

Speaker Biosketches

Benita Litson

Benita Litson has served in the capacity of the Diné College Land Grant Director since 2006. She is of the Navajo tribe and has been using her experience in farming and ranching alongside her family as means to develop much needed programs for Navajo Farmers and Ranchers on the Navajo Nation. She has spent many years strengthening the Dine College Land Grant Programs and Initiatives. Collaborating with 1862 institution and other higher educational institution has be a strength to many long lasting programs created for students, farmers and ranchers. An overarching goal to the programs is to develop much need infrastructure to move farmers and ranchers to the next level, whether it is increasing local foods, improving range health or bridging the gap of future farmers and ranchers.

Aliecia R. McClain

Dr. McClain is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Chemistry and director of Doored Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences Scholarship0 Program at Norfolk State University, Norfolk, VA. The institute is a rigorous honor program for students majoring in science, engineering and mathematics to help prepare them for success in their graduate or medical school pursuits. Dr. McClain is a member of the American Chemical Society, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers. She is also a Diamond Life member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Dr. McClain has a B.S. in chemistry from Benedict College, an M.S. in inorganic polymer chemistry from Clark Atlanta University, and a Ph.D. in agriculture and environmental chemistry from the University of California, Davis.

Rolando Flores Galazara

Dr. Rolando A. Flores Galarza is a pioneer in the agricultural and environmental sciences. His impressive body of work has helped leverage advances in those fields to impact social mobility and economic development in rural communities across western hemisphere.

In his current role, Dr. Flores is focused on demonstrating how technologies like big data, artificial intelligence, and green energy can improve everything from water usage efficiency to soil health and carbon management.

Born and raised in Costa Rica, young Rolando joined his country's National Production Bureau after earning his mechanical engineering degree in 1974. Tasked with overseeing food processing investment projects, Dr. Flores implemented a series of technical innovations that sparked an economic revolution in Costa Rica – a revolution that continues to reverberate. Today, the country exports nearly 80 agricultural products, up from the mere 4 or 5 it exported when he first joined the Bureau.

In the 80s, Dr. Flores brought his talents to the United States, earning a master's degree from Iowa State University, and a Ph.D. from Kansas State University. After several prolific years as a U.S. Department of Agriculture researcher, and later as an educator and administrator at the University of Nebraska, he landed with us at New Mexico State University. He's skillfully led our College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences since 2016.

Far from an ivory tower technocrat, Dr. Flores connects directly with the people in rural communities who benefit most from his research. He engages regularly with farmers and ranchers from rural communities and Native American land across New Mexico, as well as the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora, to help improve their food production, and, in the process, their livelihoods.