



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

August 27, 2014

We need two educations: one to teach us how to make a living, and one to teach us how to live.

—James Truslow Adams

SAM Data: For many years now, the six-year First-Time Full-Time (FTFT) student graduation rates have been used as the main student success metric at four-year institutions. While initially intended to measure the graduation rates of athletes (1.5 times the four-year degree, and, correspondingly, 1.5 times the two-year degree at community colleges), the six-year FTFT graduation rate is now used to compare all four-year institutions by federal and state entities. The metric leaves a lot to be desired as it ignores non-first-time, non-full-time, and non-freshman graduates. Some may also object to focusing on the six-year versus the four-year (or five-year) graduation rates, even though many college students are now part-time students, and more and more are “non-traditional.” One effort to address a limitation of the six-year rate is to gather and report on the graduation of FTFT, including those who graduate from an institution other than their starting institution. In other words, if a student were to start at UNM but graduate from Arizona State University (say, in 4 years), then she should be counted. There is now [a national database](#) that allows us to track our students as they change universities, and according to such data, last year’s graduating cohort (48 percent for six-year FTFT at UNM) should be augmented by [another seven percent](#) for those who graduated elsewhere. A further 22 percent remained enrolled at UNM and elsewhere after six years. While these numbers remain challenging, they present a more accurate picture of students’ graduation rates.

Spurious Correlations: Spurious correlations have [exact mathematical definitions](#), but a resurgence of interest in big data has presented a fertile ground for some to show that one can find correlations where none exist. Spurious correlations is the term adopted [here](#) to illustrate this phenomenon, one that I believe will become ever more prevalent, as we continue to collect and use more data. As an example that could be of interest to our Civil Engineering department, per capita consumption of mozzarella cheese is correlated with the number of Civil Engineering doctorates awarded in the U.S.!

UNM in the News: “The University of New Mexico is touted by HispanicBusiness.com for Hispanic enrollment in postgraduate programs. UNM is featured in all four of its lists: business, engineering, law, and medicine. Of the 40 schools that made it on the 2014 [HispanicBusiness Best Schools](#) list, UNM comes in fourth in business, sixth in engineering and 10th in both law and medicine.” In [addition](#), “PreLaw magazine ranked the UNM School of Law 11th ‘Best Value Law School’ nationwide in its 2014 Back to School issue. Last year, the magazine ranked the UNM law school 13.”

The Center for Teaching Excellence: The UNM Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) seeks to provide the highest quality activities, events, and programs to develop, support, and promote active and engaged learning practices. The CTE (formerly OSET) will be conducting a needs assessment during the Fall 2014 semester in an effort to understand how teaching occurs on our campus and how the center can support UNM instructors of all levels in their teaching and/or research roles. In an effort to evaluate and improve the CTE’s offerings, the Center will be conducting a series of focus groups with department chairs and directors and distributing a campus-wide online survey to faculty. We are interested in your honest impression of the teaching needs of faculty — what works and what does not work and what the CTE can do to support teaching in your various areas and disciplines. For more information, please contact the CTE at oset@unm.edu, or call (505) 277-2229.

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