NMSU Computer science department head named interim associate dean

[Photo by Darren Phillips]

Enrico Pontelli, computer science professor and department head, will take the position of interim associate dean in NMSU’s College of Arts and Sciences as of July 1.

“Enrico Pontelli has been an outstanding department head, who is noted for his extensive research collaborations across disciplines,” said Christa Slaton, dean of NMSU’s College of Arts and Sciences. “His ability to be attentive to administrative details while also understanding the big picture is an important quality that will make him an effective member of the leadership team in our large and diverse college.”

Pontelli will replace associate dean Lise Bond-Maupin, who was recently selected to become the founding dean of the College of Social Sciences and Communication at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

“The College of Arts and Sciences is a complex and large entity, whose administration and operation present great challenges and opportunities,” Pontelli said. “When Dean Slaton approached me with the idea of stepping up as interim associate dean she convinced me that this would provide an opportunity to learn new skills and grow in my understanding of university administration.”

Pontelli’s new duties will include coordinating the College Advising Center as well as assisting the dean with enrollment management, instructional resources, promotion and tenure processing and strategic planning.

“I am looking forward working with the director of the Advising Center to continue exploring ways of maintaining an effective communication with students, helping them to stay on track with their degrees and aiding in identifying as early as possible difficult situations that require special interventions,” he said.

Pontelli intends to work with the dean and college leadership to explore new avenues to engage students with diverse backgrounds in ways that cross boundaries of individual disciplines and embody a broad vision that such a large college represents.

“It is a distinct honor to have the opportunity to work with a group of people that is so talented – I believe I have a lot to learn from them.”

Full articles can be seen at http://artsci.nmsu.edu/news
Theatre manager brings the magic to his job

William Shakespeare wrote “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” If that’s true, Matt Reynolds is a key player at NMSU who makes the magic happen.

As manager of the Center for the Arts, he coordinates use of the space, maintains the building, designs lights and sound for productions, and advises students – all in addition to teaching a couple of courses.

Although he’s only been with American Southwest Theatre Company (ASTC) for about 18 months, Reynolds has years of theater experience under his belt. He first caught the theater bug as a child, when he took acting classes. He said he started taking it seriously when he was in high school and began working for professional companies in Atlanta. Since then, he’s worked at the Cardinal Theatre and Brown County Playhouse in Indiana, while earning his bachelor’s degree from Indiana University. He earned his MFA degree in production design from Michigan State University, where he studied lighting and sound.

Reynolds says, “As a designer, I’m always changing, always growing. As someone in theater, if you’re not learning something, you shouldn’t be doing that production. There’s no reason to do a show that you can’t learn something from. It’s always a wonderful learning and growing experience for me.”

Researchers take small tools to big caves

Professors at NMSU are going further than they have ever gone before, using scaled-down versions of equipment that may eventually be used to search for life on other planets. At Fort Stanton Cave near Ruidoso, a team of faculty and graduate students recently tried something new – simultaneous, on-the-spot analysis of rock samples with instruments small enough to fit in a backpack.

“We collected 20 samples and analyzed them right there with both instruments, said Nancy McMillen, geology professor and department head. “Then we set off with the instruments to analyze samples on the wall.”

The two instruments used at Fort Stanton Cave included a Portable AOTF Spectrometer for Astrobiology (PASA) and a 30-pound backpack model Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS).

“The objective of the program was to use two different technologies – one of which we developed through a partnership through astronomy and electrical engineering and the other which has been developed with the geology department — to look at samples of rocks in caves to see if we can identify signatures of life,” said Nancy Chanover, associate professor of astronomy.

“The two different instruments tell us two different types of things about the rocks we’re looking at,” Chanover said. “By using two technologies together we can gain a better understanding of the nature of those rocks and whether they are inhabited by microbial colonies.”

Math lab promotes learning

As part of the summer professional learning series of the Mathematically Connected Communities (MC2) project, NMSU’s College of Education and Department of Mathematical Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences hosted a weeklong math lab for the first time on campus in Las Cruces June 2-6. The camp consists of about 60 students who are going into the third grade, sixth grade or an algebra one class in area public schools.

“The math lab is an opportunity for children to engage in content, particularly the content they are going to be learning in the Common Core State Standards, but they are doing it with their colleagues through really fun activities,” said Cathy Kinzer, associate professor in the department of curriculum and instruction.

Ted Stanford, associate professor of mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences, has worked with MC2 for 10 years. He said unexpected issues always arise and collaboration is a helpful way to solve the problems.

“One of the most beneficial things about this partnership is we can talk not just about what they are getting right and what they are getting wrong, but how are they thinking and how are
they communicating, how are they being precise and how are they learning to reason mathematically,” Stanford said.

PHOTO: Sele Ukpedijagba (left) writes a math problem on the chalkboard during NMSU’s math lab, while Jacob Yoder (right) and Karla Dow (middle), a Belen sixth grade teacher look on. (NMSU photo by Tiffany Acosta)

Facility. led courses: students see the world
A passport is a ticket to the world, and NMSU students have an opportunity to travel internationally through the Faculty-Led International Program (FLIP).

“FLIP is a new program that is designed to help faculty members, who want to teach an international course,” FLIP coordinator Ed Boles said. “These are quite different than a standard course. When you are in travel mode or in the field setting, it’s a 24/7 situation.”

“I think what really pulls students into the program is being able to get into the field and learn firsthand about something they have only been reading about, whether that’s business or biology,” Boles said. “When you are on site and you are actually involved with the subject material, it makes for a whole different educational experience.

For spring break 2014, Elvira Hammond, history college associate professor, and Margaret Goehring, art history assistant professor, both in the College of Arts and Sciences, led the Splendors of Imperial China class on a trip to northwest China as part of the HIST 323/549 and ART 311/511 FLIP course. This was the largest FLIP course to date with 26 members, which included community members for the first time. In addition to 12 NMSU students, the group included NMSU faculty and administration, retirees, alumni and family members, and the age range was 14 to 76.

“We had a very multi-generational mix of people who were sharing this incredible international learning experience and were able to interact and discuss issues and exchange in ways that we typically don’t have available in our society anymore,” Boles said.

PHOTO: Tim Wright, biology associate professor (fifth from right), and William Gould, economics, applied statistics and international business professor, taught a faculty-led international program course in March in northern Costa Rica. (Courtesy photo)
For more information on FLIP courses, visit http://flip.nmsu.edu or call 575-646-4528.

Arts and Sciences associate dean bids farewell
Associate Dean Lisa Bond-Maupin is leaving NMSU to begin her appointment as founding dean of the College of Social Sciences and Communication at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

“I am proud of the team in the dean’s office in Arts and Sciences and of everything we have accomplished together to create a more open, predictable, fair, proactive approach to college level leadership,” Bond-Maupin said. “We came in with a commitment to a service orientation and this will continue as long as Dean Slaton is leading the way.”

In 1995, Bond-Maupin joined the NMSU faculty as an assistant professor of sociology. Since then she has also served as director of the Women’s Studies Program for five years and as academic department head of the sociology department for almost two years. She’s served on various committees throughout the university and was instrumental in establishing the first ever J. Paul Taylor Social Justice Symposium in 2004.

“It has been a true pleasure to work with Lisa the last four years,” added Christa Slaton, dean of NMSU’s College of Arts and Sciences. “Her professionalism, integrity, and commitment to excellence have been tremendous assets to our college and to our university.”
NMSU biology professor helps students discover their potential

(NMSU photo by Darren Phillips)

After 22 years at NMSU, Regents Professor Elba Serrano’s philosophy about student success remains rooted in the beliefs that have nurtured her own career.

“People emphasize a lot the need to encourage, but I think the lack of discouragement may be as important as encouragement,” said Serrano. “Then, the child can follow his or her own interests without being told ‘don’t go there.’”

The daughter of a U.S. Army sergeant, Serrano grew up on military bases all over the world, where her interest in science was allowed to blossom.

“I think when I look back on it, I was the beneficiary of Department of Defense schools,” she said. “These were positive environments for young students. I received a great education and was not discouraged from pursuing my interest in math and science.”

Serrano, whose biomedical research focuses on neural regeneration, sensory disorders of hearing and balance and nanobiotechnology, was on sabbatical in spring 2014 as a visiting professor at the University of California, San Diego Center for Research in Biological Systems.

During two decades, Serrano’s values and work ethic have impacted the lives of thousands of NMSU students. She identifies with many who, like Serrano, were the first in their family to graduate from college. The biology professor has taught more than 2,500 students and mentored student research for more than 100 individuals in her lab. Moreover, she has reached out to hundreds more at the university as the principal investigator of programs such as the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) and BP-ENDURE Building Research Achievement in Neuroscience (BRAIN).

At a recent 20-year reunion of her lab that coincided with the retirement of Casilda Trujillo-Provenco, who managed Serrano’s lab for those years, about 30 former students came together. Serrano was gratified to hear about their accomplishments.

“My students are now faculty, physicians, veterinarians, they’re engineers, they have started businesses,” Serrano said. “I can’t take credit for it. I feel my job as a professor is to inform, to provide some structure, to show some potential paths, but they have to do the walking themselves and they’ve clearly done it very well.”

Serrano has modeled the kind of career many of her students hope to achieve. She has brought in more than $15 million in external research funding to the university, serves on national advisory boards and has received numerous honors and awards. A recipient of the NMSU Roush Award for Teaching Excellence, she was recently elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

“Even decades later they still contact me for advice about a career decision or situation they are in. We’re forging lifelong relationships.”

Full articles can be seen at http://artsci.nmsu.edu/news
Kennedy Center theater festival recognizes student work in 'Misanthrope'

NMSU's recent production of "The Misanthrope" earned four nominations from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. The group also is awaiting word on whether the production will be selected as part of the regional festival in Texas in January.

"We are now in consideration to have our show as one of the five performed during the regional festival," Josh Chenard, professor in the College of Arts and Sciences, who submitted "The Misanthrope" for consideration. "This is huge, as only 12 to 15 productions get held every year. This is a real tribute to the quality of work that continues to take place in the Theatre Arts Department at NMSU."

Honors went not only to the production overall, but also to individual students involved in the production. Three earned Irene Ryan Acting nominations and one earned a Meritorious Achievement award in costume design, which allows them to compete for scholarships in the upcoming regional festival. The Irene Ryan scholarships "provide recognition, honor and financial assistance to outstanding student performers wishing to pursue further education," according to the Kennedy Center website.

"I am not surprised to hear that those who helped to create this performance of "The Misanthrope" are getting nominations from the Kennedy Center College Theatre organization," said Christa Slaton, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "It was a memorable event. I was impressed, not only by the talent of our student actors but also by the quality of the costumes and set design."

In addition to awards, the Kennedy Center Festival regional representatives also offered feedback to the cast and crew. Chenard said, "They loved the costumes, felt the actors mastered the challenging language and delivered their performances with energy and consistency. They also loved Jim Billings' exquisite set.

The all-student cast was led by nominee Josh Horton as Alceste, Ellen Striepeke as Celime, Anthony Forrester as Philinte and Elizabeth Staski as Eliante. Rounding out the cast were Austin Parrish, nominated for his role as Oronte, Lindsey Porter, Kenneth Williams, Robert Sciortino and Stephanie Vasquez, who earned a nomination for her role as Basque.

The production team included set designer Jim Billings, lighting designer Josie Parsons, costume designer Kaitlin Sikes, sound designer Matt Reynolds, prop designer Dave Hereford and stage manager Mike Wise. Sikes was awarded Meritorious Achievement for her work.

As a result of the submission, NMSU is now eligible to enter any student designs from the entire academic year, which will make students eligible for potential awards and scholarships as well as feedback from professionals.

"I wanted to enter 'The Misanthrope' because of the high level of student commitment," Chenard explained. "I know this group's value, in terms of community-building, professional opportunities, potential scholarships, fresh feedback — it is the only festival of its kind."

The regional festival will include nominees from Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Chenard said that as the New Mexico State Chair and the Irene Ryan Award vice coordinator, he regularly attends, and this time, he plans on including the students.

"They'll get to attend professional workshops, view the best productions in the region, compete for scholarships and awards, and spend time with peers from other regions who will be the next generation of theater artists."

"This production was a dream," Chenard said. "From my design team to the backstage crew and technicians, everyone worked with excellence and ease to pull this show off, and it was a challenge! Staging a 17th century comedy of manners complete with rhyming couplets, huge costumes, wigs and an unusual set design is no easy feat. As a director, you have a vision and a plan — the hope is that everyone you work with takes your ideas and makes them better. That was certainly the case with 'The Misanthrope.'"
NMSU researchers to use massive particle detector to study neutrinos

PHOTO: The 30-ton MicroBooNE experiment, an argon tank the size of a school bus, was placed in its permanent position at the Fermilab. (Courtesy photo)

NMSU’s High-Energy Nuclear Physics group will be among scientists performing experiments using the 30-ton MicroBooNE particle detector, which was moved into place Monday at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory near Chicago.

The MicroBooNE detector—a 40-foot-long cylindrical metal tank designed to detect particles called neutrinos—was carefully transported by truck across the U.S. Department of Energy’s Fermilab site, from the warehouse building it was constructed in to the experimental hall three miles away.

“The technology is very interesting; a tank of liquid argon the size of a school bus, will contain a network of wires that will record the interactions that neutrinos will have with the argon nuclei,” said Stephen Pate, physics professor who, along with physics associate professor Vassili Papavassiliou, leads the NMSU group in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The MicroBooNE scientific collaboration consists of more than 100 physicists from 23 institutions from the U.S. and three other countries. This machine will allow scientists to further study the properties of neutrinos, particles that may hold the key to understanding many unexplained mysteries of the universe.

“We are very excited to be a part of the MicroBooNE Experiment at Fermilab,” said Pate. “MicroBooNE is a big step forward both from a physics point of view, and from a technological perspective.

“We will use a beam of neutrinos from the Fermilab accelerator complex to explore the nature of neutrinos themselves, and also use the neutrinos to explore the internal structure of protons and neutrons and the nuclei in which they reside.”

“The liquid-argon detector of MicroBooNE, operating at a temperature of about minus 300 degrees Fahrenheit, represents the latest in the technology of such target/detector systems and it is the largest of this type in the Western Hemisphere,” Papavassiliou said.

The MicroBooNE detector’s 170 tons of liquid argon will release charged particles when neutrinos interact with it. The detector’s three layers of wires will then capture pictures of these interactions at different points in time and send that information to the experiment’s computers.

Papavassiliou explained BooNE stands for “Booster Neutrino Experiment” where the Booster is one of the proton accelerators in the Fermilab accelerator complex. The proton beam from the Booster is used to produce an intense neutrino beam that is used in experiments. MicroBooNE is the latest in a series of “BooNE” experiments and “Micro” refers to its relative size.

“The construction of this detector is itself a step towards much larger liquid argon detectors that will be used in the next two decades in other experiments at Fermilab, in which NMSU will also play a role,” Pate said.

NMSU has a long history of collaboration with Fermilab and is a member of the Universities Research Association, a consortium of 86 research universities from around the world. The NMSU team also includes Tia Miceli a post-doctoral research associate; graduate student Katherine Woodruff; and two undergraduate physics students Alistair McLean and Eric Henderson. The DOE is funding the NMSU group. The DOE and the National Science Foundation are funding the experiment.

Giving to the College of Arts and Sciences: An investment in our Students and Faculty!

We invite you to invest in the College of Arts & Sciences today by making a gift to the Dean’s Fund for Excellence, which supports faculty and students with special projects, awards, research, and teaching.

Please contact Patrick Knapp, Director of Development in the College of Arts and Sciences
575-323-4475 pknapp2@mcsu.edu. Or go right onto our website http://arts.nmsu.edu and click on “Giving”.

Full articles can be seen at http://artsci.nmsu.edu/news