



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

April 1, 2015

**On the Challenges of the American University:** The Economist magazine's most recent issue features a [discussion](#) on the challenges of American universities. The special section succinctly reviews the tension between access, cost, and excellence: "The American model of higher education is spreading. It is good at producing excellence, but needs to get better at providing access to decent education at a reasonable cost." The article goes on: "Although individuals enjoy decent returns to their investment in higher education, it is less clear that society as a whole does. The big question is whether the graduate premium is the consequence of higher productivity or of establishing a pecking order. If universities increase people's productivity, then society should invest in having more graduates, but if they are merely a mechanism for signaling to employers that graduates are cleverer than non-graduates, then it should not. And since little effort goes into measuring whether universities actually educate people — a matter to which this special report will return — society does not know whether investing in education is worthwhile. Even if the social returns on investment in higher education were poor, there would be a strong political argument for the state to provide access to it. If people need a degree to get ahead, then democratic governments must offer everybody with sufficient brains a chance of getting one. The market alone will not lend money at a reasonable rate to students who can provide no security, so even governments that rely heavily on private finance tend to offer loans to students."

**Prediction is Difficult:** While I have continued to argue the value of data for decision-making, I have also described how human decisions are influenced by a multitude of factors, many of which may never be included in our analysis. I recently came across an [article](#) that discusses extraneous factors in judicial decisions. Interestingly enough, I learned of the article because of a column in an airline magazine. "The likelihood of a favorable ruling is greater at the very beginning of the work day or after a food break. The authors recorded the judges' decisions and found out "that the percentage of favorable rulings drops gradually from  $\approx 65$  percent to nearly zero within each decision session (segmented by their food breaks) and returns abruptly to  $\approx 65$  percent after a break." Thus, the (professional) judges' decisions may be "swayed by extraneous variables that should have no bearing on legal decisions." Even with professional judges, trained in weighing data and facts, decisions may be affected by extraneous factors and subconscious influences!

**Innovation Academy and ecoMOD:** Professor John Quale of our School of Architecture + Planning won the 2013 Architect Magazine R+D award, which celebrates innovation in architecture and design, when he was a professor at the University of Virginia. In a [follow-up feature](#), the magazine described the status of the ecoMOD project. The project is one of the first initiatives in the [Innovation Academy](#) and includes faculty and students from architecture, landscape architecture, community and regional planning, civil engineering, construction management and law.

**Lightning Lounge:** The last Lightning Lounge of the spring semester will take place Thursday, April 2, at the UNM Faculty and Staff Club from 5:30-7 p.m. This month's theme is "Sending Messages." We would like to thank everyone who participated. Stay tuned for more research, socializing and fun next year!

**60th Annual Research Lecture:** Karl Karlstrom, Professor, Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, has been selected as UNM's 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Lecturer for his geologic work in the Grand Canyon-Rocky Mountain Region. I congratulate Professor Karlstrom on this wonderful honor, and I encourage everyone to attend the lecture, "It's about time: Forty Years of Geologic Work in the Grand Canyon-Rocky Mountain Region," on April 23, at 5:30 p.m. in the Student Union Building, Ballroom B. For more information, and to RSVP, please see the [website](#) of the Vice President for Research.

**The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual UNM National Security Symposium:** The theme of this year's National Security Symposium is "Security Trends in the Next Decade: Challenges, Issues and Opportunities." Topics will include cyber security, Guantanamo Bay and the military justice system, the Ukrainian crisis and other military, legal and political global issues. The keynote address on Thursday morning, at 10 a.m. in the Student Union Building will feature Gregory

Treverton, Chairman of the United States National Intelligence Council. Treverton oversees the analysis and production of coordinated Intelligence Community analyses. The symposium kicks off today with a full day of events at the UNM School of Law, Anderson School of Management, and at the Science & Math Learning Center. For a complete list of speakers, agenda topics and times, see [here](#).

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Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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