



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

August 21, 2013

Welcome back! This year, the Academic Affairs office will be focusing on a multitude of short and long-term initiatives. We are engaged **already** in co-developing the new budget model, on reviewing and streamlining our tuition and fees policies, and monitoring costs and financial aid. We are also planning for future faculty/staff compensation and work-life balance initiatives. We hope to experiment with various distance learning models, but our primary efforts will be to launch a variety of student success initiatives, as will be discussed in future versions of this communiqué.

Higher Education Act: President George W. Bush signed into law legislation [to reauthorize the Higher Education Act in 2008](#). “The 1,158-page bill, which was itself five years in the making, was expected to leave a lasting imprint on American higher education, holding colleges and states accountable for skyrocketing tuition and reining in abuses in the student-loan system. It was supposed to simplify the process of applying for federal student aid and help students make better borrowing and college-going decisions, courtesy of a shorter application form and a slew of new disclosures.” The law has succeeded in providing more information about college costs, and made it easier for students to apply for financial aid. “But the bill has failed in its larger goals of making college more accountable and more affordable. Since 2008, tuition at four-year public colleges has increased significantly, as states have slashed their higher-education budgets. At the same time, public confidence in the nation's colleges has declined, with lawmakers and families increasingly questioning the value of a college degree.”

The World’s Dumbest Idea: What is [the world’s dumbest idea?](#) According to Steve Denning, it was Milton Friedman’s idea that the “sole purpose of a firm is to make money for its shareholders.” In my opinion, a more general manifestation of the “world’s dumbest idea” is the focus on the short-term at the expense of what truly matters.

Positivity Ratio: [A recent article in the American Psychologist](#) debunked the application of differential equations to measuring “human emotions.” To quote Brown, Sokal (of Sokal affair fame), and Friedman, “We find no theoretical or empirical justification for the use of differential equations drawn from fluid dynamics, a subfield of physics, to describe changes in human emotions over time; furthermore, we demonstrate that the purported application of these equations contains numerous fundamental conceptual and mathematical errors. The lack of relevance of these equations and their incorrect application lead us to conclude that Fredrickson and Losada’s claim to have demonstrated the existence of a critical minimum positivity ratio of 2.9013 is entirely unfounded.” Interdisciplinarity has found its limits!

Georgia Tech Degree: How much is a master’s degree in computer science worth? According to [a new collaboration between Udacity and Georgia tech](#), the answer is around \$7,000. This is yet another experiment in trying to deliver reduced-cost higher education.

UNM Honors College: UNM's longstanding Honors Program is now an Honors College, and this week the Honors College welcomed its first freshman class. More than 600 new UNM students have accepted admission to the Honors College, and approximately 430 have enrolled in Honors courses this fall, an increase of over 100 students (or nearly 33%) relative to last year's fall freshman enrollment. These students join more than 400 continuing Honors students. To accommodate them, nearly sixty Honors Seminars are being offered this semester. In past years, the Honors Program typically offered 35-40 seminars each fall.

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