

Academic Dispatch

October 8, 2020

In some sense, this will be a two-part Dispatch. I want to properly celebrate Dean Mark Peceny, and so we dedicate this Dispatch entirely to him. Then in another dispatch tomorrow, I'll talk about graduation, spring term, and other good stuff.

Dean Mark Peceny

With some sadness I would like to acknowledge that this is Professor Mark Peceny's last year as Dean of the UNM College of Arts and Sciences. Mark has guided A&S through a complex period of both growth and retrenchment, seeking always to develop a strong fully-developed college that spans the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, with accomplishments that range from launching strong departments of Native American Studies and Chicano/Chicana Studies, to the opening of a state-of-the-art sciences building in PAIS. Senior Vice Provost Barbara Rodriguez said of Mark, "Dean Peceny's tenure, as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, will be remembered for his tireless work focused on the College's key role in improving our students' time to degree, persistence and graduation rates."



Mark Peceny joined the UNM faculty as an assistant professor in 1992, was promoted to full professor and named chair of the political science department in 2005, and was appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 2011. After serving in that role for five years, he was reappointed with broad support among chairs, directors and faculty, for another five years, until June 2021.

As a department chair, Dean Peceny created one of the most diverse faculties in the nation among departments of political science. As dean, he has overseen the university's largest college, with 21 departments, 9 interdisciplinary programs, and 10 research centers and institutes. "From his first months in the position, Dean Peceny demonstrated an unparalleled and detailed grasp of the strengths and challenges of each of the departments and programs in the College, as well as the ability to develop tailored strategies to support each unit's needs. Especially memorable was the first chairs and directors retreat he hosted as dean, during which he spoke without notes for over two hours on the hiring plan, explaining how each proposed faculty met priority needs of departments. Throughout his term, he maintained focus on UNM's unique role as a majority-minority research university, combining accessible higher education and world-class scholarship," said Bill Stanley, Associate Provost for Faculty Success.

During his first two years A&S doubled the number of African Americans in tenure track positions in the college.

Personally, I am grateful that Mark has been a key partner in academic leadership during my first year as provost, and I look forward this year to continue to learn from him about the special work of UNM and the College of Arts and Sciences. There will come a time when we can celebrate Mark's work in person, but in the meantime, Mark, thank you so much for all you do for UNM, each and every day.

We will not immediately launch a search for a new dean for Arts and Sciences. To do so during a year dominated by COVID, when the state has already reduced our budget once, might do so again this year, and will certainly need to do so for the next fiscal year, there is too much uncertainty for Arts and Sciences. I will seek an internal candidate to serve as interim dean for a year starting next summer. If you have recommendations for full professor colleagues who might excel in this role, please let us know at provost@unm.edu.

Stump Speech

A few years ago, Mark gave a speech as part of a public forum as part of UNM's reaccreditation work. The speech was recorded, and the provost office staff pulled up the content of that recording. It so well captures the heart of UNM, that I thought it would be fitting to close this dispatch with Mark's speech.

Hello, I'm Mark Peceny. I'm Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and I'm going to inflict on you the stump speech that I give to all job candidates for faculty positions in the College. We are a Research One flagship university and, like any flagship university, excellence in research and graduate education are central to our mission. We have an undergraduate student population unlike that of any other flagship university. We have more Hispanic students than Anglo students. Hispanic students and Native American students together form a majority for our undergraduate student population. Forty percent of our students are eligible for Pell Grants. Large numbers of students are first-generation in their family to come to college or non-traditional students coming back to college after years in the workforce or raising families. We're one of the top 10 schools for serving veterans in a recent survey, many of them coming back to school after serving in the Armed Forces.

And that combination gives us a special opportunity and a special responsibility, because if we can deliver a flagship quality education for our students, we can really transform lives and our society in ways that aren't possible in a lot of other flagship universities, because those other flagships have had to become more like private institutions in order to survive in an era of limited state support. And when I was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan 100 years ago, most of the students I went to school with were well-provisioned when they walked in the door. A lot of our students today at UNM wouldn't be admitted to the University of Michigan. So I take it

as my own personal mission, and the personal mission I hope every faculty that comes here embraces, that we want to make sure that every student who comes to UNM leaves UNM as well prepared to succeed in any profession or discipline as anyone who comes out of the University of Michigan. And—so then I have an involuntary arm wave that I give as I give the tagline: If we do this well, we become national leaders in delivering a flagship university education for the emerging American majority, because everyone else's student populations are going to look more like ours, not just because we live in a more diverse society, but also a more inequitable one, and the promise of a high-quality public education from a flagship university is more important now for opportunity and social mobility than it's ever been.

And so I give that talk to every job candidate, ... because I want people who are drawn to this institution because they want to do both of those things. They want to be at a place where we're doing cutting-edge research, world-class faculty, leaders in every discipline, that simultaneously want to help students who come from small, rural communities who may not have had physics at their school. They may not have had the same kind of opportunity that students at a lot of other flagship universities had, but they want to work with those students and bring them into what it means to have a flagship university education—which means, bring them into the research, bring them into the laboratory, bring them into those upper division courses where they can learn, from the people who are at the top of their craft, what's going on in those disciplines. And we are drawing tremendous candidates from under-represented groups, who could make more money at other institutions, but are drawn to us because they share that vision and that mission. [...] And so I think that we do live up to that. We have a hell of a lot of work to do, but we do live up to that vision and that mission that is unique to this institution. Stump speech over.

Well said, Mark.

James Paul Holloway

Professor of Nuclear Engineering

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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