



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

September 2, 2015

Empathy: Some of us are teachers. In that role, we are called upon to evaluate our students' work, to enforce classroom, professional, academic and university policies, and to do so in the face of multiple demands on our personal time, our families' needs, and our professional careers and success. It is tempting to always apply the rules rigidly, as this would seem to be the fairest and simplest approach to deal with complex cases. I am reminded here of [a video](#), posted in the Chronicle of Higher Education, that challenges our instincts. There are many cases where things are not as they appear, and I do believe that as we apply the rules fairly, a little empathy can humanize the rules and make the university a better place.

Rethinking Work: Much of the discussion in the national press is focusing on the jobs awaiting college graduates, and the national discourse is focused on the immediate economic return on investment. While such considerations are important, I am more convinced than ever that the more important question to ask is what intellectual capabilities and skills will be required of our graduates as they move into their post-college lives. Here again, things are not as they appear. While technology is becoming more dominant, it is not enough to possess deeper technical skills, as computers will keep on getting better and faster and keep encroaching on previously safe careers. Rather, as discussed in [this column](#) — and also in the book, “Humans Are Underrated: What High Achievers Know That Brilliant Machines Never Will,” by [Geoff Colvin](#) — the skills that are uniquely human are the ones that will be required. As an example, computers will not replace CEOs or generals since “the issue isn’t computer abilities; it’s the social necessity that individuals be accountable for important decisions.” Computers will not replace humans when (sometimes ambiguous) collective goals are pursued, such as within a university. “It’s because in real life, and especially in organizational life, we keep changing our conception of what the problem is and what our goals are. Those are issues that people must work out for themselves, and, critically, they must do it in groups. Partly that’s because organizations include many constituencies that must be represented in problem solving, and partly it’s because groups can solve problems far better than any individual can.” Most importantly, humans will not be replaced for “the tasks that we must do with or for other humans, not machines, simply because our most essential human nature demands it, for reasons too deep even to be articulated. We are social beings, hardwired from our evolutionary past to equate personal relationships with survival. We want to work with other people in solving problems, tell them stories and hear stories from them, create new ideas with them, because if we didn’t do those things on the savanna 100,000 years ago, we died. The evidence is clear that the most effective groups are those whose members most strongly possess the most essentially, deeply human abilities — empathy above all, social sensitivity, storytelling, collaborating, solving problems together, building relationships.” It is these characteristics that we must strive to nurture within ourselves and to impart to our students, in addition to the more traditional technical and non-technical knowledge and tools.

Oliver Sacks: Oliver Sacks passed away on August 30, 2015. Many of you sent me articles describing his contributions to science and humanity. Dr. Sacks was the author of one of my favorite books, “The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat.” My favorite description of one of the most remarkable neurologists of our times is from [his obituary](#): “Describing his patients’ struggles and sometimes uncanny gifts, Dr. Sacks helped introduce syndromes like Tourette’s or Asperger’s to a general audience. But he illuminated their characters as much as their conditions; he humanized and demystified them.”

Free Entrepreneur Training for Faculty, Staff, and Students: StartUp School is designed to be an “entrepreneurial literacy program” for UNM-affiliated individuals interested in starting their own business or developing a product. The program is flexible to allow “drop-ins” for any and all sessions. The topics range from team formation to project management. Each session is held for two hours, including 30-45 minutes of content and teaching, and an additional hour and a half of entrepreneurial office hours with the opportunity to ask questions to the day’s presenter.

Sessions are free of charge to UNM students, faculty and staff, as well as residents of FatPipe. Fall 2015 sessions will be held on Wednesdays from 3-5 p.m., beginning Sept. 9. All sessions will be offered at FatPipe ABQ. For more information and a schedule of sessions, visit the [innovationAcademy website](#), or email [Rob DeICampo](#).

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