



Academic Dispatch

October 4, 2019

Beyond Rocket Science

The members of the UNM family are an incredibly accomplished lot, of course. Yet beyond the advanced degrees and amidst the packed calendars, there is a striving to live humanely and fully that distinguishes the people I have met here. Recognizing and caring for the humanity of others isn't rocket science. It's harder. It takes observation, grit, inspiration, and wisdom. September closed at UNM with powerful models of how best to be human.

On Sept. 26, UNM biology professor Kimran Buckholz noticed a message chalked on the sidewalk reading "I could die and I wouldn't mind." Professor Buckholz was heartsore from this message written by an unknown but struggling member of our community. She chose to act. Grabbing chalk and stopping past her classroom to explain what she had seen, she went outside with her students. Together, they wrote encouraging messages in response to the words of despair. As someone who has had a family member attempt suicide, I know first-hand the power of messages of support and hope.

Kendra Koivu began her career at UNM in the Political Science Department in the fall of 2012 after completing her Ph.D. at Northwestern University. She wrote a book, published several articles, became an important voice in the methodology of political science, and mentored many students before being granted tenure and promotion in the spring of 2019. She studied the political economy of illicit markets and the development of international drug control regimes and transnational narcotics trafficking, and she explored the logic of inquiry and philosophy of science. With some 150 citations to her work, she was making an impact on both our understanding of the markets she studied, and of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies of political science — in which she identified four subtypes of qualitative methods, breaking the often unstated assumption that these methods are some homogeneous group. Her 2018 paper "Finding the Question: A Puzzle-Based Approach to the Logic of Discovery" with Christopher Day explored systematically the discovery phase of research design, where, as all good scholars learn, the real issue of research is finding the right question. Professor Koivu's many accomplishments since joining UNM are notable. Yet we also know that in 2013, just after the birth of her second child, Professor Koivu was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, and her body finally succumbed to the cancer she endured for five years on the night of Sept. 27, 2019 at the age of 40. She will be missed, and her loss is painful for the UNM community, but she lived and achieved amidst life's challenges.

Also in September, UNM community members Sarita Cargas, Amy Neel, and Heather Mechler came to see me to talk about food security on our campus. Along with others they had noted in informal inquiries that a number of our students might skip meals to buy books. Having discovered the right question to ask, they and their colleagues are launching a research project to develop a better understanding of the magnitude of the need at UNM, so that we can best determine how to serve our community.

Each of us defines all of us, and many Lobo faculty, staff and students are striving and caring for the future of our communities and families. Here on this planet, at this university, we strive to support and enrich each other's lives.

Dr. James Paul Holloway

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