



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

October 14, 2015

On Criticism: When you hear words like criticism and judgment, chances are that you think of the negative connotations of these words. We think of being criticized for an action or judging someone's decision. The original uses of these words were not always negative. Judgment is a term used to describe a [basic rational function](#). Similarly with [criticism](#): "Etymologically, the term comes from a Greek word meaning 'to separate,' and one of the central gestures of criticism is to separate the good from the bad, the original from the derivative, the important from the trivial." When we talk about the importance of critical thinking, we are referring to this ability to separate content, form judgments about experience, and so on.

It probably says something about human beings that these cognitive functions, and therefore also the meaning of the names of those functions, have become more negative with use. I am partial to the original definition of criticism, or its use in [literature and art](#), which lies in an attitude of "receptivity and response." In our shared academic life at UNM, I hope we can all strive to embody the spirit of criticism rooted in professional friendship and shared commitment to our academic mission.

When it comes to the negative forms of criticism, I am a believer in the philosophy of [Amin Maalouf](#), who says, "The right to criticize someone else has to be won, deserved. If, in general, you treat another with hostility or contempt, your slightest adverse remark, whether justified or not, will be seen as a sign of aggression, much more likely to make him obstinate and unapproachable than to persuade him to change for the better. Conversely, if you show someone friendship, sympathy and consideration, not merely superficially but in a manner that is sincere and felt to be so, then you may allow yourself to criticize with some hope of being heard, things about him that you regard as open to objection."

As I was maturing as a researcher, I came across the following review of a technical textbook that I had read and that represents the opposite of Maalouf's recommendation (never mind that the criticism may have been warranted): "However, nothing in this book will convey any indication that underlying these items there may be a logically coherent structure, in which words have precise meanings and statements can be proved. At best, the book might perhaps induce a sense of wonder in readers who find big words fascinating."

Finally, and as I have remarked before, the speech by President Theodore Roosevelt always reminded me that a critic is but the secondary act of the "man (sic) in the arena." In our professional lives, *many* of us at UNM have a turn at being the 'person in the arena' in some endeavor, be it teaching, publishing, speaking, performing, or leading. May we therefore approach one another with generosity rooted in the above spirit of constructive criticism, knowing that any of us may be the next object of 'the secondary act' of others' criticism.

Excellence in Diversity: One of the many remarkable features of life at UNM is the rich diversity present in our community. UNM was recently recognized for its commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence when it received "the 2015 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine, the oldest and largest diversity-focused publication in higher education." You can read more about it in the [News.UNM.edu article](#).

United Way Campaign: The University of New Mexico pulls together every year to support the United Way, and this year's campaign is in full swing now through Nov. 19. Please consider making a pledge today. Visit the [UNM United Way](#) page for more information.

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