

Academic Dispatch

September 11, 2019




Final day of Staff Appreciation Week, May 2019. Photo source: UNM Staff Council.

Those who make the Lobos Go

Research universities are drivers of discovery and creators of human intellectual capacity. The members of our academic community accomplish this by learning and creating new ideas through engagement with each other and with members of the wider publics that we serve. But while our students and faculty engage in this work, none of us does it alone. To realize our goals we all rely on the talents and dedication of those who make the Lobos go: UNM staff.

My first research work was as a masters student at the University of Illinois. While studying the thermodynamics of radiation damage in materials, I relied on our departmental secretary and our departmental draftsman to help convert my ideas into a tangible published form that could be broadly shared with others. My first full-time academic job was as a research professor at the University of Virginia; since then and in every role I've assumed, many others have been crucial to any success I may have had. University staff have made sure my students were enrolled in my courses, my grant budgets were up to date, and that my computing systems were functioning. The list can go on.

For students at UNM, numerous tasks are managed by our professional staff, often unseen and too often unappreciated. Enrollment, advising, transcription, health care, cooking, cleaning, program management, job fairs: all these things happen because dedicated staff are here to make them happen, and to support the university's mission of discovery, education, and service. No undergraduate gets to class without advising and registration, classroom scheduling, IT support, and much more. No graduate student completes her dissertation without help from the UNM professionals who arrange her research or teaching appointment, process her pay, assist her in navigating the dissertation format requirements, and provide her with hundreds of other supports. For our faculty, research supplies are ordered, appointments are set, grant funding appears in the right indexes, copies are made, and problems are solved. For all of us, the lights go on and water comes from the pipes.



In August, I was pleased to join President Stokes, Vice President Dorothy Anderson, and others, for a staff town hall to hear some of the concerns and needs of our staff. These opportunities to hear from staff are critical, because our staff often see the opportunities and challenges that students and faculty may not. The multitude of perspectives is critical. Equally, we must recognize the benefits that come from providing development opportunities for staff and attending to their wellness. The UNM Employee Wellness Team has been active over the last few years to build a culture of health at UNM, including recent planning for a Wellbeing Expo, and a Fitbit Challenge. Employee and Organizational Development is supporting a number of courses and trainings for staff. The ULead program begins this week, and another session will launch in the spring, continuing to help our staff develop leadership and strategic planning skills. Aside from continued improvement, we must also find ways to reduce day-to-day operating burdens. Senior Vice President Costantinidis and I will continue to look for opportunities to eliminate or streamline processes that increase effort more than they increase value.

UNM has many challenges to overcome. In this we are not special among institutions of higher education. But as all of you who have made your careers here know, UNM is a special place. We will overcome these challenges and continue to build our place as a first-rate research university. We will succeed because of our special community of students and faculty, and because UNM staff make the Lobos go.

James Paul Holloway

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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