



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

September 10, 2014

**The Ailments of Higher Education:** A recent [article](#) in the New Republic has generated much excitement and feedback. The article was written by William Deresiewicz, author of the book “[Excellent Sheep](#).” I have since heard from many faculty colleagues on both sides of the argument, and read many more critiques of the book and the article. This particular thread epitomizes for me what is best about universities: a relentless and passionate pursuit of the truth for the benefit of humankind. Here are a couple of those articles: The [first one](#) by Steven Pinker disagrees with most of Deresiewicz’s arguments and proposes standardized testing as a response to the remaining ones. My favorite response, however, is [the debate](#) between Deresiewicz and Harry R. Lewis, the author of “[Excellence Without a Soul](#).”

A different but somewhat related posting by Frank Bruni (forwarded to me by many of you this past weekend), describes how we should [demand more from college](#). Bruni’s column, furthermore, cites the new book by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, “[Aspiring Adults Adrift](#),” “in which they assessed how a diverse group of nearly 1,000 recent graduates were faring two years after they finished their undergraduate studies. About one-quarter of them were still living at home. And nearly three-quarters were still getting at least some money from parents. These were the nuggets that the media understandably grabbed hold of, drawing the lesson that college isn’t the springboard that young men and women want and perhaps need it to be.”

Bruni remarked that while economic concerns and “goals are important and that focus is understandable, there’s another dimension to college, and it’s one in which students aren’t being served, or serving themselves, especially well. I’m referring to the potential — and need — for college to confront and change political and social aspects of American life that are as troubling as the economy. We live in a country of sharpening divisions, pronounced tribalism, corrosive polarization. And I wish we would nudge kids — no, I wish we would push them — to use college as an exception and a retort to that, as a pre-emptive strike against it, as a staging ground for behaving and living in a different, broader, healthier way.”

**Feedback on Quality of Life:** Last week’s posting on the quality of life generated some interesting feedback. One of our faculty colleagues pointed out to me that according to the “[Strengthening Brand America Project](#),” and [this survey](#), New Mexico was ranked #1 in 2013 by a sample of citizens who say they are able to achieve the “American Dream” in their home state.

**STEM Collaboration Center:** A proposed STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) Collaboration Center (STCC) is closer to becoming a reality after UNM Student Services was recently awarded a grant of \$2.6 million. The [STCC](#) will create student support programs to increase attainment of STEM degrees for Hispanic, low-income, or high-need students, as well as improve institutional efficiency in STEM areas. More information will be available in the [UNM Newsroom](#) later today.

**Nomination for Sarah Belle Brown Community Service Award:** To support and promote the University’s commitment to public service and to recognize those individuals engaging in our community, Doug Brown, dean emeritus of the Anderson School, established [this award](#) in honor of his wife, Sarah Belle Brown. The President’s Office is currently accepting nominations for this prestigious award that recognizes a student, member of the faculty, and a staff member with a \$1,500 award. Please consider nominating a deserving colleague or student for this award.

**Faculty and Friends Art Extravaganza Reception:** On Tuesday, Sept. 16, 5:00-6:30 p.m., the UNM Law School Forum is hosting a [Faculty and Friends Art Extravaganza Reception](#). The show presents 38 works by 15 artists, including Sybille Szaggers Redford. The [event](#) is open to the public.

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