



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

November 5, 2014

Stream of Change: Almost two years ago, the most discussed topic in higher education halls was the advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). When I shared some of my thoughts in this communiqué on the effect that MOOCs may have on our traditional models of instruction, some of our colleagues (within UNM and outside) became defensive while others overestimated the potential benefits of this new teaching modality. I personally maintained that we should not be afraid of experimentation but test and adapt new ideas and innovations to our traditional teaching methods. With the benefit of hindsight, I call your attention to two recent articles – “[Demystifying the MOOC](#)” and “[A History of MOOCs, Open Online Courses](#)” – describing the actual impact of MOOCs. They have been assimilated and are no longer feared nor believed to be a solution to all that ails public higher education. MOOCs have not been as disruptive a force as originally promised, their adoption following instead “[The Five Stages of Disruption Denial](#).” I am using the example of MOOCs to illustrate that even potentially major disruptions in higher education can be successfully coopted, and that while [change is usually resisted](#) it need not always be. In recent weeks, I have entertained numerous questions on the selection of potential quality metrics in our proposed budget model, on the selection of research productivity software, and many other initiatives. Invariably, many of these questions boil down to one: why do we need to change? My answer is that we need to conduct our non-academic business more efficiently and that, as we advocate for more resources for UNM, we need to provide fair and transparent comparisons with our peers. Quality metrics are needed so that we are not judged solely on easy-to-count metrics such as student credit hours generated, and new software is needed to reduce the time and effort required to produce annual evaluations.

Storytelling: Why do we [tell stories](#)? Is it to “feel that we have control over the world?” or an “evolutionary mechanism that helped keep our ancestors alive?” Regardless of how it started, we continue, at least in part, because [our brains love stories](#). Paul Zak, who penned the [blog post](#), and his research team looked into the neurobiology of storytelling and voluntary cooperation. They discovered that, “in order to motivate a desire to help others, a story must first sustain attention – a scarce resource in the brain – by developing tension during the narrative. If the story is able to create that tension then it is likely that attentive viewers/listeners will come to share the emotions of the characters in it, and after it ends, likely to continue mimicking the feelings and behaviors of those characters.” In an era of big data, it would be convenient to make decisions (or adapt to change) as a computer would, beginning with a set of premises and data, and cranking out logical conclusions. The focus on storytelling, however, helps us see why we do it in the first place, as humans working toward human ends.

CASAA: The Center on Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Addictions (CASAA) is celebrating its 25th anniversary this week. [CASAA](#) was founded to “conduct research, provide service to the community, and train practitioners and students to improve the lives of those affected by alcohol and drug use.” It has been fulfilling its mission brilliantly since 1989.

National Distance Learning Week: Next week, Nov. 10-14, is [National Distance Learning Week](#). UNM’s Extended Learning offers a number of distance learning opportunities that reach students across New Mexico, southern Colorado, eastern Arizona, and beyond. Find more information about Extended Learning and National Distance Learning Week by visiting their [website](#).

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