



2024
NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI
YOUNG ALUMNI
SERVICE AWARD

GARRETT LEITERMANN '16, '17



“My mentors at NMSU inspired and challenged me, helping me grow intellectually and as a person. They got me to a place where I could take the next steps.”

—Garrett Leitermann
'16, '17

Early in life, Garrett Leitermann '16, '17 discovered a lifelong passion for exploring the world through books—especially the diversity of ways of life of people throughout different times and places. This early passion morphed into an educational and vocational journey that continues to this day.

An undergraduate anthropology professor sparked Garrett's interest in archaeology, and, when he searched for a graduate program, NMSU stood out as having strong coursework that would marry his interests in history and archaeology of North America.

Garrett's mentors at NMSU were “foundational” to his experience: Dr. Fumi Arakawa, former director of the University Museum for whom Garrett served as a graduate assistant,

and affiliate faculty member Dr. Judy Berryman, the first principal investigator for whom he worked at a cultural resource management consulting firm.

Garrett went above and beyond his duties as a graduate assistant at the University Museum, helping to educate visiting K-12 school groups and serving as a lab manager, directing the cataloging and preliminary analysis of artifacts from archaeological field school and ensuring their proper curation.

Field work alongside Dr. Arakawa in the Gila National Forest helped Garrett see the practical application of his education to a career: “Field school inspired my thought process about observation and interpretation. It helped me define my thesis research and solidified that this was what I wanted to do for my career.”

As Monument Archaeologist for the Las Cruces Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Garrett spearheaded a collaboration with Dr. Arakawa, NMSU administration, the Mescalero Apache tribe, and the Pueblo of Zuni. Together, they achieved a successful and collaborative repatriation and reburial of human remains and cultural objects taken decades ago from archaeological sites on private and federal lands in Southern New Mexico. This two-year project, conducted under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, culminated in Native American ancestors and their belongings housed at the NMSU University Museum being reverently reinterred in an all-day ceremony. “Out of all the things I have done as a government employee, this repatriation felt like I worked towards something that mattered—righting a wrong,” he says.

Garrett says his whole job is protecting history: “I owe it to these descendent communities to do the best job possible to ensure their history and the history of the land is preserved.” One way he enjoys both protecting and advocating for cultural resources is through popular BLM outreach activities such as guided hikes, school presentations, and booths at fairs and markets.

His advice to today's students? “Recognize opportunities and be willing to take a leap of faith,” but remember that “success is not going to happen instantaneously after you get a degree—you have to work for it. Get experience and put in your time.” ▲