

Department of Computer Science

Fall 2007

Record Number of PhDs Graduated

We proudly present the PhD class of 2007. This year saw a record number of PhDs produced by the department. Our average over the last several years has been between one and two PhDs, but this year we saw the first fruits of our efforts to increase the number of graduate students, and, in particular, the number of PhDs.

Heather Pfeiffer received her BS in Microbiology & Biology from the University of Washington in 1977. From then until 1985 she worked sev-



Heather Pfeiffer

eral jobs including 4 years at Boeing Computer Services. From 1985 to 1988 she worked on and completed an MS at New Mexico State University. Then, from 1994 through 2007 she worked on and completed her PhD here at New Mexico State University. During that time she has not only worked many jobs including being a private consultant, but also helped raise two children, Joel and Becca, with her husband, Joseph,

who are now college students. The title of her dissertation is "The Effect of Data Structures Modifications on Algorithms for Reasoning Operations Using a Conceptual Graphs Knowledge Base." Her advisor was Roger Hartley.

Brian Cloteaux was born in El Paso, Texas and graduated from Canutillo High School. After receiving a B.S.E.E. and M.S. from the University of Texas at El Paso, he worked for ExxonMobil Exploration Company for



Brian Cloteaux

seven years. In 2003, he started doctoral studies at NMSU and he is currently a postdoctoral research associate at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The title of his dissertation is "An Investigation of Pointer Machines." His advisor was Desh Ranjan.

Phan Huy Tu received a Ph.D. degree in computer science from New



Phan Huy Tu

Mexico State University in June 2007. His research interests include Reasoning about Action, Planning, Logic Programming, and Information Retrieval and Extraction. He is the co-author of fourteen published papers. He has now moved to Arizona State University for a postdoctoral fellowship. The title of his dissertation is "Reasoning and Planning With Incomplete Information in the Presence of Static Causal Laws." His advisor was Son Cao Tran.

Omar el-Khatib's dissertation was entitled "Integration and Debugging of Answer Set Programming." His advisor was Enrico Pontelli.

YongGang Lu's advisor was Jing He. His dissertation was entitled "Ab initio protein tertiary structure prediction constrained by extracted secondary structures from CryoEM density maps."

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Computer Bytes

Computer Bytes is a production of the Computer Science Department of New Mexico State University, produced once a year, in the Fall semester.

Written and produced by the Computer Science Department faculty and Staff.

Edited by Roger Hartley.

For past issues or for copies of this issue, please contact csoffice@cs.nmsu.edu, or call (505) 646-3723.

Also available online at www.cs.nmsu.edu.

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Message from the Chair

Dear friends,

As always, I am delighted to have the opportunity to communicate with you. 2007 has been another successful year for the NMSU Computer Science Department.

In this issue of Computer Bytes, you will read about many exciting activities going on in the department. The departmental faculty, students, staff and alums continue to excel. I am particularly pleased to notice that this year one of our alums, Mr. Larry Blount (BS 1981), was recognized as an outstanding alum in the College of Arts & Sciences. Also, Marzyeh Ghassemi, a recent alum has been awarded the prestigious Marshall scholarship and will pursue a Ph.D. at Oxford University in England. Congratulations to Larry and Marzyeh on their achievements! I am sure that you will enjoy their stories and celebrate their success. I know that many of you have gone on to great things in your career and life. Please send us any stories that you wish to share with the CS-NMSU family and we will incorporate those in our next newsletter. On a sad note, a distinguished NMSU alum and one of the founders of the NMSU CS department, Dr. J Mack Adams, passed away in a tragic biking accident late 2006. J Mack, as he was fondly known, was, without a doubt, the single greatest influence on the department. He chaired the department on more than one occasion and later served in the Deans' Office. He was an active member of the departmental Advisory Board and also one of its biggest benefactors. J. Mack will be sorely missed.

Several of our faculty members were recognized for their excellence this year. Dr. Karen Villaverde was appointed as a new tenure-track faculty member in the department. Karen, who received a Ph.D. from CS-NMSU in 2002, was on the teaching faculty in the department for several years. We welcome Karen in her new role. Dr. Son Tran received the College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Faculty Achievement Award. Yours truly was awarded a Distinguished Research Career Award by NMSU. Dr. Enrico Pontelli was recognized for his service by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) for serving as the General Chair for the 2007 ASSETS conference, which is the leading conference for Assistive Technologies in Computing. Dr. Jing He was recognized for her effort as the lead organizer of a workshop in Protein Structure Prediction at the IEEE Bioinformatics and Biomedicine Conference. This year, we had a "bumper crop" of Ph.D. graduates. A total of seven students received their Ph.D.s in 2007. Congratulations to all of them on their success! Once again, several graduate students in the CS department received scholarships from the graduate school. As always, our undergraduate and graduate student organizations continue to be active in organizing events and performing community service. Last but not the least, Ms Mariette Mealor, a member of our excellent administrative staff received the College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Employee Award.

The department has taken a lead in establishing two new academic degree programs. A new Masters program in Bioinformatics will allow the graduate students to pursue a Masters degree in the exciting area of Bioinformatics. Dr. Jonathan Cook has led the effort to establish a new Bachelor of Arts degree in Computer Science that will allow for a more diverse group of students to pursue computer science training. We expect these programs to come on-line in the next year or two.

I hope that you will enjoy this newsletter and that it will motivate you to write to us to share your success stories with us.

Desh Ranjan

Faculty News

Ranjan Wins Career Award

Department Head Desh Ranjan has been awarded the distinguished career award by the University Research Council. This award acknowledges consistent research productivity over all the years of service. Dr. Ranjan



has been at NMSU since 1993. Before that he was visiting scholar at the Max Planck Institute in Germany. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1999 and to Full Professor in 2006. He is the author of over 50 refereed papers, including publications in the journals of Theoretical Computer Science, Information Processing Letters and Acta Informatica. His co-authors include Juris Hartmanis and Frank Harary (late of the CS Department.) He has been successful in obtaining or helping to obtain many research dollars for the Department, including being the Principal Investigator for the National Science Foundation funded Center for Research

Excellence in Science and Technology whose focus is bioinformatics. He also has made outstanding contributions to academic service, including serving on National Science Foundation proposal review panels, and the paper review panels of many journals and conferences. He has been Department Head of Computer Science since 2004.

Villaverde promoted to tenure-track

Dr. Karen Villaverde has been promoted to Assistant Professor after six years as College Assistant Professor. Karen received a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science in 1991 and a Master's degree in Computer Science in 1993 from the University of Texas at El Paso, and a Ph.D. in Computer Science from New Mexico State University in 2002. Karen graduated with high honors for her Bachelor's degree, graduated at the top of her class for her Master's degree,



and received the outstanding graduating senior award for her doctoral research.

During her Bachelor's studies she was supported by an academic scholarship, during her Master's studies she was supported by an NSF fellowship, and during her Ph.D. studies she was supported by a GAANN fellowship from the US department of Education.

Karen has published more than 30 research papers and has presented them at local, national, and international conferences. Karen's primary research interests are in the areas of Interval Computations, Parallel Processing, and Computer Gaming.

Pontelli Chair of Prestigious Conference

Dr. Enrico Pontelli served as General Chair of the ASSETS conference held in Tempe, Arizona in October 2007. ASSETS is the main conference on Computers and Accessibility, a field that has been a part of Enrico's research for many years.



People with disabilities can use Computer and Information Technologies to overcome barriers encountered in day-to-day life, and to participate more fully in society. The ASSETS series of

conferences explores the potential of Computer and Information Technologies to support and include individuals with disabilities, and those around them. ASSETS is the premier forum for presenting innovative research on the design and use of both mainstream and specialized assistive technologies by people with disabilities. Sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and its SIGACCESS Special Interest Group on Accessible Computing, ASSETS includes formal paper sessions, demonstrations, posters, a doctoral consortium, and a student research competition. The single track and friendly atmosphere make ASSETS the ideal venue to meet researchers, practitioners, developers and policymakers to exchange ideas, share information and make new contacts.

Department to Hire New Faculty Member

Even though the department is in the “yellow zone” as far as hiring new faculty goes, we have been given permission to begin a search for a new faculty member, hopefully starting in Fall 2008. This is due, in part by the tireless lobbying of Dean (now Provost) Cruzado-Salas by Department Head Ranjan. The new faculty member will replace Dr. Clint Jeffery, now at the University of Idaho, but will be a specialist in data mining. This will undoubtedly improve our teaching of data bases and of machine learning techniques, and give our graduate students another area to consider for their research.

Departments are now placed in one of three categories, red, yellow or green for the hiring of new faculty. The determination is done on the basis

of student credit hours. Our number of student credit hours have been dropping recently due to in drop in CS majors, but also in the number of students taught in CS110, our service course on computer literacy. This was brought about because the class is no longer considered a part of “viewing a wider world” requirement. However, since our graduate student population has been rising recently, the Dean, and then Provost Flores deemed us worthy of more faculty - hence the yellow category.

Dick Stark Remembered



Long time faculty member Dick Stark died last January, at the age of 90, and a bench in his memory has been placed in the garden of the Good Samaritan Society of Las Cruces which is where he spent his last years. He retired from the department in 1983.

Dick lived in an apartment at “Good Sam” for a number of years before the special care unit became his home. He thrilled everyone with his deep bass voice and continued singing

with the Village Singers for as long as he was able. Dick was always happy to perform the solo, Ol’ Man River, to rave reviews. After Dick’s death in January, his family considered doing something special in his memory. His daughter, Jean Starr (pictured above, sitting on the bench), lives in Las Cruces, so she returned to the areas of the campus that Dick had particularly enjoyed.

The gazebo/pond/fountain area was at the top of his list. The two of them often moved chairs closer to the area so they could watch and listen to the water tumbling from the fountain and down into the pool. They appreciated the St. Francis statue that stands in the fountain enhancing the sense of serenity for the many people who stop there. Jean and her brothers, Richard, Dan and

Larry, recently gave a stone bench to be placed in the area in Dick’s memory. A small stainless steel plaque placed in the rocks in front of the bench reads, “Meditation Bench in loving memory of ‘Ol’ Man River’ Dick Stark, Donated by his family, June 2007.” Dick’s bench joins a variety of trees and plantings in honor and memory of others.

An endowed scholarship in his name is awarded every year to a deserving Computer Science student.

Departmental Events

Harary Room Dedicated

This past spring saw the dedication of the Frank Harary room and the first annual lecture in his memory. Room 134 in Science Hall, long the home of our most illustrious faculty member, has been turned into a memorial for Frank and his writings. A dedication ceremony was held on March 12th. and the room, now resplendent with new furniture and carpeting, was officially opened. The photograph below shows Desh Ranjan showing the room to then Dean Cruzado-Salas and Mrs.. Harary. Tom

Harary is standing in the doorway.

In conjunction with the ceremony, a lecture was held in Science Hall as the first in an annual series dedicated to Frank's memory.

The first speaker was Dr. Lowell Beineke (pictured at right) who is the Schrey Professor of Mathematics at Indiana University Purdue University at Fort Wayne. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Purdue University and his Master's and Doctorate from the University of Michigan. Frank Harary, was his thesis supervisor and the topic of his dissertation was the thickness of graphs. His list of publications includes six books and over a hundred papers in graph theory. He has been on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Graph Theory since its inception, and currently serves as Editor of The College Math-

ematics Journal. In addition to topological graph theory, his favorite areas



are line graphs, trees, and tournaments.

Dr. Beineke's talk was entitled "Splendor in the Graphs" and he entertained the audience with results in graphs on surfaces, as well as describing several games with graphs which was a much-loved pursuit of Frank's.

Alumnus is Distinguished by College

Larry Blount has been named as one of the Arts and Sciences Distinguished Alumni.

He graduated with a BS in CS in 1981 and is now a member of the Senior Technical Staff at IBM Tucson. He is currently working in the development lab on large-scale storage controllers.



He has many patents and travels all over the world as trouble shooter for users of the IBM's storage systems.

Mr.. Blount is married to Michelle and he has two children, Emily and Matthew.



Successful Summer Camps

The Computer Science Department hosted their annual Computer Science Summer Camps, held during NMSU's Summer Session II. These camps are all made possible with various grants from the National Science Foundation, secured under the direction of Dr. Desh Ranjan and Dr. Enrico Pontelli. These camps are intended to provide exposure to not only the New Mexico State University campus and the Computer Science department, but also to the field of Computer Science and possible career opportunities. Additionally, these camps are intended to attract under-represented groups in the field of Computer Science, including women and American Indian students, who historically are not entering the field in large numbers.

The College Camp was an in-

tensive 5 week program and included 9 participants from schools such as DACC, EPCC, San Juan College, and Dine College. All students were current community college students interested in transferring to a 4 year institution.



During camp they studied Java Programming, Web Design, and Bioinformatics.

The Young Women in Computing camp was also a 5 week program that invited local high school females to the CS department to gain experience in CS related topics, including Robotics, Programming with

Alice, Web Design, and Bioinformatics.

The High School Bioinformatics camp lasted 2 weeks and participants were local high school students. All three camps combined to provide exposure to students to the field of Bioinformatics.

Camp activities included a poster session at the conclusion of the Bioinformatics portion of camp. NMSU faculty and staff as well as parents were invited to attend. The Young Women in Computing presented animated video games they created using Alice. Campers also participated in extra curricular activities, including game nights, movie nights, bowling, swimming, and swing dancing.

Campers responded positively to their experience with many college students expressing a desire to transfer to NMSU and high school students interested in returning next summer.



Student News

IGERT Fellows named

Two Computer Science graduate students, Se-line Virk and Carlos Herrera, have been named as IGERT fellows.

The Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) program, initiated in 1997 by the National Science Foundation has been developed to meet the challenges of educating U.S. Ph.D. scientists, engineers, and educators with the interdisciplinary backgrounds, deep knowledge in chosen disciplines, and technical, professional, and personal skills to become in their own careers the leaders and creative agents for change.

The program is intended to catalyze a cultural change in graduate education, for students, faculty, and institutions, by establishing innovative new models for graduate education and training in a fertile environment for collaborative research that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries.

It is also intended to facilitate greater diversity in student participation and preparation, and to contribute to the development of a diverse, globally-engaged science and engineering workforce.

CS Graduate to be Marshall Fellow

Recent graduate Marzyeh Ghassemi, who was featured in our last newsletter has been awarded a Marshall Fellowship to study in the United Kingdom.

Marzyeh will study Bio-medical Engineering in the graduate program at Oxford University.

Scholarships Awarded

The following undergraduate students are in current receipt of departmental scholarships. **Scott Blauert** was the first recipi-



ent of Steven Judd Memorial Scholarship. Scott is planning to graduate soon.

Kelly Mills was awarded the Brandy Streit Memorial Scholarship. She is continuing her CS program and doing very well.

Jessica Greenling was the recipient of the Scheidegger-Burk Scholarship. She is on a study abroad trip to



Japan. Jessica will resume her CS studies at NMSU in the fall of 2008.

Ryan Kubinski received the Stark Scholarship. Ryan has graduated and is working for the Department of the Army at TRAC-WSMR.

Michael Simmons was the winner of the prestigious International Foundation for Telemetry Scholarship. Mike has graduated and is now working at the Physical Sciences Lab on

campus. He is a graduate student in CS.



Open Letter from Hue McCoy

Dear CS Alumni,
For those of you that know me, I proudly announce that I am a total failure at retirement. I am now a part time development coordinator for the department. Thanks to many of you, contributions have been on the rise the last few years. The department now has a Founder's Fund and several endowed scholarships. One honors Dr. Stark, two of them are memorials to former students (Ms. Brandy Streit and Mr. Steven Judd.)

We wish to thank all of you that support the department with your donations. We hope that you will continue to remember us as you make contributions to various causes and organiza-



tions throughout the coming years.

Sincerely, Hue McCoy, Development Coordinator (hue@cs.nmsu.edu)

Research News

Knowledge representation, Logic, and Advanced Programming Laboratory

Research Activities:

This has been another very productive year, in terms of publications and research accomplishments. The investigators published well over 25 papers in very well-respected conferences and journals, such as AAAI, ICLP, TPLP, JAIR. The research team continues to be at the fore-front of research in the fields of logic programming and knowledge representation.

Recently we have invested further effort in expanding our research interests toward inter-disciplinary domains. Some of the new collaborations include a collaborative project with researchers in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, aimed at devising new robotic technology to train astronauts; and a collaborative project with the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center (NESCent), aimed at the development of the first ever formal ontology for evolutionary biology.

Educational Activities:

The KLAP Laboratory has been involved in several activities aimed at promoting education and training in the relevant areas of expertise.

Dr. Pontelli chaired the Third International Doctoral Consortium on Logic Programming. The event took place in September 2007 in Porto (Portugal). It featured 6 presentations from selected doctoral students starting their careers in the field of logic

programming. Each student was assisted by an assigned mentor – this year the mentors included some of the most famous names in the field (e., David Warren). The event included also an invited presentation by Peter Szeredi, one of the founding fathers of the field, presenting his personal perspectives about the beginnings of logic programming in Europe.

Members of the laboratory are involved in the organization of the Young Investigator Program that will take place in July 2008 in association with the International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs (ICCHP), one of the most prominent European conferences on assistive technologies.

The members of the laboratory are also continuing their effort to reach out to groups of students that have been traditionally under-represented in Computer Science. An outreach program is in place targeting high school women; the program includes a summer camp component and monthly meetings with invited speakers. The laboratory is working hard to secure funding to continue and expand this effort.

The laboratory has secured a \$30,000 grant from the CRA-W and Center for Diversity in Computing to organize a summer school in logic programming (scheduled for late July 2008).

The laboratory continues also its effort to develop new educational material for the CS department. We have recently completely redesigned the Logic Programming course, which was successfully offered in Fall 2007 (15 students attended the classes). We are also working on a number of new Special Topics classes (e.g., parallel programming using GPUs).

Several MS and Ph.D. students associated to the lab completed their degrees. In particular, Islam Elkabani, Omar El-Khatib, Yu Pan, Hung Viet Le, and Tu Phan completed their doctoral degrees.

Organizational Activities:

The members of the laboratory have been very active in the research community, by serving as program committee members and organizing several events.

Dr. Pontelli served as General Chair of the ACM ASSETS 2007 conference; this is the primary research conference in the field of computers and assistive technologies. The conference took place in Tempe, AZ, in October 2007, and was attended by 115 participants. Several members of the lab helped in various aspects associated to the organization of this event.

Dr. Tran has chaired the recent International Workshop on Declarative Agent Languages and Technologies.

Dr. Pontelli has been appointed a Program Chair for the 2008 International Conference on Logic Programming. This is the main international event for the logic programming community. The conference will take place in Udine (Italy) in December 2008.

Travel:

Dr. Tran spent several weeks traveling to Australia and Vietnam, to conduct collaborative research and to establish research and educational partnerships. Dr. Pontelli visited the Department of Computer Sciences at the University Porto and the University of Texas at Dallas.

The members of the laboratory attended several conferences, delivering tutorials and presentations, e.g. 2007 International Conference on Logic Programming; Colloquium on Implementation of Constraint Logic Programming Systems 2007; Workshop on Logic Programming and the Web; International Conference on Planning and Scheduling; Workshop on Declarative Aspects of Multicore Programming; National Conference on Artificial Intelligence (AAAI)

Visitors:

The laboratory continues to actively sponsor visits from well-known researchers and younger researchers. Recent visits include Dr. Piero Bonatti (Univ. Naples, Italy); Dr. Alessandro Dal Palu' (Univ. Parma, Italy); Dr. Agostino Dovier (Univ. , Italy); Alberto Ghedin (MS Student, Univ. Udine, Italy.)

Song Receives Research Award

Dr. Joe Song, who has been with the department for two years, has received funding for the Na-

tional Institutes of Health, together with Bruce A. Edgar, a Biologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

The project is entitled "Discovery of Gene Regulatory Networks Controlling Cell Cycle Exit in *Drosophila*, using the Discrete Dynamic System Model."

The award is in the amount of \$279,558, (\$167,260 to



NMSU) and will run for three years. The goal is to screen about 3,000 genes in the fruit fly wing using time-course gene expression data and compute a gene regulatory network model that may explain the cell-cycle exit control mechanism in *Drosophila*.

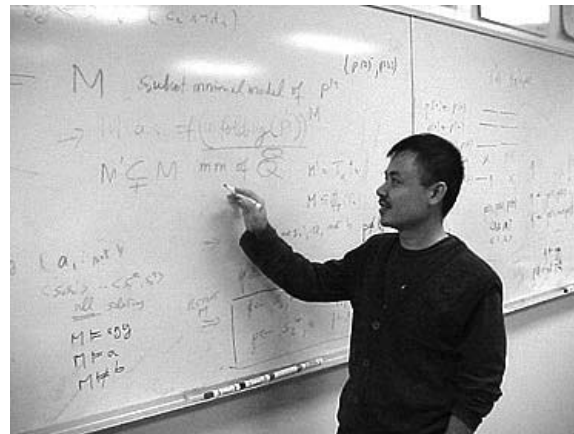
[Continued from page 1]



Omar El-Khatib

Hung Le's advisor was Enrico Pontelli. His dissertation was entitled "Efficient Execution of Answer Set Programs."

Yu Pan's advisor was Enrico Pontelli. His dissertation was entitled "Automating Bioinformatics Tasks Through Intelligent Workflow Construction."



Hung Le



Yu Pan

CS Faculty

Desh Ranjan, Department Head, Professor
Amiya Bhattacharya, Assistant Professor
Jonathan Cook, Associate Professor
Roger T. Hartley, Associate Professor
Jing He, Assistant Professor
Hing Leung, Professor
Joseph J. Pfeiffer, Jr, Assistant Professor
Inna Pivkina, Assistant Professor
Enrico Pontelli, Professor
Joe Song, Assistant Professor
Esther Steiner, College Professor
Son Cao Tran, Associate Professor
Karen Villaverde, Assistant Professor

Adjunct, Part Time, and Emeritus Faculty

Richard Dale, College Associate Professor - Part Time
D. Hue McCoy, College Professor - Part Time
John B. Johnston, Professor - Emeritus
Gopal Gupta, Professor - Adjunct
Arthur I. Karshmer, Professor - Adjunct
John Barnden, Professor - Adjunct
Shaun Cooper, Assistant Professor - Adjunct
Jim Cowie, Professor - Adjunct
William Ogden, Adjunct

CS Staff

Ivan Strnad, Manager System Support - Computer Operations Group
Mathew Hulin, Analyst II - Computer Operations Group
Mariette Mealor, Secretary III - Computer Science Office
Jenny Lee Griffith, Secretary II - Computer Science Office

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Hans Fugal, President, Graduate Student Organization
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Rutger Van Iperen, President, ACM Student Chapter
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Giving back to the department

Fifteen years ago, the Computer Science department had one VAX minicomputer (remember those?) and a bunch of terminals. Punched cards were still in use in the computer center.

Now we are in a new building, with hardware that is the envy of many computer science departments. We have a large laboratory for teaching, and special labs for graduate students and research programs. We are putting the finishing touches to a state-of-the-art computer classroom. Every teaching assistant has an up-to-date machine, and every faculty member has a fast workstation on his desk.

So are we happy? Well, yes ... and no. Maintenance of this large network

of heterogeneous platforms (Linux, Solaris, SunRay, Mac, Windows) is a technical nightmare for our computer operations group. Monitors wear out, disk drives crash, machines break, networking cables die. It all requires money to keep the system going at full strength.

In addition to hardware maintenance costs, we want to maintain an active colloquium program, to run a local job fair every semester, and to keep our advisory board at full strength. All these costs are extra to our regular budgets for teaching and administration.

What is more, faculty, staff and students deserve more money than the state provides. The whole IT business is still strong, despite the downturn in the economy and the demise of many dot coms but we often get left out of the picture by the state legislature. However, we are actively exploring

the possibility of getting the formula funding from New Mexico changed to give CS more money. Also we are constantly pushing at the Dean and the administration to raise salaries and make the department more competitive. We are always trying to help our students with more and better scholarships to enable them to finish their degrees and go and get a wonderful job.

You can also play your part by donating as much as you feel you can give to the department. Your donation will be greatly appreciated and we guarantee that it will be used wisely for the well-being of the department. Whether your donation goes to scholarships, or a general departmental fund, or you would like to earmark it for some special project, we will take care of your money. Thank you for your support!

Name: _____

Graduation year (if applicable): _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

eMail address: _____

Yes, I want to help the Computer Science department at NMSU. Enclosed is my check for:

_____ \$1000 _____ \$500 _____ \$250 _____ \$100 _____ \$50 _____ \$25 _____ \$10 _____ other

I want my gift to benefit:

Richard H. Stark Scholarship _____ Founders' Endowment Fund _____ Brandy Streit Scholarship _____

Steven Judd Scholarship _____ Scheidegger-Burke scholarship _____ Lopez Scholarship _____ Harary Endowment _____

Other - please specify _____

Please make you check payable to the NMSU Foundation and mail it to

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