



# The Wednesday Communiqué

**September 26, 2018**

Last week, I shared information about budgets and enrollments at UNM. Lots of work continues on those fronts, but this week I thought I would keep it a little lighter by sharing some of the better things I have recently read.

Let's start with terrific news about UNM. Professor Bob Berrens (Economics) and his doctoral student Rajan Bishwakarma have analyzed the “value proposition” that we offer our students here: the comparison between what the average student pays to attend and what the university spends to support that student's education. It's a technical paper, but the [executive summary](#) highlights it well and the takeaway is this: “UNM represents an exceptional undergraduate value proposition”—one that perhaps no other flagship research university in the United States can offer.

On very different fronts, over the summer I read some fine novels and accessible academic work:

- The novelist Mary Karr's final volume of her trilogy memoir, titled “Lit” is a great account of the hard struggle for redemption from the addictions and relationships that entrap us. But do not start there—the hilarious and sad story of her childhood provides a great launch, titled “[The Liar's Club](#).”
- Richard Powers offers the inspired “[The Overstory](#),” a complex novel built on emerging botanical science and the environmental wars of the Northwest.
- Nancy Maclean, an historian at Duke University, has written a fascinating and disturbing account of the origins of current democratic dilemmas in American life, titled “[Democracy in Chains](#).”

Some great summer reading, before the rigors of new semester and budgets got hold of the interim provost. I hope you are reading some great literature or science or other nonfiction, either for classes or (like me) to get out of the left-brain before going to bed.

## **Student Success and the First Year Experience**

In 2012, UNM embarked on a years-long process of strengthening the first-year experience for incoming students. Hundreds of faculty, staff, and students contributed. Improvements were made to orientation, first-year courses, advising and other student support programs, as well as data analysis and faculty-led research. These efforts contributed to improved retention rates (more than 80 percent for full-time beginning freshmen in 2015, before a decline in 2016) and graduation rates (for instance, the 4-year graduation rate is 32.5 percent, more than double what it was in 2012). We recently aggregated

information and updates on many of the projects that comprised the “First Year in High Gear” effort in a [report for the Higher Learning Commission](#). This is a testament to what can be accomplished when many talented people across campus work toward a common goal aligned with the University’s academic mission.

### **Working Smarter: a simple online tool to bring more people to your event**

UNM hosts a remarkable variety of events every week. The photo at right is an example: The UNM Iranian Students Association recently sponsored a stunningly beautiful Persian concert. But lots of folks missed it because UNM’s central calendar has not been well utilized. Let’s more strategically present our best face to a wide audience. If you have an event that you would like to broadcast to the UNM or New Mexico communities, please submit it to the [UNM Events Calendar](#). The calendar is maintained by University Communication and Marketing (UCAM) and allows you to market your events. Events on the calendar must be sponsored by a UNM group, organization or department and be of interest to the campus community, a segment of the UNM community, or the general public.



National Persian touring quartet NuAeen Ensemble, hosted by UNM Iranian Students Association, Sept. 2018.

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