

Doug Benson grew up in the high green mountains of Taos, in northern New Mexico, where Indigenous people and Latino/as have formed the ethnic majority for centuries. As a child, he began to notice that his friends were profiled in stores, schools and traffic. He would not understand why until much later. It was there that he got his first exposure to Spanish and took his first classes in the language.

Benson received the Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and French from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces in 1966, after two initial years studying chemistry and physics. He also met his future wife Cecille there; they celebrated 50 years of marriage in August 2015. He received the doctorate in Spanish and French literature in 1974 from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. It was during his university experiences that he began to expand his growing awareness of the cultures of Spanish-speaking peoples and to become involved in groups and initiatives that addressed the challenges that many Latino/as face.

For 11 years, he taught Spanish and French at Hastings College in Nebraska. He was almost the only person in Hastings who spoke Spanish at first, but gradually members of immigrant families began to contact him and attend his classes.

In 1980, he was hired by the Department of Modern Languages at K-State and almost immediately made contacts with multicultural faculty and staff who generously invited him to participate in the university's diversity work. Some of these activities include:

- 1984-1987 — Development Committee for the American ethnic studies secondary major program; served on its governance board until it became a department in 2013.
- 1989-1999 — Charter member of the President's Commission on Multicultural Affairs.
- 1995-2002 — Planning Committee for the Kansas Regents — now Michael Tilford — statewide Conference on Diversity and Multiculturalism in the University Classroom.
- 1996-2012 — Charter member of K-State Tilford Group on multicultural course transformation.
- 1997-2009 — Co-chair with Candice Hironaka of Community Cultural Harmony Week, formerly Racial Ethnic Harmony Week, founded by K-State student Barbara Baker in 1988.
- 1999-2003 — Faculty advisor for the Hispanic American Leadership Organization (HALO).
- 2000 — Member of ALIANZA.

Benson has published some 30 articles and book chapters on the post-Civil War poetry of Spain, Chicano poetry of the Southwest and language teaching, and has presented more than 60 professional papers and workshops in the U.S. and abroad. He was promoted to full professor in 2004 and has received awards for teaching as well as service to multicultural students. The awards include the Commerce Bank Presidential Awards for Excellence in Teaching in 1999 and for Distinguished Service to Underrepresented Students in 2000; the Ron and Rae Iman Outstanding Faculty Award for Teaching from the K-State Alumni Association in 2008; and the university's highest teaching award, the Coffman Chair for University Distinguished Teaching Scholars, from 2009. Benson retired in 2015.