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| pn-logo-on-wte | **2013 ACE Critique and Awards Program**  ***NMSU Media Productions — Jeanne Gleason*** |

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| ***Southwest Plant Selector***    ***An iPhone/iPad App***  **Class 39**  **Innovative use of**  **communication technology** | ***WildCatBlue:Users:jeanne:Desktop:SW Plant Selector Movie:end placard.png*** |
| To look at a video demonstrating this project, visit [ace.nmsu.edu/2013/College/Class39SWPlant.html](http://ace.nmsu.edu/2013/College/Class39SWPlant.html)  This link also offers screen shots from this iPhone/iPad app. |

Overview of the Innovations:

This entry demonstrates risk-taking and innovation in that the NMSU Media Productions team started with a text-only database from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer and transformed it into a dynamic, ever-improving, problem-solving mobile app. The team has worked for more than 2 years on prototypes of the plant selector. Development of the app involved coordinating contributions and suggestions for improvements from University Extension Specialists from two states, four different organizations, and eight different Master Gardener groups. The coordination of resources, data, and visuals was a significant challenge.

Offering to maintain and constantly upgrade a free app also demonstrates risk-taking. There was instant delight from the target audience and the Master Gardeners when the app was released, followed shortly with a list of new requests for additional features and offers to donate additional photos to expand the database. Media Productions has responded to the users’ requests and added new features, such as search by color, and new data, such as West Texas growing conditions, water conservation data, and hundreds of new photos. These upgrades are included in the latest update (demonstrated in the video for this ACE entry), which is in submission and review at the Apple App store.

In addition, simply getting the university bureaucracy to cooperate with the demanding requirements of Apple’s App Store was a risk-taking undertaking that took more than a year to accomplish. In fact, NMSU has determined that Media Productions will be the only entity on campus allowed to sell Apple apps and if any other NMSU entities want to sell apps, they must work through Media Productions.

The result of this innovation is the ***Southwest Plant Selector,*** designed especially for the dry, hot and high desert environments of the American Southwest. Today’s environmental and cost-conscious landscapers are moving to native and xeric plants. This app highlights more than 750 plants that can thrive on little or no supplemental water, and allows users to search the database by plant type, category, sun tolerance and geographic region. This free app is an ideal tool for anyone wanting to establish an economical yet beautiful regional xeriscape.

Purpose (goals, objectives, need):

The goal was to create an easy-to-use mobile app that would allow landscapers to do their research and make plant selections before going to the nursery. The **objectives** were to allow users to sort potential plants by name, category (tree, shrub, perennial, annual), type (evergreen, deciduous, and sun requirement (sun/shade combinations), and geographical area. Another objective is to remain responsive to the needs of users. They have requested additional filtering criteria, including West Texas growing data, sorting by color, water conservation data, and even more photos, which we have included in our pending update to the Apple App Store.

Audience:

The need and demand for this app came from the audience, primarily Extension’s statewide network of Master Gardeners, who outlined the specifications of what they needed to advise homeowners in their communities on how to save water and money by using more native plants.

Marketing/promotion:

The Southwest Plant Selector app has been in beta testing with a select group of Master Gardeners since late summer and will be highlighted at this spring’s Master Gardener’s kickoff training. The Cooperative Extension Service will promote it through their offices in every county of the state, and the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer and the Center for Landscape Water Conservation, who contributed to the content, will also promote it with their clientele this spring and summer.

Role of each entrant for the project:

All work, including animation, programming and instructional design, was produced in NMSU’s Media Productions studios. The specific team for *Southwest Plant Selector* is listed in credits. The overall team includes programmers, content specialists, writers, editors, and volunteer Master Gardeners, as well as content experts and researchers from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer and the Center for Landscape Water Conservation.

Extent to which project met goals and objectives:

Each feature of the *Southwest Plant Selector* was pilot tested extensively during development. Beginning in the fall of 2012, a select group of Master Gardeners conducted a more rigorous evaluation, as did a team of NMSU Extension agents. They feel that this iPhone/iPad app provides excellent resources, but once the Master Gardeners played with the app, they contributed even more photos of plants, West Texas growing data, and suggested color sorting. All these features will be available soon on the Apple App Store.

How diversity was incorporated into entry:

New Mexico’s overall population is 47% Hispanic and 10% Native American, and the state is often considered a bellwether for demographic changes to come across the United States. The deep historical roots and values of these two cultures have shaped the state’s culture. Master Gardeners often note that xeriscapes are nothing new in New Mexico, as the local Native Americans and early Hispanics were experts in cultivating hardy low-water landscapes. The popularity of irrigation in the past 50 years has lured many homeowners away from the past wisdom of water conserving plants. But now, low water availability and the commercial availability of native plants is encouraging a return to this historically important and sustainable ways of maintaining the landscape around homes.