WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

May 1, 2013

Why You Can't Believe Everything You Read (including what is in this message): I was reminded in recent weeks that even the most experienced and prominent researchers will make serious and potentially dangerous mistakes. Two incidents come to mind. The first was a report published by the Education Sector and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni stating "that faculty teaching loads had gone down substantially, contributing to the rising cost of higher education." The report, titled "Selling Students Short," claimed that "from 1987-1988 to 2003-2004, the average number of courses tenured and tenure-track faculty taught per term…declined 25 percent." The research summarized in the report, however, turned out to be incorrect. A blog post from Andrew Gillen, the research director at Education Sector, admitted that they "cannot determine whether teaching loads for the typical professor declined, stayed the same, or increased." Read more information here. Even more serious was the mistake made in a 2010 paper by Carmen Reinhart, currently a professor at Harvard Kennedy School, and Kenneth Rogoff, an economist at Harvard University. "They argued that GDP growth slows to a snail's pace once government-debt levels exceed 90% of GDP. The 90% figure quickly became ammunition in political arguments over austerity." In fact, the above paper shaped many political arguments and economic policies in the US and abroad. A graduate student named Thomas Herndon at the University of Massachusetts tried to replicate the results of the Reinhart-Rogoff paper only to discover it was riddled with mistakes. See more on the story here. My conclusion? Always check, then double-check, published results, even those by famous and (usually) careful researchers.

What University Presidents are Concerned About: College presidents were asked to define success and to rate the importance of each of their activities (out of a maximum of five). The following are what came out of a survey of four hundred college presidents, in order of descending importance: having a balanced budget (4.7), strengthening the institution's reputation (4.5), shared vision for the future of the institution (4.5), improved retention and graduation rates (4.5), productive working relationship with the governing board (4.4) meeting fund-raising goals (4.4), improved quality of educational programs (4.4), good faculty and staff morale (4.3), good relations with constituent groups (4.2), good student morale (4.2), quality and size of the freshman class (4.2), improved quality of the faculty (4.1), keeping attendance financially accessible for most students (4.1), good record of student placement (4.1), good town/gown relations (3.7), increased global perspective and presence (3.5), and expansion of online opportunities (3.5). The one activity that scored below neutral was "improved US News rankings" (at 2.5). Two items accounted for more than 50% of daily activities: fund raising and budgets. Other daily activities included strategic planning (30%), enrollment management (25%), athletics (7%), and relations with chancellors (11%).

Darwin-Hooker Letters: "The 1400 letters exchanged between Darwin and Joseph Dalton Hooker account for around 10% of Darwin's surviving correspondence and provide a structure within which all the other letters can be explored. They are a connecting thread that spans forty years of Darwin's mature working life from 1843 until his death in 1882 and bring into sharp focus every aspect of Darwin's scientific work throughout that period." The letters are finally being made available at The Darwin Correspondence Project.

MOOCs News: At UNM, we have recently completed an agreement with Udacity that allows students to take the CS 101- Introduction to Computer Science MOOC and, upon completing the course, pass an exam which will give them credit for either CS 151 – Introduction to Programming in the Computer Science program, or ECE 131 - Programming Fundamentals in the Computer Engineering program. We are working on making this available as a dual credit offering for New Mexico high school students.

In other MOOCs news, it turns out that graduate schools are still not ready for MOOCs, as discussed in the recent *Chronicle* article. At a recent conference of the association for graduate enrollment management, concerns were raised over quality and the potential disruptive power of MOOCs, but the attendees agreed that there is no need for

graduate schools to "have an identity crisis over MOOCs." In a related story, a recent report found that students still prefer to take more difficult courses in a traditional setting, only attending the easier courses online.

Book Orders for Summer and Fall: I would like to ask faculty to help the bookstore keep course-material costs low by insuring they have your summer and fall orders. Buyback starts this week, and having the orders enables the bookstore to give the students back money, up to half the new book price. As of today only 43% of the book orders are in, so please contact the bookstore as soon as possible to place yours. Remember, it's your students who benefit.

LoboAchieve: The new LoboAchieve portal will be officially implemented university-wide starting Fall Semester 2013. The proof-of-concept began on April 22, 2013 for a select group of students on both main and Health Sciences Center campuses. LoboAchieve is a campus-wide portal with a host of tools and features—including better tracking of student-advising visits, a campus-wide early alert system, and single-login integration with other campus management tools such as Blackboard and the Exchange calendar—that will bolster our efforts to improve student success and retention. In addition, the portal will allow students to schedule appointments with their advisors online and make valuable connections to student success programs across campus. As a faculty member, student, or advisor, your participation will be crucial to the success of LoboAchieve. If you have questions, please contact Vanessa Harris, director of University Advisement, at loboachieveinfo@unm.edu.

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