



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

September 4, 2013

Everything has been said, but not everyone has said it.

—Morris Udall

On Communication: I have struggled in the last two years to communicate among the various University constituencies. At times, groups have attributed to each other sinister motives, or mistrusted the intentions of an administrator or colleague. Other times, folks communicated to me “obvious solutions” to complex institutional problems. A colleague who recently joined UNM sent me [this link to an article](#) which sets forth two rules for communication. The article was written in 2005 by Mark R. Hamilton, the twelfth president of the University of Alaska (1998-2010). Mr. Hamilton retired as a major general with the U.S. Army in July 1998, and his message highlighted the difficulty of communicating across a complex institution. His two rules are (1) not to assume evil motives are at play, and (2) not to assume that everyone else is stupid. This is wise advice. In fact, as he says, “Adopting the ‘Great American Rule’ and the ‘Stupid Rule’ can change the attitude of an institution. At the least, these rules will remind us all that most of ‘them’ are simply ‘us’ with a different zip code.”

Critical Thinking: Most employers in the 21st century are looking for graduates who possess the ability to think critically, and most colleges claim that their curricula provide such ability. Unfortunately, with the exception of [some recent efforts](#), no agreed-upon tests are able to measure whether we are succeeding at imparting or nurturing the ability of undergraduate students to approach issues and problems critically. This is a key point to keep in mind at UNM as we focus our efforts on increasing our graduation rates, as we risk focusing on the quantity versus the quality of learning. [Recent reports](#) have suggested that diversity plays an important role in teaching critical thinking, as do the arts. In fact, [according to the ARTSblog](#), the arts may be uniquely positioned to impart 21st century skills. The author cites six reasons: (1) the arts avoid “black and white,” dichotomous thinking, (2) enhance creativity, (3) promote practice and persistence, (4) teach constructive ways to give and receive feedback, (5) reward practitioners with moments of success, and (6) offer healthy ways to manage stress. As we proceed down the path of examining and improving our academic offerings, it is critical to focus on measuring and rewarding what is important.

MOOCs at Midlife: So it seems that massive open online courses (MOOCs) are neither the best educational approach nor the worst idea ever! San Jose State, an early adopter who was in the news recently because of a stumble in their offerings, is [now reporting that with a few tweaks came some recent successes](#): “For example, in the spring trial, only 25 percent of the students taking the ‘Udacity’ version of a statistics course earned a C grade or higher; in the summer trial, 73 percent made at least a C. Only students in the adapted version of an entry-level mathematics course continued to lag well behind those in the face-to-face version on the San Jose State campus. The results come with an important caveat: Unlike the spring trials, which drew on San Jose State undergraduates as well as underprivileged high-school students, the summer trials were open to anybody who wanted to register.”

CTL Building Formal Opening: The new Collaborative Teaching and Learning (CTL) building will formally open on Thursday, September 12, 2013, at 4 p.m. The CTL building, located adjacent to Travelstead Hall, is a multi-disciplinary classroom building that will provide main campus with innovative classrooms for general education classes. The CTL building will also include a variety of other learning environments—including group study rooms, and student gathering areas for casual study—to enhance student success. The opening will be followed by technology demonstrations, self-guided tours, and refreshments. I hope to see you there!

Chaouki Abdallah

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