



## Engineering a Distinguished Career

When opportunity knocks, Dr. Delores Etter, a UNM alumna and former faculty member, opens the door. In doing so, she's transformed a love of math into a distinguished career in electrical engineering.

"I believe that you never know what opportunities you're going to have. So when you have the chance to do something really neat, you need to think seriously about it, because that opportunity won't come around again," explains Etter.

Currently, Etter is a faculty member in electrical engineering at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis and holds the Distinguished Chair in Science and Technology provided by the Office of Naval Research. She is also conducting research on biometric signal processing. In addition, Etter is a member of many national and professional advisory committees, including the National Science Board and the Defense Science Board.

### A Different Course

But engineering was not Etter's first interest when she started college at Oklahoma State University (OSU). She loved math but says, "Engineering never crossed my mind. There were no role models and none of the high school counselors were suggesting engineering for young women. So I started in math."

Etter met her husband, an aerospace engineer and member of the Air Force, at OSU. His postings took them to Texas and then to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. Etter worked as a teaching assistant at Wright State University while completing her B.S. and M.S. degrees in mathematics.

Then they moved to Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. Opportunity knocked again, when Etter started teaching computer science courses at UNM. "Just for fun, I decided that I would enroll in the first electrical engineering course to see what kind of problems my students were solving, so that I could use those problems as examples in my teaching," explains Etter. That course sparked her interest in electrical engineering and led her to earn a Ph.D. in the field. "If the computer courses hadn't been in the electrical engineering department at UNM, there's probably a very small chance that I would have gotten into electrical engineering," says Etter.

### An Opportunity to Serve

After UNM, Etter taught at the University of Colorado at Boulder for eight years. At the same time, she served on Department of Defense advisory committees. In 1998, she had the opportunity to serve as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Science and Technology. She was responsible for planning, program execution and budget allocation for the \$9 billion Department of Defense Science and Technology Program. "It was an incredible adventure for an academic," says Etter.

In 2001, she took up her current post. "I feel like I have a foot in both worlds now. I'm playing a role in training the next generation of our nation's Navy and Marine Corps leaders. I'm still on a number of advisory committees and continue to be involved in things related to national security," says Etter.

She has earned numerous awards for her outstanding accomplishments and dedication, including the Department of the Navy Distinguished Public Service Award and the Federal Women in Science and Engineering Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2002, Etter was honored with the UNM Distinguished Engineering Alumnus Award. She has also been elected to the National Academy of Engineering, and is a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Etter attributes much of her success to her education in the nation's state universities. "I got such a wonderful educational background in my course work at public universities... I'm really proud of that background," says Etter.

She notes that UNM's department structure and culture led her into engineering and shaped her interests. "UNM gave me, and faculty members in general, the opportunity to do the things we wanted to do in terms of research and academic interest. As long as you worked hard, you had a lot of flexibility to learn new things, bring new areas into the classroom and start new topics," says Etter. +