a number."

"The most impactful part of this experience is actually the non-compliance points. If you forget your pen or pencil, you lose points. If you don't wear your ID badge, you lose points. There are so many examples of how you can lose points, but in prison it is not just points. Not following the rules could mean something like spending more time in prison or in an isolated cell."

"Our activities make me feel both sides of what it's like being in a prison. We get to know what it's like from a guard's perspective working in the prison and everything they have to deal with on a daily basis. We also get to see and play out inmates point of view and how they get treated. I feel like in the system it's hard being on both sides."

In what ways does your experience in solitary connect to what we've discussed in class about real-life incarceration or correctional practices?

"My experience in solitary confinement really opened my eyes to what we've talked about in class regarding the real-life effects, especially isolation. Even though our activity was a simulation, I still felt how mentally draining it can be to be cut off from others, even for a short time. It made me think about how inmates who spend long periods in solitary confinement must feel the extreme boredom, the stress, and the loss of control over their environment."



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New Faculty



Dr. Jessica Corey
Assistant Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: Dr. Jessica Corey

"I now realize that in real prisons, confinement punishes not only the body but also the mind. It makes you question your worth, your thoughts, and even your identity."

"My experience in solitary confinement has been very strange. It was genuinely so boring and the class felt like it dragged a lot. In a weird way too though I felt like I actually wanted to participate – but in solitary we aren't allowed to talk. It was so strange since I usually don't like to talk out loud in class. For some reason today felt so isolating that when Dr. Corey asked the class questions, I actually wanted to put my input in."

"My experience in solitary has definitely been a bit different because I can no longer talk or have a cellmate but overall it was kind of cool. I know in real life it is not cool but being able to be in this experience just shows me more about how it could feel to someone in prison. You just kind of sit there in your own thoughts which is sometimes nice but after a while you kind of just want to talk to someone."

Dr. Corey's creative approach to teaching correctional law shows how experiential learning can transform understanding. By placing students in the shoes of those within the correctional system, she bridges theory and lived experience in a way that resonates far beyond the classroom. Her students walk away with more than just knowledge of legal principles; they gain empathy, awareness, and a deeper appreciation for the human side of corrections.

Thank you Dr. Jessica Corey!





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New Faculty



Scott Garland College Assistant Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: Scott Garland

Professor Scott Garland is developing a new online course: CJUS 432 Special Topics (Correctional Leadership) that he will be teaching in the spring of 2026.

CJUS 432 – Special Topics (Correctional Leadership)

The Criminal Justice Department is proud to offer a new Special Topics course this spring — CJUS 432: Correctional Leadership, taught by Scott Garland, College Assistant Professor and Associate Warden with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. This 8-week course examines the real-world challenges of leadership in correctional settings, focusing on ethics, accountability, communication, crisis management, and institutional reform. Students will explore how effective leadership shapes organizational culture, staff morale, and rehabilitation outcomes through case studies, simulations, and applied analysis.

"Leadership in corrections is about trust, accountability, and doing what's right under pressure," says Professor Garland.

Ideal for students pursuing careers in corrections, law enforcement, or justice administration, this course bridges theory with practice and provides a foundation for future leaders in the field.

Ourse: CRIM 432 – Correctional Leadership

Format: 8-Week Accelerated (Spring 2026 Mini Semester II)

器 Instructor: Scott Garland, M.A.

Popartment of Criminal Justice, NMSU Register early — limited seats available!

Professor Garland's recently published a peer-reviewed journal article:

Garland, S. L. (2025). Recidivism rates as they relate to the First Step Act: Is it serving its intended purpose? International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 6(11), 27–31.





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New Faculty

Jesse Williams
College Assistant
Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: <u>Jesse Williams</u>

Agricultural Preparedness Training with NMDA

In collaboration with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA), Professor Williams participated in the Agricultural Preparedness Training (APT) for New Mexico law enforcement officers, held from July 28 to 31, 2025.

This innovative training blends agricultural issues with criminal investigation practices—an area of growing importance for rural and statewide public safety. Two additional sessions are scheduled for November and March 2026.

"As part of the training, our team assisted with coordinating a mock crime scene on day one, giving officers hands-on experience with scenario-based investigation," Professor Williams said.

Please see the photos from the exercise:









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New Faculty

Jesse Williams
College Assistant
Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: <u>Jesse Williams</u>

Agricultural Preparedness Training with NMDA

Please see several participant comments and reflections from the training:

What did you like most about the training?

The hands-on activities! I appreciate the real life application of the information we learned.

The amount of presentations. So much was covered. Great resources and knowledge was shared.

Relevant, hands-on, fun, great learning activities! Now that I know, I KNOW!!!!!

Which presentation or field trip is worth repeating for future courses?

Cattle crossing, The border trip; Border crossing; All of them are amazing and relevant!!

How satisfied were you with the event staff and instructors? Extremely satisfied

Which presentation or field trip should be reconsidered in future trainings?

I appreciated all of the field trips!; I like them all.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

The course was excellent and should be attended by LE supervisors.

I enjoy this training very much. Thank you for the opportunity. I hope this stays available in the future

Wow! You somehow managed to get the best of the best to teach, and I qm super impressed with your ability to design and choreograph this huge opportunity so much!





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New Faculty



Mari-Esther Edwards
Assistant Professor

CJ Faculty Focus: Mari-Esther Edwards

Dr. Edwards conducts research focusing on various aspects of community supervision agencies (both juvenile and adult). She is passionate about finding ways to reduce social inequalities perpetuated within the criminal justice system through research and outreach.

Below are Dr. Edwards's recent publications:

Publications

Baek, H., & Edwards, M.-E. (2025). Native American Adolescents' Substance Use and Opportunity of Usage Substances: An Explanation Within Self-Control Theory. *Substance Use & Misuse*, *60*(10), 1463–1474. https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2025.2502102

Edwards, M.-E., & Steinmetz, K. F. (2025). Community Supervision Officers' Perspectives on The Utilization of Body-Worn Cameras in Community Supervision. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 9(4), 220-

236. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/17165

Technical Reports

Edwards, M.-E. & Corey, J. (2025). FirstPlay Therapy Training: A Technical Overview Based on Trainees' Experiences. Technical Report

Terry, A., Lockwood, A. & Edwards, M.-E. (2025). Community Supervision for Youth in Kansas: A Statewide Exploratory Study. Executive Summary

Student Organization Update

American Criminal Justice Association Lambda Alpha Epsilon (LAE) has weekly meetings on Thursdays at 3:00pm (unless otherwise specified). We host representatives from two different agencies on a monthly basis to discuss what it is like to work in their agency, how to apply, qualifications and realities of being in the field.



Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Raven Dickens



Raven Dickens
CJ Undergraduate
Student

One undergraduate student we are excited to highlight is **Raven Dickens**. Dr. Jessica Corey have had the pleasure of mentoring Raven since January 2025 through the campus Discovery Scholars Program, where she has been an integral part of her ongoing research.

Dr. Corey and Dickens are currently finalizing a co-authored paper for publication—an accomplishment well worth spotlighting.

Raven is graduating this December and plans to pursue graduate studies.

Enoy the interview with Raven:

How did you first get involved with the Discovery Scholars Program, and what has that experience been like for you? Back in December of last year, I received an email from the Discovery Scholars Program. After discussing it with my peers and looking more into what I wanted to do after my undergraduate studies at NMSU, I thought it would be beneficial to work closely with faculty on a unique project! So far, I have thoroughly enjoyed the program, and it has been a fantastic learning experience. I have learned far beyond what I would have learned between my Criminal Justice and Psychology majors. I also want to note that the Discovery Scholars Program does not always have to be research! I have a close peer who is working on creative projects for her Fine Arts degree and future business. This program is more geared towards encouraging and providing more valuable career and educational experiences for the student, rather than just a letter grade.

What has it been like working with Professor Jessica Corey?

I met Professor Jessica Corey during one of my core Criminal Justice classes sophomore year in criminological theory, and I immediately enjoyed not only her teaching style, but her thoughtful character. From there, I knew she was a professor whom I would happily do research with, and she helped me understand that research shouldn't be daunting for undergraduate students. Gaining skills not only pertaining to research but also effective communication skills with faculty is priceless as an undergraduate moving on to graduate school or your first career outside of college. Working closely with Professor Corey has been a great opportunity in my undergraduate years, and I am very grateful to have had her as a professor multiple times at NMSU.

Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Raven Dickens



Raven Dickens
CJ Undergraduate
Student

You've also been assisting with research. Can you share a bit about the project and your role in it?

Currently, I have been assisting with a research project that explores the possible connections between infant play therapy, attachment styles, and juvenile delinquency. As of right now, I am in the process of gathering an extensive literature review of relevant studies to aid in the future development of this project.

I heard you're finalizing a paper for publication. What's the topic, and what motivated you to write about it? How has this research experience shaped your understanding of the field or influenced your career goals?

The topic of the paper for publication encompasses military veterans, mental health, and military involvement in the criminal justice system. During my research, I learned how crucial accessible medical and mental health care is to the military veteran population, especially those who have had criminal-legal involvement. This research experience has most definitely motivated me to continue my education in the fields of mental health and psychology, as many populations go through systemic challenges and lack proper mental health care. Even outside of my career goals and education field, I have learned that mental health advocacy is extremely important in every setting.

As you get ready to graduate this December, what are you most proud of from your time at NMSU?

From my time at NMSU, I would say that I am most proud of expanding my knowledge and ultimately my understanding of different career fields. While graduating with honors is fantastic, I would say that I would not have taken the variety of classes that I did without the opportunity that the Arts and Sciences and the Honors College provided me. From classes on technology and policy to biological anthropology, I have learned so much and have gained a wider perspective on the world.

What are your plans for graduate school?

I plan on attending graduate school next fall to study Forensic Psychology! I am in the process of applying to graduate programs this semester. I am extremely excited to see where this next step takes me.

Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Raven Dickens



Raven Dickens
CJ Undergraduate
Student

How do you think your experiences at NMSU have prepared you for the next step in your academic or professional journey? Without attending NMSU, I would not have had the support from faculty, peers, and mentors who all have extremely valuable knowledge in their field. Advice from my professors at NMSU led me to a second degree and a minor in separate fields that I had not known I had an interest in during my freshman year!

Finally, what advice would you give to other CJ students who are just starting out or considering getting involved in research or mentorship programs?

Don't be afraid to reach out to your professors with whom you share similar research interests! It's always important to make lasting connections during your undergraduate studies, and your research may influence your future career goals or graduate program path.

Thank you Raven for this insightful interview!

Graduate Student Spotlight: Olivia Martinez



Olivia Martinez
CJ Graduate
Student

Enjoy this brief spotlight interview featuring our graduate student, **Olivia Martinez**.

What inspired you to pursue your master's degree in Criminal Justice at NMSU?

The faculty and staff here in the Department of Criminal Justice were the people who inspired me to pursue my master's degree. I graduated with my bachelor's early, so I still didn't have a definite career in mind. My professors convinced me to pursue a master's and apply for a teaching assistant job to gain more personal and professional experience that I can use in my future endeavors.

What has been the most rewarding or eye-opening part of your graduate studies so far?

Some of the most rewarding parts of my graduate career has been being involved in the department. I am happy to have gotten to know everyone in the department more as a person, and it's been great to be a part of a lot of projects, or host events of my own for my colleagues. If I was never as involved as I am now, I don't think my experience would feel as rewarding.

Are you currently involved in any research projects or topics? If so, explain.

I am currently working on my master's thesis! I am researching about racial and gender stereotypes in the news media when it comes to crime. I'm still at the beginning of it, but so far the topic has been very eye-opening.

What advice would you give to new students starting their graduate journey in CJ?

Some advice I would give to new students entering the graduate program is to take advantage of office hours, to not be afraid to ask questions, to not procrastinate, and to practice time management, just as you would for an undergraduate degree. There are a lot of deadlines and work for everyone, but with communication and time management, it's feasible. This department helps everyone out and supports one another, so as long as you do your part as the student, everything will be alright. It'll definitely be overwhelming and daunting at first, but once you make a good system for yourself everything will be alright.:)

Thank you Olivia for this insightful interview!

After Graduation: Our Students' Next Steps

DE ARI-BUB

Nevaeh Guevara CJ student



Nevaeh Guevara

When I graduated from New Mexico State University in 2022 with a degree in Criminal Justice, I was eager to start my career in law enforcement—but I quickly learned that the hiring process takes time and patience. From submitting my initial application to finally being sworn in as a police officer, the process took several months. Between written exams, interviews, background checks, and physical testing, I realized that preparation and persistence are key.

My Criminal Justice degree gave me a solid foundation to build on, but I also had to prepare myself physically and mentally for what was ahead. The police academy is no joke—it's demanding, both academically and physically. The days are long, the expectations are high, and you're constantly challenged to improve. While I had always excelled in academics, the overall environment and pressure of your job being on the line, I found the academics to be challenging and at time overwhelming. Having a study routine helped me handle the classroom portion with confidence.

Looking back, I see how much my education helped me transition into law enforcement. My degree didn't just teach me laws and procedures—it gave me an understanding of ethics, cultural awareness, and the importance of communication, all of which are essential in this profession.

Now, two years into my career in law enforcement, I can honestly say it's been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. No two days are ever the same, and that's what keeps me motivated. Whether I'm responding to calls, helping someone through a crisis, or simply being a reassuring presence in the community, I'm reminded that this job is about people first. On the long draining days it is important to remember the "why." Why do I do this job? Why have I decided to put others before myself? I believe your why is extremely important in law enforcement, but it can also be a way to look at other paths and struggles in your life. To current students: don't rush the process of figuring out your path. Every class,

internship, and volunteer experience helps you discover what truly drives you. Get involved in as much as possible. Build connections and relationships, you never know when you may need that person. A career in criminal justice—whether in policing, corrections, or advocacy—isn't just a job; it's a commitment to service and integrity.

And while I may be a little bit biased, I truly have the best and most rewarding job. I get to work with some of my best friends, who not only look out for me on the streets and challenge me to become a better cop, but push me to the same high standards in my personal life.

.. . . .

- Nevaeh Guevara

Thank you Nevaeh for this insightful interview!

After Graduation: Our Students' Next Steps



Wyatt Greene CJ student

Wyatt Greene

Our MCJ alum Officer Wyatt Greene, now serving with the Tulsa Police Department, is making headlines and hearts smile!

Wyatt handled a community noise call with kindness, humor, and style and it's gone viral! The Tulsa community appreciated his positive approach!

We're so proud of Wyatt for representing NMSU and our Criminal Justice Department with such professionalism and heart. He's showing what it truly means to live the values of our field and lead with respect, empathy, and integrity.

Huge thanks to the TPD for being such a supportive workplace and giving our alumni space to shine!

Read the news article

Thank you Wyatt!

October 21, 2025 - "Clothesline Project" travels to raise public awareness. Special thanks to Dr. Ahram Cho for bringing this project to life

NMSU's fourth annual "Clothesline Project" will welcome students, faculty and staff, along with the greater Las Cruces community to campus from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 21, in the Corbett Center Student Union's first-floor Aggie Lounge.

Created by NMSU's Department of Criminal Justice, the project is among many activities across Las Cruces recognizing Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October.

The project continues to shine a light on the realities faced by survivors and fosters a community of understanding and support

Watch the news covering this important event



New Mexico State University

CLOTHESLINE PROJECT





OCTOBER 21ST 9AM - 5 PM CORBETT CENTER **AGGIE LOUNGE**

YOUR VOICE HAS POWER



CHANCE TO A PRIZE!

Department of Criminal Justice

Humans for Humans (H4H) Student Organization

NMSU's Criminal Justice Humans 4 Humans student group presented at fraternity/sorority, organization and educated them on the realities of the sex trafficking industries: prostitution, stripping clubs, and pornography. Besides many other events, the group organized the human trafficking conference in November, 2025.

Please get in touch with President: Samara Nunez: at snunez03@nmsu.edu to join this incredible, inspiring group of students and follow them on Instagram.

Humans 4 Humans, New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission, and L Pinon Present: **BEHIND THE FILES REAL STORIES FROM A HUMAN**

TRAFFICKING DETECTIVE



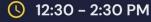
Detective uy Baker

Detective Guy Baker is a thirty-five-year veteran of the Missoula Police Department and a member of the FBI Safe Streets Task Force. With over 1,200 criminal cases investigated, Baker specializes in violent crimes, sex trafficking, and child exploitation. He has served on the United States Attorney's Office Human Trafficking Task Force for over a decade and is a certified instructor for the Montana Law Enforcement Academy and the National Gang Center. Throughout his career,

Detective Baker has trained thousands of law enforcement and justice professionals nationwide, received multiple commendations from the FBI and the Missoula Police Department, and continues to lead efforts in combating human trafficking and gang violence. His dedication to justice, extensive field experience, and commitment to education make his presentations both deeply informative and powerfully inspiring for professionals and students alike.



November 18, 2025



Atkinson's Music Hall 1075 N Horseshoe St. Las Cruces, NM 88003







Las Cruces Police Partners with CJ Department



Chief Jeremy Story with Dr. Dennis Giever

NMSU's Criminal Justice Program partners with the Las Cruces Police Department. New Mexico State University and the Criminal Justice Department have signed a memorandum of understanding that allows students pursuing a bachelor's degree in criminal justice to receive up to 15 academic credits while training in LCPD's state-certified academy.

"This is just a phenomenal opportunity for our students to gain experiential learning as part of their degree in the Department of Criminal Justice," said Academic Department Head Dr. Dennis Giever. "With this agreement, our students can gain hands-on experience in law enforcement with a premier agency in the region."

"This really is a win-win situation for criminal justice students interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement," said LCPD Chief Jeremy Story. "This endeavor joins the well-educated talent produced by NMSU with our state-certified and highly regarded training academy.

"We anticipate the students who take advantage of this opportunity will help raise the bar when it comes to commissioned law enforcement officers."

The MOU will allow students enrolled in NMSU's Bachelor of Criminal Justice program to simultaneously be employed in LCPD's academy. Students will receive up to 15 hours of academic credit plus a salary of \$24 an hour while training in LCPD's academy. Graduates of LCPD's academy earn roughly \$54,000 annually in their first year and close to \$60,000 annually, plus overtime, after completing probation. Academy applicants who have earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, criminology, sociology or psychology are also eligible for up to \$25,000 in hiring incentives.

Sophia Barnett

Class of 1983

CJ Alumni Spotlight: Meet Sophia Barnett Class of 1983

Former Chief Law Enforcement Officer, NM State Forestry

Sophia's extraordinary career has spanned corrections, investigations, education, and leadership in law enforcement. From developing inmate management systems to coordinating GED programs behind prison walls and later enforcing state laws across all 33 NM counties, her journey truly represents the heart of criminal justice service.

We caught up with Sophia to learn more about her path and reflect on her time at NMSU.

Career & Education

What inspired you to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice, and how did NMSU shape your career path?

My inspiration came from my maternal grandmother Sophia Mares. Her father was deputy sheriff and had also worked at the territorial state prison in Santa Fe, New Mexico when she was growing up. Her favorite cousin also worked as a matron at the penitentiary in Santa Fe, NM. She would often tell me interesting crime related stories about various cases and work experiences her father and cousin shared with her. These stories sparked an interest in me to pursue a career in law enforcement.

My grandmother encouraged me to go to college to give me an advantage to advance in a career in law enforcement. She believed education would open doors to great opportunities. She was very pleased when I began my career in the New Mexico Corrections Department.

Looking back, which CJ courses or professors had the biggest influence on your professional journey?

Most of my Criminal Justice courses were important and influenced me in many ways along the way. Looking back, they provided me with knowledge and new experiences I might have missed out on if these class opportunities were not available. Classes such as Laws of Evidence, Chemistry, Statistics, Human Physiology, Spanish, Police Administration were important and helped me to be successful in my career in CJ.

Sophia Barnett

Class of 1983

Professors Dr. Larry Mays and Ron Pincomb come to mind immediately as they inspired me to always be curious, willing to be open to new things and to continue to challenge myself in this ever-changing field of Criminal Justice.

You've held so many fascinating roles — from Classification Officer to Chief Law Enforcement Officer. Which position challenged you the most, and why?

Chief Law enforcement Officer for State Forestry Division was the most challenging in every aspect both intellectually and physically. I was required to at minimum to:

- complete the State Law Enforcement Academy certification,
- complete Wildland Fire Investigation and Incident Command System training and certification.
- write a State Forestry Law Enforcement policy and procedures manual
- establish a statewide State Forestry law enforcement program with limited staffing and funding.
- Provide statewide wildland fire investigations and enforcement of the New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) and New Mexico Criminal Statues Annotated (NMSA) as they pertained to New Mexico State Forestry Division laws, rules and regulations.
- Coordinate joint operations and investigations with local, state and federal agencies reference New Mexico State Forestry laws, rules and regulations pertaining to state and private lands.
- conduct administrative duties, field officer duties and provide training to local police and fire management staff involved with enforcement of wildland fire, timber and illegal dumping.
- conduct internal investigations for the Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department.

How did your NMSU CJ education prepare you to navigate such a wide range of responsibilities — from inmate education to wildland fire investigations?

I feel strongly feel obtaining my degree in Criminal Justice was key in preparing me for my professional journey. Each class served as a steppingstone to fuel my interest in various areas of the criminal justice system. I found my degree provided me with valuable knowledge in relevant subjects I was able to apply to advance in my CJ career. The CJ degree also gave me the confidence to take on difficult work challenges and new career experiences.

Continued on the next page

Career Highlights

Sophia Barnett

Class of 1983

You mentioned developing an inmate management system that's still in use today. That's incredible! Can you share what that process was like and what you're most proud of about it?

The primary purpose of the Inmate Management System (which was originally called the Inmate Employment System) was to help control the inmate incentive pay budget and to give each inmate an equal opportunity for employment within the prison system where they could receive fair pay and work advancement opportunities.

I tried to model employment system we all have to navigate in society. This included job descriptions, and requirements for hire and pay scales for each job within the prison system. Also, built into the system were job postings, an application process and interview process. This system also served to prepare inmates with real world job search skills and career planning based on advancement opportunities focused on job performance, experience, responsibilities and education requirements. Eventually the Inmate Employment System evolved into the Inmate Management System and was used to track all inmate programing activities within the entire prison system. I was always happy to know this simple idea continued to serve the inmate population and the Corrections Department to accurately track inmate program activities.

As a Special Agent and later a Chief Law Enforcement Officer, what was one of the most memorable or rewarding moments of your fieldwork?

As a New Mexico Forestry Division Officer, the most rewarding moment I recall was searching for and successfully finding two lost young children who wondered away from their parents in the Santa Fe National Forest. They were lost in the woods for several unnerving hours as a coordinated search which included local law enforcement and community volunteers continued into the late evening. US Forest Service Law enforcement Officer, Victor Apodaca and I located the children in a deep ravine unharmed but scared, cold and hungry.

You've been involved with both juvenile and adult systems; what key differences did you observe, and how did each experience shape your perspective on rehabilitation?

Continued on the next page

Sophia Barnett

Class of 1983

Adult and Juvenile offenders differ by the basic fact that adult offenders have more life experience. Adult offenders are more inclined to cooperate and tend to focus on working on a resolution when they are in a serious law enforcement situation. I found that juvenile offenders are more challenging due to their lack of life experience. This may cause them, especially in serious law enforcement situations, more confusion and fear which can lead to more uncooperative interactions. Both juvenile and adult offenders need clear communication, respect and honesty. Based on my experiences working with adult and juvenile offenders I have found it differs in how you initiate your first contact. With adults you can be direct by providing them with facts and information to begin your communication process. With juveniles I have found it was always best to allow them the opportunity to speak first. Listening can give you a better understanding of how best to reach them so you can establish a clear communication process. Clear communication can lead to a more proactive interaction, allowing you in your law enforcement capacity to complete your work safely and successfully.

Rehabilitation is word I use carefully. To me rehabilitation (restore lost skills) means we are assuming at one point this individual was habilitated and now needs rehabilitation due to some recent unlawful action or behavior. Some offenders, juveniles especially are better served by affording them the opportunity to improve or develop skills necessary for daily living and given the skills to make good decisions and understand the consequences of their actions.

Working as the Pre-Release Coordinator and instructor at the Penitentiary of NM the class curriculum consisted of subjects like basic life skills, parenting from a distance, financial fitness and a program called Time to Think which was based on cognitive skills development. It was noted the inmates who completed the program and pursued continued adult education improved their chances of a successful release and a better transition to life outside of prison.

Advice & Reflections

What advice would you give to today's CJ students or young professionals who want to make a difference in their communities? Do not limit yourself to just one Criminal Justice work experience. Challenge yourself and do something that will matter 100 years from now!

Thank you Sophia for this insightful interview!



Sonya Chavez

Alumni Spotlight: Sonya Chavez

We are honored to feature Sonya Chavez, an NMSU alumna whose extraordinary career journey, from journalism to the FBI and ultimately serving as the first woman U.S. Marshal for the District of New Mexico, embodies leadership, service, and the spirit of the Aggie community. In this interview, Sonya reflects on the mentors who shaped her path at NMSU, the unforgettable moments that defined her decades in federal law enforcement, and the lessons she now brings into the classroom as a Criminal Justice instructor. Her story is one of courage, commitment, and lifelong connection to the NMSU family—and we are proud to share it with our students and alumni.

NMSU Journey

What first drew you to study at NMSU?

Simple. My parents gave me two choices. UNM or NMSU. Go Aggies! (Shout out to UNM, as I got my master's there and love the Lobos too! EEEK, can I say that here?)

As it turned out, I planned to study journalism and the program here at NMSU had been recognized (still is!) as the best in New Mexico and I was excited to be a part of the Journalism and Mass Communication Program.

Any favorite classes or professors that made a big impact on you?

My department head for Journalism, Dr. Sean McCleneghan (Dr. Mac) had an incredible impact on me. He encouraged me from the beginning and ensured I had a paid internship each summer throughout college. He was very real about how grim the job market would be for young college graduates in our field, yet never stopped encouraging me to continue in journalism. Additionally, I had Dr. Michael Fody in the Criminal Justice Department. He was from Hoboken, New Jersey, a place that seemed so far away to me as a girl who went to Moriarty High School. He brought great perspective to our classes and really pushed us to consider all points of view as we pursued our education.

Looking back, what's one memory from your NMSU days that always makes you smile?



Sonya Chavez

I was very involved in campus life, a member of Delta Zeta Sorority and found myself volunteering for many campus initiatives. College was fun. But the memories that are most meaningful to me are of the relationships that blossomed into what are now lifelong friendships. I have been fueled by Aggies in all phases of my career and personal life and am reminded that we all experienced a very special place here at NMSU.

Life in the Field

Your career in law enforcement - what roles did you hold and what did you love most about the job?

First, let me explain that my career in journalism, although fulfilling, made a drastic turn when I was approaching 30. I made a dramatic shift from journalism to law enforcement when I decided to join the FBI and made my way to Quantico and then to FBI Chicago for the first part of my second career. There, I experienced some of the most amazing opportunities to learn and grow as an FBI Agent and to serve my community and my country. I was assigned to an inner-city street gang task force and learned all about building enterprise cases and the importance of working in partnership with our state and local counterparts. It was a challenging experience. After 11 years in the freezing, but invigorating temperatures, I was able to transfer home to New Mexico and spent the next 11 years here in our great state. I was responsible for implementing the federal gang initiative for the FBI here in New Mexico and again, was lucky to work with amazing people who supported our work and were strong and reliable partners.

I retired from the FBI in 2018 when I was appointed as the United States Marshal for New Mexico. Just when I thought the law enforcement experience could not get any better, I was honored to be the first woman to serve in this position for the Marshals Service here in New Mexico. Nominated and confirmed by the United States Senate, this White House appointment gave me the opportunity to do impactful work at a different level. I was appointed to the Director's US Marshal Advisory Committee and to lead the 30X30 Initiative, working to increase the number of women serving in law enforcement nationwide. Working in partnership with many organizations, I was excited to impact policy and growth for the Marshals Service on a national level.

Continued on the next page



Sonya Chavez

I served a wonderful team of committed professionals who carried responsibility and pride for the Marshals Service in the forefront. Being in this position was most satisfying because of the opportunity to bring federal resources to our state. A true honor. All of it.

After leaving federal service I was fortunate to be named as Director of the New Mexico Law Enforcement Academy for the Department of Public Safety in Santa Fe. The Academy is a critical part of our state law enforcement initiative with meaningful statewide impact. I enjoyed the opportunity to interface with our New Mexico Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police to ensure their officers and deputies received adequate training and met compliance and disciplinary standards for law enforcement in New Mexico. Our New Mexico law enforcement officers are highly committed and driven individuals who see great promise in their mission and their communities. I was thrilled to be a part of that.

Any moments from your work that taught you something unforgettable?

I've had a few moments that I would call unforgettable; one early in my career that I refer to as a "Charlie's Angels Moment." I must note that although being an FBI Agent had its share of adventure, most days were filled with hard and sometimes frustrating work, long hours — a very demanding mission. But I will not forget the time two of my colleagues and I were in pursuit of a violent gang offender who had become a fugitive and when we finally got his vehicle pulled over, he would not step out of his vehicle, as we had instructed him to. We eventually had to approach the vehicle and safely apprehend him. Later, in our interview him, we asked him why he did not comply and get out of the vehicle. He said he heard us identify ourselves as FBI and heard our commands, but he had never seen three girls with guns wearing police vests and he thought he was being kidnapped! We laughed about it later and took a very corny picture of ourselves after the arrest.



Sonya Chavez

That experience taught me to never assume anything about the people around us how they perceive us as law enforcement. We have to always represent ourselves and our profession in the best light, knowing that service to our communities is an honor we commit to when we take the oath and we must always do it with absolute integrity.

From the Field to the Classroom

How do your students surprise or inspire you?

This has been such a positive experience for me. Each student brings a unique background to the class and everyone has his or her own career plan. There is great diversity in our class, as some students are quite young and attending class full-time, while others are returning to school after a lifetime of work and experiences. Nevertheless, everyone is here in pursuit of a good foundation and all have a calling to serve, which is evident in their writing and their defense of their perspectives and positions on critical issues. My hope for them is that they enjoy learning and do not feel stressed about the demands of school. It is such a privilege to be a part of their learning.

What class do you teach? If you could describe your teaching style in three words, what would they be?

I am teaching CJUS 425 Issues in Ethics, Law and Criminal Justice. As far as my teaching style? Open, Curious and Excited.

Advice

What advice would you give students dreaming of a career in policing or criminal justice?

I would say that a career in this field is one of the greatest honors you could ever experience. We are charged with enforcing the law, protecting the public and living the true intentions of the constitution. Law Enforcement personnel throughout our country have experienced some hard times in recent years, yet this profession continues to be one of the most sought after careers. I've said it many times that this is not an ordinary job. We are part of Team America and people are depending on us. It is a commitment to service and with that comes incredible responsibility and sacrifice.



Sonya Chavez

As I finish my career, I know that every interaction we have leads us to something that needs attention or cultivating. It is up to us to exercise good judgement and fairness in our decisions to determine how we can contribute and most important — how we can guide and cultivate others on our team and in our world to make meaningful impact.

Any message you'd like to share with our current students or alumni?

We have something very special here at NMSU. We are a community of people who prioritize service and who are committed to our school's mission and the people NMSU serves. I am grateful for the continued support I feel through the university and for my interaction with the amazing people here who continue to inspire me through selflessness and service. Always look for ways to add value to your environment, whether it is in a conversation, a class, a relationship or a profession. We have so much to look forward as we continue to find impactful ways to make our world the best we can make it.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to share a little bit about my NMSU experience and career journey with our wonderful students. Sonya Chavez

Thank you Sonya for this insightful interview!

ONLINE PROGRAMS



NMSU Global Campus. With You Every Step of the Way

https://global.nmsu.edu/

Lead the Way for Those You Love



With over 70 online degree and certificate programs, and an everexpanding range of microlearning courses, we are serving adult learners through accessible, affordable, 100% online education. With our flexible course offerings, students can continue working and raising their family while the earn their degree, grow in their field, and build the kind of relationships that last a lifetime. Behind every student is an invaluable network of support – families, communities, and generations invested in your success.

At NMSU Global Campus, we're proud to be part of that network, guiding and cheering you on, providing diverse opportunities and holistic resources to support you during your studies, and beyond graduation.

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Through NMSU Global Campus, we offer 100% online bachelor's and master's degrees in criminal justice that will prepare you for a meaningful career in the field. To support your journey, we have implemented a \$250/credit hour for active-duty law enforcement and military students who are looking to earn or complete their degree. To learn more about these programs, go to https://global.nmsu.edu/degree-programs/. For tips and tricks on how to apply, student success stories and more, check out our blog.

Want more information on our online programs? Reach out to us here: https://global.nmsu.edu/request-info/



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Andreia Jaramillo-Nellist Administrative Assistant

Bachelor of CJ Global Campus

Master of CJ Global Campus

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Criminal Justice Spotlight

Andreia Jaramillo-Nellist

Administrative Assistant in the Department of Criminal Justice

Andreia makes everyone's day a little brighter. She brings such a positive, can-do attitude to everything she does, no matter how big or small the task. You can always count on her to stay calm, kind, and solution-focused, even when things get hectic (as they often do in the department).

What really stands out about Andreia is how effortlessly she supports everyone around her: faculty, staff, and especially our students. She treats every student with genuine care and respect, always keeping their success at the center.

In a world that can sometimes feel overwhelming, Andreia reminds us what it means to lead with positivity, compassion, and purpose. She truly embodies the heart of our department and is such an incredible part of the NMSU CJ family.

Thank you, Andreia for taking care of student and faculty needs. Your personal touches and caring for each individual student is absolutely noticed and you are truly a vital asset to NMSU and the department of Criminal Justice.



Criminal Justice Department



Andreia Jaramillo-Nellist (Administrative Assistant)



Liz Oquendo (student work/administrative assistant)

Thank you Andreia and Liz for taking care of student and faculty needs. Your personal touches and caring for each individual student is absolutely noticed. Thank you both!

Please touch back to us and let us learn about your career and what you have done since you graduated.

Please send a short note or email briefly describing your careers. We might include these in future Newsletters or on our website. It would be nice for our alumni to hear from others and what they have been doing since they left NMSU.

Please check our <u>alumni success webpage</u>

<u>Newsletters page</u>

Connect with Us on LinkedIn

Please visit the <u>CJ Giving Page</u> - **Scholarships** to see how you can contribute to the future success of Criminal Justice Students.