



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

November 27, 2013

Happy Thanksgiving! I wish you and your family safe travels, a joyful holiday, and a much needed rest before the final week of classes.

The University of New Mexico will continue to work on improving our efficacy and efficiency in educating our students; this is both a matter of better serving them and one way we can have more resources for strategic investment in our mission. It is critical that we do that while constantly protecting the quality of the student learning experience. The first two items below flag factors we should keep in mind throughout that effort.

Which Majors Lead to What Occupations? Aligning degree programs with the skills needed for the first job after college remains a core focus of policy makers, something often referred to as workforce development. The [article](#) from the University of Virginia shows that the road from a major to an occupation is hardly linear and that many majors and occupations intersect. What is needed in the long run are not the specific skills learned during the college years, but rather the analytical skills that foster adaptation and further learning. Such skills may be learned in STEM programs, but they may also be found in liberal arts majors or fine arts majors, as described in the [recent article](#) in *The New York Times*.

The Quality Agenda: In addition to encouraging students to pursue specific majors, the “graduation agenda” focuses on increasing graduation rates. While student success remains our focus, success must include quality metrics as well as the standard quantitative measures. This is the topic of the [paper](#) written for the American Council on Education, as well as the focus of a group led by our own Associate Provost Virginia Scharff that is attempting to include quality metrics in our new budgeting system.

In the Footsteps of our Ancestors: We travel the same daily distance as did our ancestors according to the Venetian physicist Cesare Marchetti, who in 1994 “found that despite technological progress and shifting economic constraints (deer hunting vs. paper pushing, for example), humans have tended to commute for a total of around an hour a day throughout history.” This has been recently [verified](#) using mobile phone data where it was shown that “Neolithic humans would have spent the same time travelling each day as 21st-century humans spend commuting. And commuters in sub-Saharan Africa spend the same time travelling as workers in North American megacities.” Except when our ancestors emerged out of Africa, many of them did not go back and continued their trek around the world. Paul Salopek decided to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors and to take a stroll around the world starting in Africa and eventually ending in South America. You can follow his [trek](#) and read his [most recent post](#) in *The New York Times*. An interesting idea from one of his posts is that by walking slowly across the globe, one gets to learn about our habitat, focusing attention on small villages and their occupants as opposed to simply passing them by in a speeding car. It struck me that a similar phenomenon takes place when we take a stroll across campus, bumping into colleagues and strangers, as well as learning about various events, programs, departments, and units.

Book Nominations for Lobo Reading Experience: The Office of Student Academic Success is seeking book nominations for the 2014-15 Lobo Reading Experience. The Lobo Reading Experience seeks to promote a common reading experience that fosters critical thought and discussion among all students, staff, faculty, and community members. Nominations will be accepted until noon on Monday, Dec. 9. To submit an entry, fill out an [electronic form](#) or visit the [Student Academic Success](#) events page.

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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