



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

October 16, 2013

The Brain Safe Project: As many of you know by now, UNM and the [Mind Research Network](#) (MRN) are collaborating on the [Brain Safe Project](#), “an innovative, state-of-the-art sports-related concussion assessment program designed to study and minimize the impact of brain injury on NCAA athletes in contact sports. More than 200 UNM athletes will receive a noninvasive Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan of brain structure, chemistry, connectivity and function at the beginning every season. Every year, or after any acute injury, the athlete will be scanned again and the results will be compared to their initial baseline MRI. Using this ‘within-subject’ design, the athlete’s baseline MRI scans can be precisely compared to post-injury scans. Highly sophisticated MRI analyses will be performed using algorithms developed by MRN and UNM scientists to identify any brain related injuries.” The project is being featured on national and international news outlets, and credit is due to the Brain Safe director Kent Kiehl, [Vice President of Research](#) Mike Dougher for championing the project, and to VP for Athletics Paul Krebs for supporting a controversial effort that will ultimately help athletes everywhere.

The Real College Crises: Whenever possible, I have discussed in this space the real challenges facing colleges, and some of our approaches at UNM to address such challenges. To recap, while the demand for college education and degrees has never been greater, the iron triangle of access, quality, and cost [continues to challenge](#) and limit our ability to deliver on our mission. And it keeps getting more complicated. According to [the recent New York Times editorial](#), “We must make college practical but not excessively so, lower its price without lowering its standards and increase the number of diplomas attained without diminishing not only their currency in the job market but also the fitness of the country’s work force in a cutthroat world.” This last point bears repeating. It is no longer sufficient to graduate more students; we must make sure that they possess “key information-processing competencies.”

A [recent survey](#) of Adult Skills (PIAAC) by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) assesses the proficiency of adults from age 16 onwards in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments. “These skills are relevant to adults in many social contexts and work situations, and necessary for fully integrating and participating in the labour market, education and training, and social and civic life. In addition, the survey collects a range of information on the reading- and numeracy-related activities of respondents, the use of information and communication technologies at work and in everyday life, and on a range of generic skills, such as collaborating with others and organizing one’s time, required of individuals in their work. Respondents are also asked whether their skills and qualifications match their work requirements and whether they have autonomy over key aspects of their work.” Here is an important finding: “Well-intentioned plans to boost the brainpower of workforces by pushing more people into universities are now also looking flawed. Competence varied widely among individuals with similar qualifications, both within and across countries. Italy, Spain and America have large numbers of graduates, but still perform badly in literacy and numeracy tests. Even more worrying, some university degrees turn out not to offer much advantage over good secondary-school qualifications. Those who completed [secondary-school] in Japan and the Netherlands outperformed southern European [college] graduates at the same age. The lessons seem clear: vocational education needs to be both more consistent and more ambitious. But the bedrock of success is improving the quality of secondary education. Without that, letters after a name do not mean much.” So add to the earlier challenges of universities these new ones: we must do better at measuring what we teach, imparting key information-processing competencies, and contributing to the improvement of secondary education.

James Burke, Fall 2013 Distinguished Lecture: British broadcaster, science historian, author, and television producer James Burke delivers the Fall 2013 Distinguished Lecture for Campus and Community on Wednesday, Oct. 28 at 5 p.m. in Keller Hall, located in the Center for the Arts on the University of New Mexico main campus. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, see [the announcement](#) at UNM Newsroom.

UNM Employees & Retirees Benefits Update: In recent weeks, various regents committees began reviewing the status of health care benefits for UNM employees and retirees. Such reviews have raised concerns by the retirees and the employees, and the regents have since released a statement on their [website](#) to explain the process. To quote from that statement: “We want to assure all UNM employees, current and retired, that no further changes are contemplated until the leadership of the University and Regents fully understand all the implications and impacts on individuals. The questions raised in Regents’ Committees are part of this process of further examination... UNM will not be making any additional changes in these matters before May 2014. In addition, before any changes are made we will ensure that public comment and discussion occur.”

Riley O. Schaeffer Endowed Lectureship: Please join the Department of Chemistry & Chemical Biology for the Sixth Annual Riley O. Schaeffer Endowed Lectureship presented by Prof. Edward I. Solomon, Stanford University. He will be presenting "Geometric and Electronic Structure Contributions to Cu/O₂ Reactivity." The lecture will be held on Friday, Oct. 25 at 4 p.m. in room 102 of the Science and Math Learning Center. A reception will be held at 3:30 p.m. in the SMLC atrium to meet with Professors Solomon and Schaeffer.

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Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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