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Experts & Superforecasting: Should we trust experts? Our education system is built upon the idea that knowledge may be acquired from field domain masters, including some as students who progress from novice to knowledgeable, and to expert in one or more fields. That is why we trust our most prized possessions, such as our health and our children, to medical doctors and teachers. The article from the Harvard Business Review discusses what makes an expert and concludes, "Consistently and overwhelmingly, the evidence showed that experts are always made, not born." It takes years of education and practice (the so-called ten-year rule) but ultimately, "how can you tell when you're dealing with a genuine expert? Real expertise must pass three tests. First, it must lead to performance that is consistently superior to that of the expert's peers. Second, real expertise produces concrete results. Brain surgeons, for example, not only must be skillful with their scalpels but also must have successful outcomes with their patients. A chess player must be able to win matches in tournaments. Finally, true expertise can be replicated and measured in the lab." It is against this backdrop that I find it confusing that within some fields society will trust the solution of complex problems to non-experts. This is most evident in politics.

There are, however, areas where being an expert may be counterproductive. Professor Philip Tetlock was interested in this problem when, between 1984 and 2003, he set up a series of forecasting tournaments. There were 284 forecasters from various fields, including professors, journalists, government officials, and others. The forecasters made around 28,000 predictions over the course of the tournaments. Professor Tetlock discovered that the forecasters were "often only slightly more accurate than chance, and usually worse than basic extrapolation algorithms, especially on longer–range forecasts three to five years out." He also found that "forecasters with the biggest news media profiles were also especially bad. This work suggests that there is a perverse inverse relationship between fame and accuracy." This then led the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA) to launch "a four-year geopolitical forecasting tournament that engaged tens of thousands of forecasters and drew over one million forecasts across roughly 500 questions of relevance to U.S. national security, broadly defined." The results are fascinating and you can learn more about it from Tetlock's course on superforecasting.

The Internet: And speaking of forecasting, Professor Leonard Kleinrock, one of the (many) fathers of the Internet back in 1969, provides a fascinating examination of the Internet's rules of engagement. Looking back, Kleinrock suggests that different decisions could have addressed what he perceives as current vulnerabilities, which have been exploited by individuals, businesses and governments.

Sarah Belle Brown Community Service Award: The Office of the President will accept nominations for the Sarah Belle Brown Award until Monday, Sept. 28 at 5 p.m. The award recognizes those faculty, staff and students who have donated considerable personal time and effort to serving the public. One faculty and one staff member each will receive a monetary award of $1,500, and one student will receive a $1,500 scholarship. For more information, and to submit a nomination, please visit the website.

PhD Enrollment: A new report by the Council of Graduate Schools shows that "First-time enrollment in doctoral programs as a whole continues to grow, but in some areas of study, like the arts and humanities, numbers of students are declining." The largest one-year increases (percentage-wise) are in the health sciences, engineering, and public administration. The overall "doctoral enrollment for all fields increased an average annual rate of 1.2 percent during that time period, and grew almost 2.0 percent from 2013 to 2014." An interesting analysis of the data and its potential long-term effects may be found in this article from the Chronicle of Higher Education. While market forces are credited for some of the declines, some professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association and the American Historical Association are helping colleges "get better at preparing Ph.D. students for careers outside of higher education, thereby broadening the job possibilities." UNM is one of the recipients of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant aimed at broadening the career paths of history Ph.D.'s

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