



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUE

July 11, 2012

Higgs Boson: Last week was an amazing week for physicists and for humanity in general! At CERN's Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland, physicists found what might be the long-sought Higgs boson. If indeed the Higgs boson was spotted, then the "standard model" lives to fight another day. If you would like to know more about this topic, grab your closest physics colleague or check out the article: Ten Things You May Not Know About the Higgs Boson <http://www.symmetrymagazine.org/cms/?pid=1000921>, originally published in Symmetry magazine. One of the best explanations for non-physicists is found at the following link by Jorge Cham of PhD Comics <http://www.phdcomics.com/comics.php?f=1489>.

MaLL: Math proficiency has long been a concern of UNM academic leadership. Approximately 2,300 students per year attempt intermediate algebra (Math 120) with a pass rate of less than 50 percent. Since Math 120 is one of the gateway courses for UNM students, addressing the low pass rates is crucial for student success. The leadership of the College of Arts & Sciences, and the faculty in the Department of Mathematics began researching and planning a pilot project over the last academic year to redesign content delivery replacing lectures with time in a learning lab where students use self-paced, computer-based resources to learn and be assessed. President Frank was familiar with the effort, having started a similar one at his last institution and became immediately engaged in the decision-making. The first part of the Math Learning Lab (MaLL) project, starting in the Spring 2013 semester, will focus on improving the low pass rates for Math 120 and subsequently add other Math courses as appropriate. For more information see the UNM Today article: <http://news.unm.edu/2012/06/help-coming-for-unm-math-challenged-students/>.

CAPS Recognized: The Center for Academic Program Support (CAPS) has been awarded the prestigious Frank L. Christ Outstanding Learning Center Award, presented by the National College Learning Center Association. Criteria for consideration included a summary of center strengths and achievements, partnerships with other campus departments, information on center components and student usage, and staff publications. Only one four-year institution receives the award annually; CAPS' recognition places UNM in the company of previous winners such as Texas A&M, Ball State University, and Indiana University - Purdue University Ft. Wayne. Congratulations to CAPS' student employees and professional staff for their hard work and dedication in supporting academic excellence at the University of New Mexico.

The True Benefits of Funding Research: It is a recognized fact that research expenditures are not fully reimbursed by the federal government (or other sponsors) through our Facilities & Administration (F&A) recapture. Research universities however, continue to pursue funded research not for financial benefit, but rather because research dollars do double duty. They pay for part of the cost, AND they educate graduate and undergraduate students. Moreover, the long term benefits of research far outweigh the short-term costs as described in the article by Fareed Zakaria: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fareed-zakaria-how-government-funding-of-science-rewards-us-taxpayers/2012/06/20/gJQApDmJrV_story.html.

Interdisciplinary Teaching/Research: In concert with most research universities, UNM has been encouraging interdisciplinary research for many years. Interesting and relevant problems lie at the intersection of traditional fields and our faculty and students have become engaged in studying such problems. The challenge however has been to properly support interdisciplinary programs when faculty members migrate into the boundaries but teaching the disciplinary basics remains a priority. The question is one of resources and focus. How can we create and nurture new programs without diverting resources from the departments and colleges main missions? Surprisingly, few universities have been able to successfully address this challenge. The office of Academic Affairs is currently reviewing best practices from major universities and will put together a faculty committee to select a solution that is appropriate for UNM.

Sincerely,

Chaouki Abdallah,
Provost & Executive Vice-President for Academic Affairs

A PDF version of this communiqué is available at: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>. Your feedback and input are welcome at: provost@unm.edu or at the electronic town hall: <http://connectu.unm.edu/>. Please also see the Provost's Blog at <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>.