



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

February 5, 2014

The Power of Words: Last week, some of our students were subjected to yet another ugly display of ignorance. Every such incident worsens the University's climate when it makes one of us feel unwelcome, threatened, or angry. The fact that this incident happened during African American History month, the week after celebrating Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, is a reminder that we are never done fighting racism, or not until our common humanity finally overcomes personal prejudice. That anyone at the University of New Mexico today believes that they can casually toss around racial slurs is an affront to those who fought and keep fighting for equality, and to all of us who celebrate UNM's diversity.

As a university, we place a high value on our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech, as it touches nearly every aspect of university life. This right, however, is in no sense unlimited. The history of its interpretation bears this out. The first amendment of the US constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." But, "in *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire* (1942), the Supreme Court held that speech is unprotected if it constitutes "fighting words." Fighting words, as defined by the Court, is speech that "tend[s] to incite an immediate breach of the peace" by provoking a fight, so long as it is a "personally abusive [word] which, when addressed to the ordinary citizen, is, as a matter of common knowledge, inherently likely to provoke a violent reaction." To use your natural capacity for language to spread hatred is an abuse of a power that we, as a university, and as a nation, cannot condone. The power of words to injure and malign, however, pales in comparison to their power to heal and to teach. I urge you to exercise this power of speech today.

STEM or BLOOM? The president of the United States highlighted in his State of the Union address the need for STEM degrees. He and other advocates of graduating more STEM majors have focused on the short-term earning potential of such graduates. While New Mexico, the country, and the world obviously need more scientifically literate citizens, even a limited focus on earnings turns out to be unsupported by the evidence. The report "[How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment](#)," includes U.S. Census data from 2010 and 2011 and is a joint project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Humphreys and her co-author, Patrick Kelly, a senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, looked at long-term career path and salary data as an answer to the many [short-term studies](#) on recent graduates that have fueled the assertion that liberal arts graduates are disproportionately un- or underemployed. At peak earning ages (56-60), graduates with a baccalaureate degree in a humanities or social science field are making \$40,000 more than they were as recent graduates (21-25). And while in the years following graduation they earn \$5,000 less than people with professional or pre-professional degrees, liberal arts majors earn \$2,000 more at peak earning ages, when they make about \$66,000. (Salaries in both fields still lag behind engineering, and math and sciences graduates, who in their late 50s make about \$98,000 and \$87,000, respectively.)" In fact, while the earnings of recent graduates is skewed in favor of vocational degrees, the long-term economic benefits of a specific college degree are less pronounced. In the long-term, the power of education does not reside in the STEM, but in the blooming of the individual (with credit for the metaphor to Dean Brown)!

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