



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

November 16, 2011

Clarification: Last week I recommended the book, “Reinventing Discovery: The New Era of Networked Science” by Michael Nielsen, but failed to mention that Dr. Nielsen obtained his PhD in Physics at UNM in 1999 under Professor C. Caves.

CUP Report and Surveys: The recently published, “Performance Effectiveness Plan of New Mexico's Public Universities” was mentioned in the Albuquerque Journal and on TV this past week. The report contains data about New Mexico universities, and one of the reported data refers to student and alumni satisfaction. UNM actually scores low (77.1% in the most recent survey) on the student satisfaction survey, but the alumni satisfaction rises to around 85%. When I was contacted to comment about the article and survey, I said that I will never be happy until we achieve 100% satisfaction on both indices, but that a higher alumni satisfaction index indicates that people appreciate their overall UNM experience more when they are applying their education after graduation. I encourage you to read the report and to suggest ways that we may be able to do better in all areas. The report and earlier versions may be found at: <http://www.unm.edu/~cup/Reports.htm>.

Synchronicity, Correlation, and Causation: Even those who are data-driven decision makers, tend to sometime confuse synchronicity, correlation, and causation. An example of synchronicity occurred when my neighbor and I happened to walk into the same restaurant in Colorado, without coordinating or knowing of each other's plans. As we observe data about UNM's retention and graduation rates, we try to untangle causes and effects. Does our graduation rate improve because we have more advisers or because we have better prepared students, or both? What about a student who comes in to UNM with a higher than average high-school Grade Point Average (GPA) then graduates in 4 years? We know that high school performance correlates well with university performance, but we also have many examples of students with high incoming GPA who never complete their studies. To detect correlation is much easier than to establish causation, and our work in Academic Affairs is focusing on finding and pulling the levers that affect our students' academic success.

A PDF version of this communiqué is available at: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>.

Your feedback and input is welcome at: provost@unm.edu.

Sincerely,

Chaouki Abdallah

Interim Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs