



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO

Office of the Provost



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

September 16, 2015

Curiosity: Curious people are better leaders. That is the thesis of a [recent article](#) at the Harvard Business Review, and one of the results of the “[PricewaterhouseCoopers 2015 Global CEO Survey](#).” I am a firm believer of the power and usefulness of questioning, and have come across the site [amorebeautifulquestion.com](#) and the corresponding book, which I have started to read on my Kindle. [This](#) is especially useful, in my opinion, for the teachers among us.

In Memoriam: Edward Vincent DeSantis passed away on Tuesday, Sept. 8. He was one of our most beloved professors, and a model teacher and mentor. He served in the Honors program, as a graduate dean and as President of the Faculty Senate. He improved the lives of many UNM students and colleagues, and while I did not work directly with him, I quickly learned that when Ed approved of a proposed policy or statement, then I was likely on the right path. I will miss his knowing smile, his firm advocacy and his gentle spirit. Please find more information about Ed and the service [here](#).

The Tyranny of Averages: As much as I appreciate measurements and data, the loose understanding and (mis)interpretation by experts and laymen alike often surprises me. Even setting aside confirmation bias, outcome bias, groupthink and so on, humans seem to have serious difficulties with statistics, and they tend to simplify large data sets to their averages. This leads to the “tyranny of averages.” To [quote](#): “The tyranny of averages is a phrase used in [applied statistics](#) to describe the often overlooked fact that the [mean](#) does not provide any information about the shape of the [probability distribution](#) of a data set or [skewness](#), and that decisions or analysis based on only the mean—as opposed to [median](#) and [standard deviation](#)—may be faulty.”

This week, the New York Times published [a column](#) to explain the new [federal scorecard on colleges and universities](#). This information was intended to help parents and students make college choices based on cost, completion rates and potential earnings. The columnist singled out UNM as the one major university where students’ earnings failed to impress. The government data averaged earnings ten years after students began attending UNM. Although the government listed our institution as “UNM-Main Campus,” the data averaged earnings for students from both the main campus and our two-year branches, leading to an average salary of \$35,900. The same averaging occurred at other institutions with branches, such as New Mexico State University, Pennsylvania State University, and so on. The average salary does not distinguish between various majors (engineering majors from Harvey Mudd earn \$78,600, versus liberal arts majors from Smith College, who earn \$42,700), nor between labor markets (The University of North Carolina students earn \$50,400, while those of San Jose State earn \$54,600).

While we are always working to keep costs down, build support programs that will lead to professional success and help students graduate in four to six years, a higher proportion of our students graduate, and with good earning potential, than at any other institution of higher learning in the state. Our students come from New Mexico and tend to stay in state after they graduate. The true earnings of our graduates (for those who are employed in NM, a subset that provides a lower bound on the earnings of the total graduates) may be found [here](#). The same phenomenon is on display when we report our average graduation rates, average salaries, and so on.

Institutional Assessment Day: The UNM Office of Assessment is announcing a new university-wide initiative starting this fall: UNM Institutional Assessment Day (IAD). The purpose of IAD is to gather feedback from students about how well the University is doing in ensuring that our students’ academic experiences are positive. IAD will take place on Wednesday-Thursday, Oct. 14-15 at the UNM-Main and UNM-Valencia campuses, respectively, and Tuesday-Wednesday, Oct. 20-21 (tentative) at the UNM-Gallup and UNM-Los Alamos campuses. For more information about IAD, or to inquire about participating in future IAD activities, contact Neke Mitchell, director of assessment, at (505) 277-4130 or assess@unm.edu.

Sarah Belle Brown Community Service Award: The Office of the President is currently accepting nominations for the Sarah Belle Brown Award, which recognizes a faculty and a staff member with a monetary award of \$1,500 each, and a student with a \$1,500 scholarship. The nomination deadline is Monday, Sept. 28 at 5 p.m. This annual award recognizes those faculty, staff and students who serve as examples of social responsiveness, and who have donated considerable personal time and effort advancing UNM's public service mission. For more information, and to submit a nomination, please visit the [website](#).

Honorary Degrees: The Office of the Secretary is still receiving nominations for honorary degree recipients. Please send nominations to the Office of the Secretary, Scholes Hall 103, MSC05 3340, or email secretary@unm.edu no later than Friday, Oct. 16.

International Year of Light: The University of New Mexico and its Center for High Technology Materials will be the host of the state's celebration of the International Year of Light on Friday, Sept. 25 as a chance to highlight current and future advancements in the field. Registration for the free event is open [here](#). More information on the schedule of events can be found [here](#).

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

A PDF version of this communiqué is available at <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/communique-archive.html>. Your feedback and input are welcome at provost@unm.edu. Please also see the Provost's Blog, which can be found here: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>.