



Special Communiqué from the Interim Provost

May 8, 2019

In this long Communiqué at the close of the academic year, I look back over our recent work together at UNM. In a spirit of shared governance, I reflect with the UNM community regarding where we have made progress and where our deepest ongoing challenges remain.

First a word about the academic mission: At its heart, our academic mission consists of two fundamental, equal, and intertwined dimensions: First, we do research, engage in creative production, and write or otherwise publish our work. Second, we draw on that research and creative expertise to teach and mentor the next generation of leaders for society. One of our perennial challenges lies in the fact that our mission encompasses such a broad array of important areas. There is a range of creative activities that includes discovery of new knowledge, and the creation of new ideas and works of art. There is a range of instruction, from teaching general education and introductory courses to mentoring advanced doctoral and professional students. The same is true of service and support, such as advising and mentoring students and providing the resources, systems, and technical infrastructure that sustains all of the above.

In my time as senior vice provost and interim provost, I have striven to stay crystal clear with myself and others that this dual mission transcends all of us. Whether we are here as staff, faculty, students, or administrators, we are here to advance that mission. Ultimately, our work at UNM is not about “me” or narrowly about “us;” our work revolves around a shared calling to research, teaching, and service that advances the common good in New Mexico, the nation, and the world. Especially during times of transition and disruption, we must understand the purpose that lies beyond the structures, processes, and policies of the university. That purpose is the academic mission, and for the last year or two we have focused on rebuilding the systems, processes, and policies that undergird that mission.

Despite the ongoing challenges that I will discuss later in this Communiqué, we have made progress on some important fronts—some new, others building on the progress of prior years. When I look around the University of New Mexico (both within academic affairs and beyond it), here are key arenas of progress I see:

Successful 2019 reaffirmation of accreditation: Although we still await final word, all signs point to UNM’s reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission. We anticipate that the Higher Learning Commission will want to monitor our recent improvement measures in areas of longstanding concern for continuity. In areas under Academic Affairs purview, such as advising and research, we fashioned a strong, systematic, and ultimately convincing case for the “reaffirmation of accreditation” that we sought.

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GenEd and UNM's place in New Mexico's higher education system: UNM has met assertive new state mandates for common course numbering and transferability. Crucially, have responded to the legislative mandate by relying on our deepest values as an academic institution, including our commitment to research-informed teaching, research opportunities for students, and broad liberal education that advances justice and democracy in society. Now that common course numbering has been addressed, faculty will be able to participate in workshops and access new web resources in 2019-20 as we transform general education. The Academic Affairs General Education Faculty Fellows program will help advance our GenEd work into the future in partnership with initiatives on student success in the Center for Teaching and Learning and in Student Services.

UNM-Adobe: Digital Literacy for a new era: This summer's launch of UNM's transformative push will provide access to the full suite of creative software within the state-of-the-art Adobe Creative Cloud to every student, staff, and faculty member who wants it. This will include all of main campus and nearly all of HSC (and each branch campus that chooses to join). Training will help instructors build assignments drawing on this software into courses throughout the university, systematically supporting innovation in GenEd courses, online offerings, and every degree program. UNM students will emerge with software skills crucial to success in all kinds of careers, from cultural production and the fine arts to business innovation and from the non-profit sector to government service in the 21st century. Graduating Lobos will be positioned for success and creative innovation in a whole new way.

Zimmerman Murals: After years—actually decades—of debate, UNM will be proposing a long-term solution for how to preserve historically significant artwork yet avoid inflicting it on those whose cultures are portrayed in objectionable ways—while at the same time keeping the artwork available for critical reflection and education regarding past and present American society. Stay tuned for emerging proposals and opportunities for dialogue about how we proceed.

Improved main campus-branch campus relations: Although the UNM branch campuses play key roles in their communities, for their students, and as feeder institutions for those students who can relocate to Albuquerque to finish four-year degrees, in the past they have often felt themselves 'off the radar' of main campus. Motivated in part by President Stokes' statewide tour during Summer 2018, main campus and the branches have focused on improving collaboration to drive student success and create four-year and graduate degree options at branches that are addressing local needs.

Reconfigured support for new faculty, associate professors, and departmental chairs: In Spring 2019, UNM boasted a great teaching faculty to student ratio of 1:14. Better support for faculty means better education for students and higher quality research. Academic Affairs sponsors forums and resources to help associate professors sustain momentum for promotion to full professor; in the past, too many associates—especially those who do extensive university service—got trapped at that level or simply lost publishing momentum. We actively reach out to help them continue developing their academic careers in the directions for which they have passion and talent. Likewise, we will now do year-long new faculty orientation, to better launch the trajectories of our earliest-career faculty. And department chairs and program directors can draw on fuller support services from Academic Affairs as they wrestle with the challenges of leading front-line academic units.

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Launched a major Grand Challenges research initiative: A partnership between the OVPR, HSC, the Office of the President, and Academic Affairs launched three major multiyear initiatives to use UNM's prowess in research, teaching, public service, and community engagement to address New Mexico's water needs, reduce patterns of opioid and substance abuse, and build a culture of healthy aging for all.

Consolidated our partnership with ADVANCE at UNM and institutionalized its role: Since 2016, this effort funded by the National Science Foundation has done crucial work in fostering a climate that better supports the academic careers of women and under-represented minority faculty in the STEM disciplines. That work has delivered important spill-over effects for all women and minority faculty and for the academic mission overall. As part of truly delivering on UNM's potential for excellence-and-equity in the academic mission, we have institutionalized that work within Academic Affairs, under the name ADVANCE: The Office of Faculty Development.

More strategic and transparent fiscal processes: In partnership with the Faculty Senate, Staff Council, ASUNM, GPSA, and the SVP and staff of Finance & Administration, we have built on the collaborative and distributed-knowledge paradigm of the Budget Leadership Team process to advance on two fronts: This year we launched a Capital Planning Leadership Team to do more transparent long-term capital planning in order to best prioritize large capital expenditures around the needs of the academic mission. And over the last two years we have drawn on budget expertise from within the BLT and our own faculty to lay shared groundwork for more strategic multi-year budgeting in the future. That foundation should allow new UNM leadership to choose a new budgeting model that can better provide incentives for innovative student-centered initiatives.

Transformed academic advising: Work done across the entire university over the last five years redesigned UNM's advising structure and radically reduced the number of students under any one advisor for a 400% improvement in the advisor-to-student ratio. We built on that transformational work to rectify remaining problems, rationalize advisor counts across units, and significantly increase advisor salaries for the coming fiscal year. Along with dramatic changes in how we teach Math and English to entering students and retention work in a variety of student support settings, the new approach to advising has driven student success at UNM forward, nearly tripling our four-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshmen.

Policy and compliance reform: We have done significant work on the policies and processes that undergird a positive campus climate. Most importantly, Academic Affairs has strongly supported the offices and staff that oversee Title IX and OEO compliance, better delivering on UNM's commitment to enforce policies that bar sexual harassment and gender discrimination. We worked with faculty, the Dean of Students, and the Faculty Senate Policy Committee to create better-integrated policy regarding misconduct on campus, with new policy language under final review. And Academic Affairs has developed cohesive procedures for tracking and resolving allegations of "Respectful Campus" (FHB C09) policy. The Women's Resource Center has expanded to include an office at the Health Sciences Center, and in December 2018 was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the federal Office on Violence Against Women; this will further empower their work to support a campus climate in which women fully thrive.

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Re-focused the Academic Program Review process on strategic academic development

The revitalized Office of Assessment and Academic Program Review guides an APR process that fosters long-term thinking and strategic planning within academic departments.

Strategic ReDesign: We have moved forward on some elements of the “ReDesigning the University” (a.k.a. “Reengineering the University”) initiative launched under previous leadership, and channeled other elements into the next strategic planning process being developed under President Stokes.

Academic Affairs ↔ Student Affairs partnership: We have built a stronger partnership with Student Affairs, including reorganizing some units there for better focus and coordination. This included a new reporting structure for New Student Orientation and for the Women’s Resource Center, as well as the launch of new software to undergird and guide the first-year experience (developed within UNM’s University College, fully ADA compliant, and available at your favorite App Store).

Santa Fe Initiative: As the City of Santa Fe moves toward redeveloping 64 acres of prime land in mid-town, UNM is positioned to play a central role in the higher education dimension of that effort, likely focused on creative design, entrepreneurial innovation, arts/culture/film, and high-tech manufacturing. The city’s RFP just going public in 2019. But UNM is fully at the table, in partnership with Santa Fe Community College and the UNM branches but without creating a new branch campus.

Using software to unburden faculty: In partnership with the Office of the Vice President for Research, the Office of the Provost has spearheaded an effort to consolidate the vast activity-reporting burden faced by faculty. Instead of multiple reporting demands in different formats, the Faculty Annual Activity Reporting (FAAR) initiative strives to consolidate all activity reporting into one software-based reporting tool. The new FAAR tool will consolidate into one online location nearly all current activity reporting regarding publishing, teaching, mentoring, creative work, community engagement, areas of research focus, international engagement, university and public service, professional service, and grant-writing. In partnership with the Faculty Senate IT Committee, we are writing into the soon-to-be-released RFP a set of data governance rules that will protect faculty rights by appropriately limiting who has access to what data.

Infrastructure and policy to support excellence-and-equity at UNM: I hope that never again at UNM will academic excellence be played off against diversity and equity across gender, racial/ethnic, and other lines of social difference—nor diversity played off against full commitment to standards of academic excellence in all that we do. I have strived to build a dialogue at all levels of university life that recognizes that an “inclusive excellence” agenda—that is, linking rigorous commitment to research & teaching excellence with strong commitment to diversity and inclusion—represents both the ethically right thing to do and our most strategic play for greater national prominence as a university. Drawing on strong research showing that leadership teams embodying different social backgrounds and divergent points of view actually make better strategic decisions, I have made this excellence-and-equity agenda the centerpiece of Academic Affairs’ work in the last two years. As a result, we have strong “Target

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of Opportunity” procedures that allow UNM to assertively recruit truly outstanding faculty who will diversify their home academic unit, and we are in the middle of a Native American Cluster Hiring Initiative that will help make UNM a destination university for faculty, staff, and students from sovereign native communities nationwide and within New Mexico.

Our Challenges

Despite the progress outlined above, our overall situation continues to present fundamental challenges to our academic mission. The most crucial of these include:

Structural fiscal challenges: Even with recent new I&G funding (including new state support and new tuition revenue), nearly a decade of falling I&G revenue (when controlled for inflation) means that the long-term trajectory of support for UNM’s academic mission remains negative. The State of New Mexico generously supports higher education, but spreads that support around more than thirty institutions, so all face real challenges. The fiscal pressures are particularly acute for research universities, yet if New Mexico is to develop economically and socially, the state simply has to have a truly excellent research university: strong economies in Austin, Boulder, Salt Lake City and other cities around the country bear witness to the dynamism of research-based private sector innovation. Adequately funding flagship UNM and the state’s other research universities, as well as the rest of higher education, is a central challenge. How does this affect you? Chronically cash-strapped units of the university struggle to free up funds for strategic investments. Even so, Academic Affairs has reinvested new monies in academic initiatives every year for the past decade, despite significant I&G cuts.

Enrollment: Recruitment and retention: Enrollment represents another dimension of our fiscal challenge: Declining enrollments both take a bite out of current-year budgets and roll forward into future years. Employees in every unit need to understand that their salary increases and the health of the academic mission depend on recruiting, retaining, and graduating our students— and see themselves as active contributors in that work.

The research mission: We must continue UNM’s investment in student success and supporting degree, but also must urgently double down on investment in the research mission and creative works that are the lifeblood of research-driven faculty. The Grand Challenges initiative for socially-relevant and research-driven work on New Mexico’s challenges begins that investment. But an urgent need remains for deeper support infrastructure for the core research mission generally and key strategic areas particularly.

Campus climate: The organizational culture of the University: Overall, I see our campus culture as mission-driven, locally-focused in positive ways, and supportive of good work. However, some units struggle with internal conflict that undermines a healthy work climate and faculty and staff well-being. We simply have to design and implement strategies to improve our internal climate. Similarly, in recent years a series of UNM-centered controversies from outside the university’s core work has

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captured the public imagination and the university's attention, distracting attention from what we do well and what we need to do better.

Toward the Future

I have been honored to serve as interim provost this year, and I return to the faculty proud of the work that UNM does. With support from President Stokes and the University more broadly, I have pushed the boundary on what an interim provost can do. Together with the Deans, faculty and staff leaders, and the leadership team in the Office of the Provost, we have laid the groundwork for *both* excellence and equity, with clearer processes and robust insight into our institutional strengths and our institutional shortcomings. If we can build on the progress and resolve the challenges identified above, UNM's future is bright indeed: We really can become a national leader in academic excellence-and-equity, a model for laying the educational and intellectual groundwork for a more democratic future of shared prosperity in New Mexico and the nation.

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