

2026 Statewide Diversity Summit

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Thank you to all the presenters and moderators for participating in The University of New Mexico-Gallup 2026 Statewide Diversity Summit.

Deleso A. Alford: Deleso A. Alford, JD, LL.M. is the UNM HSC of DEI Humanity Matters Visiting Professor. She is referred to as the “Architect of the theory of unjust enrichment, as applied to the immortal cell line of Mrs. Henrietta Lacks.” Her work bridges law, healthcare, and ethics using what she calls “HER stories”—the unique and particularized lived inhumane experiences of marginalized women intersecting with healthcare and research. She earned a B.S., magna cum laude, at Southern Univ. A&M College, a JD at Southern Univ. Law Center, LL.M. at Georgetown Univ. Law Center and Certification in Clin. Bioethics at Medical College of Wisconsin.

Monique Anair: Dr. Anair is the Director of Workforce Development at Santa Fe Community College and an adjunct lecturer at the University of New Mexico. Anair is an accomplished higher education professional with a proven record of intuitive and insightful leadership characterized by over 20 years of academic program development and teaching within New Mexico’s secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) sector. Her research has been presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education (2024), Scholars Strategy Network (2025), and Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management (2025).

Todd Armitstead: Todd Armitstead is from San Diego, California. He is Yonsei (4th generation) Japanese-American and a first-generation college graduate. He earned a bachelor’s degree at the University of California, Berkeley and a master’s degree at the University of Manchester, both in political science. He spent over 8 years teaching English in Japan, Taiwan, and China before working in student affairs for international students and staff at UC Berkeley. Since May of 2025 he’s been a Student Success Specialist with the NASSC at UNM-Gallup and enjoys using his experience and background to serve and learn from the diverse student population in this region.

Fidel Asamoah-Tutu: Fidel was born and raised in Accra, Ghana. He has a multiethnic heritage with family from both northern and southern Ghana. He immigrated to the US as an international student in 2001. He’s earned an undergraduate degree in Economics and Finance from Calvin University, and a Master’s in Accounting from Grand Valley State University, in Michigan. He built a career as a risk professional - auditor. He is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and a Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA). He is a Vice President, Audit Manager for U.S. Bank and enjoys working remotely from his home office. He relocated from Minneapolis to Gallup in 2020 with his wife Sierra and their children to be closer to her family. He keeps ties to his family and Ghanaian culture, and regularly visits home with his family.

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Priscilla Benally: Priscilla Benally (Dine) is the Executive Director of the Thoreau Community Center (TCC) in Thoreau, New Mexico. She is a proud mother of four children and Nana to two beautiful granddaughters, all proud products of Gallup-McKinley County Schools (GMCS). Ms. Benally identifies advocating for children and for the youth in her community as one of the most rewarding journeys of her life. Also a UNM graduate, Ms. Benally has dedicated herself to supporting youth and remaining actively involved in community leadership. As Executive Director of TCC, her work has focused on saving young lives, providing critical intervention, and supporting youth who are contemplating suicide. Ms. Benally has been the District 3 GMCS Board Member for over 12 years, also serving as the Region 1 President and representative to the national Johnson-O'Malley Board of Directors. Ms. Benally strongly believes that our communities need leaders who come from within and that our children deserve to see leaders who reflect their experiences, understand their challenges, and inspire them to believe in their own potential.

Nicole Capehart: Nicole Capehart is a full-time lecturer at the Anderson School of Management at the University of New Mexico, where she teaches Human Resources, Leadership, and Organizational Behavior. Since 2016, she has focused on creating inclusive classrooms where students feel respected and challenged. Her pedagogy emphasizes a growth mindset, psychological safety, and practices that cultivate belonging across differences. Nicole is particularly interested in helping students engage complex ethical issues with empathy and intellectual rigor, including the responsible use of emerging technologies such as AI. She maintains a current SHRM certification focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Sarita Cargas: Dr. Sarita Cargas, Associate Professor of Human Rights UNM Albuquerque and Director of the NM Basic Needs Consortium

Bernard Chimoni: Bernard Chimoni is a citizen of the A:shiwí Nation, from the Pueblo of Zuni and represents the Eagle and Deer clans. He has dedicated his teaching career to improving education outcomes for Indigenous students and is an advocate for bilingual and multi-cultural education. He is a life-long teacher educator and leader with 30-plus years of experience. He has served as a bilingual teacher, Zuni language and cultural teacher, and school administrator. His work is driven by a genuine desire to promote the well-being and success of Indigenous communities, with a focus on the best interests of Indigenous youth in recruiting and empowering future generations of teachers. Bernard is a cohort member of the Native American Leadership in Education (NALE) in UNM's College of Education, Teacher Education Educational Leadership Policy (TEELP) program and is currently a doctoral (EdD) candidate. When he is not teaching and researching, Bernard enjoys all genres of music and plays guitar, harmonicas, flutes, and sings.

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Marnita A. Chischilly: Marnita A. Chischilly, M.Ed. (Diné) is from Church Rock, New Mexico. She is from the Bitter Water clan (Tódich'ii'nii) born into the Mexican clan (Naakai dine'e); her maternal grandfather's clan is Zuni people (Naasht'ezhi dine'e), and paternal grandfather's clan is Towering House (Kinyaa'aanii). She earned her degree in elementary education and a master's in educational leadership from the University of New Mexico. She chose to enter the field of education because she believes it is one of the most important professions in any culture. She has more than thirty years of experience in education and is currently a middle school math teacher and a school leader at a Native-serving school. Her role as a teacher and school leader inspires Indigenous youth in her community to pursue their dreams; she supports their educational journeys and provides high-quality education for student academic success. She believes that Indigenous leaders play an essential role in advocating for changes in educational systems to better serve Native students in the future. Ms. Chischilly is currently pursuing a doctoral degree through UNM's Promoting Our Leadership, Learning and Empowering Our Nations (POLLEN) program.

David Elmer Cox: Dr. David Cox is in his ninth year of service as the Director of the Joseph R Skeen Library at New Mexico Tech, Socorro, NM. He has worked at NMT since June 2017. David has served as President of the New Mexico Library Association (2019-2020) and the New Mexico Consortium of Academic Libraries (2022-2023). His chief professional interests include: Emphatic Library Design; Improvement of Services for Neurodivergent Patrons; Literacy and the First Amendment; the pedagogical application of Generative AI in Higher Education; and Academic Library Sustainability. David is devoted to the leadership of academic libraries through a collaborative team management approach. David believes in this method of creating a living library, addressing the needs and success of students in STE2M research and application.

Layla M. Dehaiman: Layla M. Dehaiman currently serves as a Special Education Lecturer at the University of New Mexico. Layla has mentored and coached pre-service and early-career teachers, developed curriculum for teacher residency and certification pathways, and facilitated professional development focused on inclusive practices and culturally responsive teaching. She has supported and implemented restorative practices, social emotional learning, mindfulness, and other holistic approaches to behavioral support in schools for over 15 years.

Shiv R. Desai: Shiv R. Desai, PhD is an associate professor in the Teacher Education, Educational Leadership, and Policy (TEELP) Department at the University of New Mexico. His research focuses on ethnic studies, juvenile justice, hip-hop pedagogies and decolonizing methodologies.

Georgianna Desiderio: Georgianna Desiderio (Diné) is a new GMCS Board member, representing District 2. Ms. Desiderio is a lifelong Gallup resident who has served in a number of public capacities. Ms. Desiderio is deeply committed to the success of every GMCS student.

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Michael Dominguez: Michael Dominguez, PhD

Charlie Doyle: Charlie Doyle, UNM Student

Christopher L. Dyer: Dr. Christopher L. Dyer is an applied anthropologist, Fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology, and has over 30 years of experience in social science research in 21 countries. Research funding has included sources such as USAID, NSF Polar Research Board, NSF Centers of Excellence Initiative, John D. and Catherine T McArthur Foundation, School for Field Research: Earth Watch, Economic Development Administration, NMFS, MARFIN, Natural Hazards Center, and the Organization of American States. He has 18 years administrative experience in higher education as a Dean of Academic Affairs (Missouri State), Dean of Strategic Initiatives (School for Field Studies), Dean of Arts and Sciences (University of Mount Olive), and CEO of the Gallup Campus. Community groups. Populations he has worked with include Navajo Nation, Zuni Pueblo tribal council, and civil servants including city planners, EMS personnel, first responders, the Eyak Village (Valdez Oil Spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska) and others. Ongoing research partners include the UNM Grand Challenge, George Mason University for Social Complexity, Navajo Nation, and Natural Hazards Center.

Frankie Flores: Frankie Flores (They|Elle) oversees the UNM Arcoiris Center. Frankie started as a student volunteer 15 years ago and has grown into leading the Center. Formerly the LGBTQ Resource Center, the AC is housed under the Division for Change and Empowerment (DiCE).

Daniel F. Gallego: Daniel F. Gallego, M.D. is a Forensic Pathologist and Assistant Professor of Pathology at the University of New Mexico and the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator. His work focuses on determining the cause and manner of death for the State of New Mexico, with a particular interest in identifying social determinants of health and structural inequities. Dr. Gallego's expertise includes the investigation of border-crosser deaths, substance use fatalities, and deaths occurring in policing and carceral settings. He is actively involved in resident education, research, and statewide efforts to address health disparities affecting marginalized and underserved communities.

Dominic Garcia: Dominic Garcia serves as the Auto Collision Technology Instructor at Luna Community College. He focuses on creating an inclusive shop culture that attracts a diverse range of students, including women and non-binary individuals entering the collision repair industry. Dominic works alongside the CTE team to bridge the gap between traditional craftsmanship and modern technology. His instruction emphasizes hands-on mastery and professional safety standards, fostering a mentorship ecosystem where students of all ages and backgrounds collaborate on refinishing and structural projects to prepare for competitive workforce entry.

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Deena Gould: Deena Gould, PhD is an assistant professor of science education in the department of Teacher Education and Educational Leadership & Policy at UNM. She partners with children, youth, teachers, and communities on the design and research of STEM education programs. Her background includes STEM programs for K-12, teacher education, community-based STEM initiatives, and conducting research on STEM education. Her research focuses on serving youth and community interests instead of STEM pipeline interests.

Cristino Griego: Cristino Griego is a Culinary Arts Instructor at Luna Community College, dedicated to fostering intergenerational mentorship in the kitchen. By integrating traditional Northern New Mexico culinary heritage with modern professional standards, Cristino creates a collaborative environment where "parent-students" and younger learners master high-demand industry skills together. His work focuses on providing a diverse student population with the technical foundations and certifications necessary for success in the hospitality sector, ensuring that culinary education serves as a stable pathway toward economic mobility and community sustainability.

Jvanna L. Hanks II: Jvanna L. Hanks II is the Interim Superintendent of Gallup-McKinley County Schools, bringing more than 22 years of progressively responsible public-school leadership to one of New Mexico's largest and most culturally diverse districts. Recognizing the rich diversity of GMCS students and staff, Hanks continues to work to strengthen GMCS's Navajo Language and Culture program and to build school systems that support the whole child. A recognized advocate for equitable school finance, Hanks played a key role in legislative and legal efforts that corrected Impact Aid crediting and helped secure increased funding statewide through the Yazzie/Martinez education case.

Kyle Harvey: Kyle is Diné and is from Ts'idiiliysiitah (Rabbitbrush, Arizona). He is Tłogí, and born for Kinłichiinii. Kyle is a PhD student in the Native American Studies program. He is currently the Student and Graduate Services Coordinator for the Native American Studies Department at UNM main campus. His research interests include gender-based topics and higher education.

Jennifer Jordan: Jennifer Jordan is the Open Educational Resources (OER) Librarian in the University Libraries at the University of New Mexico. She is also an assistant professor at UNM and a writer. Currently, she is the principal investigator on a grant program funded by the Department of Education to develop an OER Consortium in the state of New Mexico. Before working at UNM, Jennifer developed strong experience with creating and adopting OER, including serving as a Presidential Fellow for OER at Central New Mexico Community College, where she co-created the English department's open-source textbooks.

Karla Kingsley: Karla Kingsley, PhD is an Associate Professor of Educational Technology in the department of Teacher Education, Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of New Mexico. She teaches and conducts research on the effective integration of digital media and instructional technology in K-20 settings. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in technology, media literacy education, game based learning, and STEM/STEAM. Her research explores equity, access and social justice issues related to teacher preparation and educator professional development in the digital age.

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Michelle Lee: Dr. Michelle L. Lee (Dine’) is Kinyaa’áani from Rock Springs, New Mexico. She received her Associate’s degree at the University of New Mexico – Gallup. This is where she began her journey into the world of academia as a first-generation college student. Since then, she has earned her Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees and continues to be a practitioner in the field of educational leadership. She is currently working as the Director of Admissions and Advisement, where she feels that her greatest strength as a student support professional is her ability to relate to the students on a personal level. She states, “I find that my own personal experiences and challenges help me to support and provide guidance to our students more effectively. I am every student that walks through my door.”

Sarah Llanque-White: Sarah is an Aymara Indian whose paternal family hails from a Village on Lake Titicaca (Bolivia/Peru) called Socca. Her maternal family is from the Philippines. She is currently on the Advisory Board for Navajo Technical University’s Nursing program. She also keeps a clinical practice for same-day and primary care appointments at Albuquerque Indian Health Center. Currently, she is an Associate Professor-Clinician Educator at UNM College of Nursing.

Gene Martinez: Gene Martinez serves as the Lead Welding Instructor at Luna Community College, where he plays a pivotal role in the Náásgóó (Moving Forward) initiative. With a focus on structural mastery and industry-standard precision, Gene fosters an inclusive shop environment that bridges the gap between traditional craftsmanship and modern technology. He is a dedicated mentor to a diverse student body, guiding intergenerational learners and non-traditional students—including a growing number of women in the trades.

Jessica Inez Martínez: Jessica Inez Martínez, Esq., is an immigration attorney and policy advocate who serves as Director of Policy and Coalition Building at the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center. Her work focuses on supporting immigrant children and families, particularly those eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). She has contributed to efforts that helped pass New Mexico laws such as the Special Immigrant Juvenile Classification Act (HB 15, 2023) and the Immigrant Safety Act (HB 9, 2026), aimed at expanding protections and limiting immigration detention. Through legal advocacy, coalition leadership, and statewide implementation efforts, Martínez works to advance systemic change, centering community partnerships, racial justice, and creative approaches such as activism (art through activism) to strengthen immigrant rights.

Kevin Mitchell: Kevin Mitchell (Dine) currently serves as the GMCS Board President and has been a GMCS Board Member for more than a decade. He is a proud small business owner, a lifelong advocate for local academic excellence, and a youth mentor, dedicated to the diverse student population served by GMCS.

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Tracy Morales: Tracy Morales is the CDL Instructor at Luna Community College, leading one of the most vital workforce pathways in rural New Mexico. Tracy is committed to diversifying the trucking industry by fostering an inclusive training environment for women and non-traditional drivers. Through a combination of rigorous safety training and hands-on driving experience, Tracy helps students of all ages navigate the complexities of the commercial transportation industry. His collaborative approach ensures that the CDL program serves as a rapid, high-impact tool for community economic revitalization and individual career success.

Cleophas Muneri: Dr. Cleophas Muneri is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism here at UNM. He teaches media and critical cultural communication courses by combining his background in media and journalism to explore how media constitute and reconstitute cultural identities in the struggle for democracy. In examining citizens' responses to globalization and the resultant disenfranchisement, his research focuses on social movements' contribution to democratization and how civil society groups/organizations engage with various media forms including digital media to organize, mobilize and broaden democratic engagement in countries still grappling with the legacies of colonialism.

Jair Munoz: Jair Munoz, PhD was recently hired at Lecturer III for both TEELP & LLSS. With the culmination of more than fourteen years in education; six in k-12, and more than nine in higher education. Dr. Munoz has worked in a wide variety of departments and capacities in disciplines ranging from Literacy/Biliteracy, Rhetoric and Writing Studies, AI, faculty development, disciplinary education, Teacher Education, Educational Leadership, Reading, English, and Bilingual Education. Dr. Munoz has also worked in Student Affairs where he worked in campus advocacy, educational trainings, coordinator, and presenter in areas relating to student advocacy and sexual violence.

Valerie Nye: Valerie Nye is the Library Director at Santa Fe Community College and has worked in libraries in New Mexico for more than 20 years. She holds an MLIS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and recently completed the American Library Association's (ALA) Law 4 Librarians training. Valerie currently serves as Advocacy Chair for the Mountain Plains Library Association and has edited two collections of stories published by ALA documenting librarians' experiences responding to First Amendment issues and challenges to library materials.

Emma O'Sullivan: Emma O'Sullivan is an Immigrant Rights Staff Attorney with the ACLU of New Mexico. Her work focuses on immigration detention, ICE enforcement, border policy, and other issues implicating civil rights for immigrants. Emma has spent the past 10 years as a public interest attorney working with immigrants across New Mexico. Previously, she represented hundreds of clients in a wide variety of immigration matters at Contigo Immigrant Justice. She also worked at the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, focusing on workers' rights. Emma is from Tomé, NM and received her BA and JD at the University of New Mexico.

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Nayyer Rimi: Nayyer Rimi is a Project Management graduate student at the University of New Mexico. Originally from Dhaka, Bangladesh, she brings a multicultural perspective to her work and a passion for cross-cultural learning. As Lab Coordinator at UNM's Anderson Behavioral Lab, she supports faculty research, oversees study coordination, and trains student researchers in ethical practices. Her background in Management Information Systems and project management shapes her commitment to collaboration and inclusive academic environments. Driven by curiosity and a lifelong commitment to learning, Rimi also enjoys travel and cooking in her pursuit of global perspectives.

Bailey Rutherford: Bailey Rutherford serves as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Associated Students at the University of New Mexico, where they design DEI workshops aimed at equipping student-leaders with equity-centered approaches to leadership. As a queer Chicax and rising educational equity scholar, their work centers culturally rooted practices and education as liberation. They hope to transform student experiences by critically examining curriculum, centering students' lived experiences, and fostering spaces that value community and belonging. Growing up in rural, southeastern New Mexico, Bailey witnessed the need for creating equitable and inclusive learning environments so all students can succeed.

Adrian Sandoval: Adrian is an experienced educator, professional learning provider, and leader with 30-plus years of experience. He has served as a program coordinator, interim district-level director, and state-level administrator. Adrian currently is the director of the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations at New Mexico Highlands University. He believes in the importance of creating strong family and community partnerships with K-12 public schools and supporting youth leadership in ways that recognize students' cultural and linguistic assets. Outside of NMHU, Adrian is a member of the NM Biliiteracy Panel and the Transform Education New Mexico steering team.

Gene Sandavol: Gene Sandoval is the Automotive Technology Instructor at Luna Community College, where he specializes in preparing a diverse student body for the evolving landscape of automotive repair. Gene creates a supportive, high-tech learning environment where intergenerational students work side-by-side on everything from internal combustion engines to electric vehicle assembly. By focusing on industry-standard diagnostics and certifications, he ensures that his students—regardless of gender or age—graduate with the technical proficiency and "Skills & Solutions" needed to thrive in the modern, green-energy automotive economy.

Shawn Secatero: Shawn Secatero, Ph.D. is a member of the Canoncito Band of Navajo and serves as an Associate Professor in the UNM Teacher Education, Educational Leadership program. His research concentrates on holistic learning, Indigenous leadership, dual enrollment, rural education, and higher education. Dr. Secatero has 30 years of teaching experience in state and tribally controlled schools that includes the Gates Millennium Scholars Program, Canoncito School to Work Program, NMSU Grants Native American Program and other Native American leadership initiatives. He has published and presented research on his highly acclaimed Corn Pollen Model that has inspired organizations, students, and schools in promoting research, service, and teaching.

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Julia Simms: Julia Simms is a Caseworker for the Native American Student Success Center at the UNM-Gallup Branch. She is an enrolled member of the Sicangu Rosebud Sioux Tribe, born and raised in Vanderwagen, New Mexico. Julia is passionate about Indigenous rights, education, and mental health. She studied at Northern Arizona University for psychological sciences and a minor in criminology with the goal of bringing mental health awareness and resources back to the Gallup and broader Indigenous communities. Julia aspires to build a career in psychology, empowering Indigenous students to pursue their education and achieve their goals.

Kimimila Simms: Kimimila Simms is an enrolled member of the Sicangu Rosebud Sioux Tribe, born and raised in Rosebud, South Dakota. The daughter of a boarding school survivor and a non-native Army veteran, Kimimila grew up navigating the complexities of a mixed-race identity, neither fully fitting into Native spaces nor non-Native ones, a challenge that shaped her deep empathy and commitment to belonging. A current graduate student in the OILS program at UNM, she serves as Program Director of TRIO/SSS and oversees the Center for Academic Learning (CAL). With over 20 years of experience supporting first-generation, adult, rural, and Native American students, she is dedicated to breaking down barriers and empowering students to achieve their academic goals through holistic support and cultural awareness. Kimimila is a proud Lakota woman and mother of two whose life's work is rooted in uplifting every student she serves.

Jen Stacy: Jen Stacy, PhD is an assistant professor of Family and Child Studies at the University of New Mexico. Her research critically examines schools' perceptions of multilingual families and how these perceptions influence in/formal outreach and teaching. She is interested in how educators learn about family-school relations and how critical praxis in teacher education can support pre- and in-service teachers' development of equitable, culturally sustaining approaches to family-school relationships. Jen teaches classes in early childhood education focused on various aspects of family, culture, language, and literacies.

Andy Stoker: Dr. Andy Stoker, Pastor of Central United Methodist Church, Community Outreach Dir, NM Basic Needs

Meshell L. Sturgis: Dr. Meshell L. Sturgis conducts a fun mixture of critical cultural media studies and community engaged research using research creation methods. She received her B.A. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2013, and her M.A. in Cultural Studies from the University of Washington, Bothell and recently completed her Ph.D. in Communication at the University of Washington, Seattle in 2024. As her dissertation explored the political aesthetics of Black Girl Magic and self-representation in alternative media, Black feminism and Queer theorizing are central to her work, which you can find published in the Journal for Women's Studies in Communication, QED, Somatechnics, Lateral, and Souls. Her critical arts writing practice has led to publications in Art Practical, A Year in Black Art, and the Journal of African Art. She also has a background in trainings about power, privilege, and difference geared toward intergenerational audiences in the public and private sectors.

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Deborah Taffa: Deborah Taffa is the director of the MFA program at the IAIA. Her memoir *Whiskey Tender* was a finalist for the 2024 National Book Award and longlisted for the 2025 Carnegie Medal of Excellence in Nonfiction. Named a Top 10 book of the year by *The Atlantic* and *Time Magazine*, *Whiskey Tender* won a 2024 Southwest Book Prize, a 2025 International Latino Book Award, and the 2026 LULAC Book Award. A 2024 NEA fellow and 2022 winner of the PEN/Jean Stein Grant, Deborah grew up in Farmington, NM. She is a citizen of the Yuma Nation and Laguna Pueblo.

Vanessa Tahe: Dr. Vanessa Tahe (Diné [Navajo] Nation; Salt People, born for Bitter Water People) is an Assistant Professor at the UNM College of Nursing and one of only two Indigenous faculty members in the program. A practicing pediatric nurse practitioner, she integrates lived experience and clinical expertise to serve underserved communities. Her work focuses on Indigenous health, cultural humility, and social determinants of health, with a dedicated mission to prepare future nurse leaders to advance health equity across diverse populations.

Lisa M. Taylor: Dr. Lisa M. Taylor is a first-generation graduate and one of two Black faculty with University of New Mexico- College of Nursing (UNM CoN). She is the inaugural Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the CoN, and teaches in the nurse practitioner/leadership programs at the CoN. She is deeply interested in leadership pathways, particularly for people from marginalized/minoritized communities.

Deanza Thompson: Deanza Thompson (Dine') is born of the Zia Pueblo and into the Water Edge Clan. She grew up in Mexican Springs, NM and is a proud mother of 4 (3 girls, 1 boy), ages 15-27. She is a first-generation college student who received her Associate's degree at the University of New Mexico-Gallup. She is employed at UNM Gallup as a Financial Aid Officer for the past 11 years; through her job she was able to continue her educational journey earning her Bachelor's and Master's degree while working full-time. She is very passionate about her job and helping students obtain higher education through guidance in FAFSA and financial aid. She values each student and thinks of each student as her own children as they navigate college.

Karen Torres: Karen Torres leads the CTE and Workforce Development department at Luna Community College, where she works with her team to create inclusive economic pathways for a diverse rural student body. Her collaborative leadership focuses on removing barriers within the trades—specifically CDL, Welding, Culinary Arts, Auto Tech, and Auto Collision—to ensure these programs reflect the community's diversity. Specializing in high-demand, short-term credentials, Karen and her team have successfully implemented certifications like Water Distribution Level I and are currently launching OSHA 10 and 30 training to provide students with immediate, tangible professional value.

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Elena Valdez: Elena is an interdisciplinary teacher-scholar with expertise in Mexican American literature and print culture. Since earning a PhD in English from Rice University, she has worked in education and government in various capacities, serving as a librarian, an administrator for the New Mexico Public Education Department, and a high school social studies teacher. She is now the assistant director of the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations at New Mexico Highlands University, where she co-designs professional learning for K-12 teachers, supports youth leadership development, and offers policy counsel. Her professional trajectory has been shaped by her commitment to place, community, and culturally sustaining education.

Jesus (Jacob) Villa: Jesus (Jacob) Villa, PhD is a Lecturer III in Science Education at The University of New Mexico's College of Education and Human Sciences. His research examines equity in STEM education, outdoor learning programs, and bilingual education. He is committed to preparing pre-service teachers to work with diverse student populations and has presented on culturally sustaining pedagogy, teacher preparation, and STEM outreach.

Val Wangler: Val Wangler, MD, is a local family physician and founding Executive Director at Gallup Community Health (GCH), which strives to make excellent primary care accessible to all. Dr. Wangler is a recently elected GMCS Board member and mom to two young GMCS students. A McKinley County resident since 2010, Dr. Wangler lived and worked in the Pueblo of Zuni before transitioning to the Chief Medical Officer position at Rehoboth Hospital and then starting GCH. Dr. Wangler believes that education reflective of and responsive to culture improves outcomes as well as educational experience, that public education is a major driver of equity in our society, and that every child should receive the education and support they need to thrive.

Darrel Watchman: Darrel is a proud member of the Diné Nation, residing in Tsayatoh, New Mexico. He is Tábaqhá (Waters Edge Clan), and born for Tsi' naajinii (Black Streak People Clan). Darrel honorably served as a United States Marine and is an Iraq War Veteran. Darrel earned his Associate of Arts in Social Work from the University of New Mexico (Gallup Campus) and is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work at Western New Mexico University. His research interests focus on the intersection of healing and mental well-being with Indigenous art forms, including creative writing, small metal works, weaving, and traditional feather fan-making.

John White: John (Diné) is a Navajo Nation citizen and a PhD student at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, enrolled in Language, Literacy, and Social Studies in the College of Education and Human Sciences. He also serves as a Graduate Assistant for the Native Curriculum Partnership Program. His research focuses on bilingual education, particularly on mathematics related to Diné (Navajo) culture. John holds a B.A. and a master's in architecture, with three years of experience at an architectural firm. He has taught introductory mathematics and architecture at UNM Gallup and has worked as a Math & Science Education Specialist.

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Carolene Whitman: Shí ei Dr. Carolene Whitman dashiji ní. Honágháahnii (One Who Walks Around Another Clan) nish'í Tsi'naajínii (Dark Streak of the Wood Clan) ei báshíshchín. Tódík'ózhi (Sour Water Clan) ei dashicheii doo Náneesht'ézhí-Náádáá ątsoii Dine'e (Zuni-Yellow Corn Clan) dashinálí. My name is Dr. Carolene Whitman. I grew up in the small community of Springstead, New Mexico, located approximately fifteen miles east-north of Gallup. I received my Doctorate in Philosophy in Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies from the College of Education at the University of New Mexico. Currently, I am an Adjunct Professor teaching Navajo I and Introduction to Native American Studies.

Sierra Yazzie Asamoa-Tutu: Sierra Yazzie Asamoa-Tutu, is a mother, clinical social worker, and city councilor. She was born and raised in Gallup and left New Mexico to pursue higher education, earning a BA in Global and Intercultural Studies from Calvin University and later a Master of Social Work from St. Thomas University & University of St. Catherine in St. Paul, MN. She returned to Gallup in 2020 to practice as a mental health therapist specializing in trauma care, and now acts as remote supervisor for a holistic recovery program for mental health and substance dependence called TribaLights. Sierra was recently elected to public office as a city councilor for the City of Gallup and is enjoying this new arena of service to her home community.

Fan Xu: Fan Xu, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Educational Technology in the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of New Mexico. Her research focuses on AI literacy, computational thinking, and learning design. She is committed to conducting community-engaged, impactful research that supports the development of critical AI capabilities among pre-service and in-service teachers.