

Academic Dispatch



Mountains. Credit: Hyunju Blemel. University Communication and Marketing.

October 9, 2020

There's a lot going on at UNM during a beautiful fall. So here it is, part two of the two-part Dispatch! While there are some serious matters to ponder, it's good to remember that there is also great beauty in the world, and we must not let the grim drown out all that is delightful.

Graduation, Spring, and COVID

The virus trends in New Mexico have turned in a concerning direction. The state just reported the largest number of new daily infections since summer, and the second largest daily tally ever for our state. This is the time to remember that we are all part of the same New Mexico community, and each of our decisions impacts the others, from our family and loved ones to strangers who might simply sit near us. Please remember how important it is to wear your mask – the science on this is very clear, wearing a mask protects both you and me, and will slow the spread of both SARS-CoV-2 and other respiratory viruses. UNM is still doing well in managing the virus, and you can all track this at the [UNM COVID dashboard](#). But we can't relax – masks, distance, quarantine when exposed, working from home when possible, staying home when sick, responding to the daily UNM screening email, and following the state's safe practices are essential.

As I hope all of you know, our fall term academic calendar is somewhat different this year. November 3, election day, will be another break day. Please vote. In addition, we will not have in-person classes or exams after Thanksgiving break. This does not mean the campus will necessarily be fully closed after Thanksgiving. For example, many research labs will continue their critical work unabated. Please check with appropriate offices or supervisors to make sure you know the plans for any offices or facilities with which you work, and remember that the situation is fluid still, so things will change.

I know then that it will not surprise you, but I know also that it will disappoint you, to formally hear that we are not able to provide an in-person graduation this fall. This is a sorrowful decision for all of us. For you, our students, and your families, I know how important this celebration of your achievement is. Equally for our faculty and staff, a graduation is an opportunity to share in that happiness and to rejuvenate the energy that drew so many of us to higher education. I'm sorry that we won't be able to celebrate together in December. But we will recognize the accomplishments of our students virtually, and the University Secretary's Office is formulating plans for this now, drawing on the lessons we learned last May. And we will celebrate in person as soon as we can – President Stokes and I are committed to holding an in-person graduation ceremony for all of our calendar 2020 graduates, hopefully in spring of 2021, if the virus allows.

And speaking of Spring Term, we have already asked faculty and department chairs to work together to plan their instructional modalities for Spring Term with the understanding that we will, most likely, still be dealing with the community spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Spring term will look a lot like this fall term, with a mix of fully face-to-face, hybrid, and remotely delivered classes. We all know the value of face-to-face classes, and the importance of the critical opportunities they provide to engage in unscripted interactions that develop critical abilities in synthesis and analysis, and to engage in structured reflection to generalize lessons from the particular to the general. All of these are the very foundations of wisdom. But obviously this benefit has to be balanced against the risks of transmitting SARS-CoV-2. We expect the spring schedule to be out soon, so that students can make their elections with full knowledge of the various pedagogical modalities for each course.

Rivalry Week Canned Food Drive

Food insecurity is something many UNM students encounter. Our [basic needs survey](#) conducted earlier this year exposed that one in three UNM students faced food insecurity within the last year, and that 20% of UNM students face a double burden of food and housing insecurity. I am grateful for the many students, staff and faculty who are working to help students with [basic needs](#). You have an opportunity next week, Oct. 12-16, to directly help our students during the Rivalry Week Canned Food Drive, in a friendly competition with New Mexico State University. Please bring donations of [these accepted items](#) to the Student Activities Center in the SUB (open 9 a.m.-2 p.m.). All of your donations stay on campus and go to the [Lobo Pantry](#), which is open to students Mondays from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., or until supplies last. A working group within the provost office is developing recommendations to further address the basic needs challenges of our students, but in the meantime, you can help today!

Evaluation Underway to Determine UNM's Future Learning Management System

The last six months has underscored the importance of UNM's IT infrastructure, and IT staff have gone above and beyond in keeping the university's mission running as many of our operations moved online. Through greater use this year, a light has been thrown on our current Learning Management System, the self-hosted, on-premise version of Blackboard, that we fondly know as [UNM Learn](#). This system is

reaching the end of its life and approaching the time when the vendor will no longer support it, so it will have to be replaced. This is a multi-year process, so nothing will change immediately, but relacing it is a long process and we have to get started now. There are three alternatives being considered (one being the future cloud-hosted version of Blackboard), and we would love for input from interested students, faculty, and staff. A formal process is in place for this, allowing you to attend virtual demonstrations, test-drive the three alternatives, and provide feedback on your experiences with them. **If you would like to take part in this evaluation process, please complete this [short registration form and confidentiality agreement](#) to get access.** The entire Lobo community is welcome and we hope you will participate. Additional information is available at the [Academic Technologies website](#).

October Lightning Lounge

Can you feel the electric sizzle? I hope you'll join us this semester for our faculty Lightning Lounge series. These monthly events feature several seven-minute talks from faculty across campus, who share their latest research and ruminations on topics of interest. These talks bring the foundational work of a research university to the fore, and it's amazing to learn what our faculty are working on in their scholarship. Such scholarship becomes the basis for our teaching and our service to the state, for it truly is different to be taught by someone who creates new knowledge. The Lightning Lounge is hosted by the Office of Academic Affairs, Advance at UNM, the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Office of the Vice President for Research. This is a great opportunity to learn about colleagues' work and get the chance to connect, albeit over Zoom at the moment.

The September Lightning Lounge is posted on the Advance at UNM [YouTube channel](#), and there are plans to live stream the Lightning Lounge events, 4-5 p.m., on Oct. 14 and Nov. 11. The Zoom link for October is [here](#). If you'd like to present at a future Lightning Lounge, contact advance@unm.edu or apfaculty@unm.edu.

#WeBelongInCollege

UNM is excited to participate in the national [WeBelongInCollege](#) campaign being organized by Get Schooled and the Student Experience Project, aimed at increasing social belonging among college students. The campaign allows students to share videos about the personal challenges they've experienced, and how they've persisted and succeeded. Students, you can share your story on social media with the hashtag #WeBelongInCollege, and submit your video (up to 3 minutes) for a chance at a \$1,000 scholarship at sep.webelongincollege.com.

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A PDF version of this Academic Dispatch is available on the [Academic Affairs website](#). Your feedback and input are welcome at academicdispatch@unm.edu.