



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

October 5, 2016

When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure.

—Charles Goodhart

Core Curriculum: As discussed in previous Communiqués, a Statewide General Education Steering Committee was formed last spring and has been meeting for months to reform and revitalize general education at institutions of higher education in the state. If you want to understand the context and purpose of this effort, I encourage you to read [this two-page document](#), which outlines the relevant state laws and administrative codes, the current challenges in managing the transfer of core courses between institutions, and how this current effort seeks to resolve those challenges.

An early agreement reached by the committee is that general education will center on the acquisition of essential skills. In the case of the statewide committee, five skills were identified: communication, quantitative, critical thinking, personal and social responsibility, and information literacy. Another agreement reached by the statewide steering committee is that these skills should be mastered by taking courses within content areas. The content areas under consideration by the statewide steering committee are: communication, the sciences, mathematics, humanities, human and behavioral sciences, and fine and creative arts. The statewide steering committee spent part of the summer working on learning outcomes for each of the essential skills and each of the content areas.

The learning outcomes are still under active review and revision; however, it is important to begin receiving feedback from higher education faculty members across the state. I encourage all faculty members at UNM to go to the “Outcomes” tab at the [NM Statewide General Education website](#) and review learning outcomes relevant to your interests and discipline. You can comment on, and suggest revisions to, the learning outcomes at the website, or by sending an email to provost@nmsu.edu. The deadline for comments and suggested revisions is Thursday, Oct. 20, 2016. The office of the Provost at NMSU will ensure that all your comments and suggested revisions are passed on to the group responsible for a particular learning outcome. Please make sure that your message clearly identifies the essential skill or content area on which you are commenting.

A more purposeful general education curriculum should produce students with the skills essential for lifelong learning and leadership in the community and workplace. Few issues are more important to UNM and its faculty and students than general education. I encourage you to participate in this important effort.

Stigler’s Law (again): It is often the case that credit is not given to the discoverer of a phenomenon, or as Alfred North Whitehead remarked, “Everything of importance has been said before by somebody who did not discover it.” This is known as [Stigler’s law](#), which, appropriately enough, was actually discovered by Robert Merton. Merton’s formulation is also known as the Matthew effect: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The list of examples falling under Stigler’s law includes Hubble’s law (discovered by [Georges Lemaître](#)), and Benford’s law (first stated by Simon Newcomb). One that may not fall into the same class is [Goodhart’s law](#) (today’s epigraph), which is also known as [Campbell’s law](#), [Cobra effect](#), and the [Lucas critique](#), but Goodhart beat them to it by a year. Even then, what Goodhart beat them to, surely, was the formulation and attribution of an idea that pre-dated them all. The upshot of all this might be a paraphrase of another Whitehead remark, when he said of the whole European philosophical tradition that it “consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” All the best things have been said, then re-said, and then said again, only differently this time.

Goodhart’s law is also related to the “unintended consequences” effect I mentioned last week. This is nowhere more evident than in the ever-confusing mix of university rankings, which demonstrate how the choice of sub-metrics can make universities soar or plummet up and down a list. The latest such ranking by the Wall Street Journal ranked UNM 125th among public universities and 483rd out of a total 1000 universities. Meanwhile, our university libraries

was ranked 60th out of the 114 top members of the association of research libraries. Last but not least, the national magazine “Insight into Diversity” just awarded UNM’s Colleges of Nursing and Pharmacy its 2016 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award.

Major NSF STEM grant: Congratulations to the faculty team that secured a [five-year, \\$3.3 million grant from the National Science Foundation](#) through the NSF Advance program for institutional transformation. The project, which will be called Advance at UNM, will support the success of women and minority STEM faculty at UNM. More information can be found [here](#).

Social Determinants Collaborative: The Social Determinants Collaborative is a new committee composed of leaders from colleges and departments across UNM. Their goal is to identify and address the social conditions that determine health and wellbeing in New Mexico’s communities. They are currently looking for more participation from main campus faculty, staff, and students. The group meets monthly, and their next meeting is tomorrow, Oct. 6 from 10-11 a.m. in the first floor conference room of George Pearl Hall. Meetings are open to the public.

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A PDF version of this Communiqué is available on the [Academic Affairs website](#). Your feedback and input are welcome at provost@unm.edu. Please also see the [Provost’s Blog](#).