



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

April 8, 2015

**Research and Narrative:** Last week, the director of the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA) Dr. Peter Highnam visited UNM and gave a talk on the research of IARPA. He reminded us of the [set of questions](#) that George Heilmeier, the director of [ARPA](#) (later DARPA) in the 1970's, developed as a guide for any proposal for a new research program. He called these questions the "Heilmeier Catechism." The questions strike me as a useful framework for many kinds of descriptions, including the role of higher education in society. In addition to questions that help articulate a problem, provide context for it, posit a new approach to solving it, and so on, the Heilmeier Catechism also includes one of the most important questions that I was asked by one of my mentors as a graduate student: why are you conducting this research? Answering these questions can help to construct a narrative around a given project. In his presentation, Dr. Highnam stressed the importance, when preparing convincing presentations, of focusing on the narrative rather than on isolated facts.

**The Cost of College:** A recent [opinion piece](#) in The New York Times argues that the large increases in tuition are not due to reductions in state funding, something the author calls a fairy tale that administrators have been telling. The column is flawed, though the [several responses](#) to it are illuminating. Overall costs have indeed been rising, and this cost includes both administrative costs and salaries. It is also true, contrary to the NYT column, that funding per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) has stagnated and funding has shifted from state to family budgets. This year, for example, UNM will be adding new administrators to manage new forms of national compliance (Clery Act and Title IX), as well as in student support positions (advising, software, and so on). We will not be adding to our faculty ranks, other than to replace departing members, while inflation eats away at whatever increases we received from the state. This makes the cost per student FTE go up, accelerated by the potential drop in enrollment.

**The New American Freshman:** Gaining insight into the students entering and attending UNM is important to us as teachers and service-providers. It can also be difficult to obtain the answers to questions such as: Do first-year students at UNM intend to graduate from here or transfer to another institution? Do new students expect to graduate within four years? The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA conducts an annual Freshman Survey. The [49th Annual CIRP Freshman Survey](#) from 2014 provides some answers to these questions at a national level. Nearly 23 percent of entering students at four-year institutions think there is either some chance or a very good one that they will transfer to another institution. Further, that transfer rate varied from 30 percent at the least selective public institutions to around 12 percent at the most selective public institutions. Just over one-third of students expect that they will need extra time to complete their degree requirements. At the least selective institutions, this rate is just over 40 percent. At the most selective institutions, the rate is closer to 30 percent. The increased time to complete degree requirements has many causes. The survey report suggests as possibilities students who pursue a double major, cooperative educational experiences, or require developmental courses to address preparation for college-level courses. "As CIRP data show, entering freshmen's expectations and preparation levels vary considerably based on institutional selectivity, which can serve as a proxy for institutional resources."

**Design Thinking:** is being highlighted in many recent articles and in conversations with colleagues from the School of Architecture + Planning and the College of Fine Arts. So what is design thinking? "Design thinking is a form of solution-based, or solution-focused thinking – starting with a goal (a better future situation) instead of solving a specific problem. This approach differs from the analytical scientific method, which begins with thoroughly defining all the parameters of the problem in order to create a solution." In recent years, design thinking is being used on campuses to make changes to curricula, as discussed in a [recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education](#). Boston University, for [example](#), turned to design thinking to revise its core curriculum.

**The Decreasing Affordability of Public Flagships in One Chart:** By plotting a flagship university's net price percent change versus a state's median household income percent change, [this chart](#) shows which flagship universities have become more or less affordable between 2009 and 2013. UNM is one of four universities (UNM, The Ohio State University, University of Alaska, and the University of Michigan) where the state's median household income and net price went down. The income went up while the net price went down in three states; the incomes were down but the net price went up in 29 states; and the incomes went up while the net price went up in 14 states.

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