

# Academic Dispatch

**May 6, 2020**



## **One UNM, One New Mexico**

Long ago, I gained greatly from doing graduate work at a university in England. While there I was struck by the presence of walls around my college, and enjoyed the nice porter who warmly welcomed visitors at the gate. In more recent years, I spent a decade working with universities in China, each encircled by a ceremonial wall pierced with beautiful gates. These walls separated each university enclave from its surrounding city, symbols of universities as worlds unto themselves, separate and autonomous.

Except we are not. Universities are of the world, deeply embedded within the broader communities that support and sustain us, and whom it is our mission to serve. Recent events remind us of these connections, and these cues can help us to chart our path into the future.

Over the past months New Mexico and UNM have, in many ways, been at our best. In the state, we have done hard work to socially distance ourselves and developed new habits of mask wearing and handwashing. Workers have put themselves at personal risk to support community needs and health. At

the university, we have delivered essential health care, moved over 4000 courses to remote instruction, reconfigured our research enterprise, and through all our actions have flattened the curve of SARS-CoV-2 infection and maintained our health care system's ability to save lives. All of this work required UNM to act in alignment with the state. We are not separate, and our actions, if disconnected from the broader New Mexico community, would have yielded naught.

Many of our world-wide community have displayed great courage and good heart. Yet we are also reminded that the hate and intolerance that infests the world all too often enters into our campus community. Last week, members of our university community were attacked, threatened, and accused, solely because of their identity. These despicable incidents reflect the worst of the world. They do not reflect the values of our university. Law enforcement investigations and OEO inquiries are underway, and our Vice President for Equity and Inclusion has organized a series of virtual workshops to address bias and prejudice from an educational perspective. Lobos are better than these racist incidents. We will not let these events turn us from our values and mission and our work to influence for the better the world beyond our campuses.

Because we are of the world, we have responsibility to it. To flatten the curve and mitigate the injury from the virus that infects our community, UNM must act as a collaborative part of New Mexico. Our actions will affect others beyond UNM, and their actions will affect us. Our anxiety leads each of us to seek certainty, and yet certainty is not given to any of us to provide.

On all of our minds there lingers the question: will our research and educational missions continue in the fall, and will these missions be realized in person, or remotely?

The state government is designing a three-phase plan to shift the current limits on in-person activities towards a new equilibrium centered around a set of "COVID Safe Practices" (CSPs) and phased reopening of various venues with carefully limited occupancy. Use of masks will be standard for all of us through all of these phases, and very possibly into the next year, until herd immunity has been established either through vaccination or exposure and natural resistance. The three phases defined by the state will have trigger criteria to move to the next phase, or, when needed, to move back to a previous phase in order to better control community transmission of the virus.

I expect that as we move through the phases, especially in phase 2 and significantly in phase 3, UNM will offer the in-person educational experiences that provide the rich intellectual development that we know is key to our students. But this will not look like last fall. Social distancing will continue, density of students in classroom spaces will likely be reduced, hallways might flow one-way, masks will be worn,

some classes might mix in-person with remote modalities for the best of both, and we will be ready to move to greater social distancing if needed. All of our actions will be aligned with the needs of the state to protect us all through a coordinated response that recognizes our relationships and interdependency with all of New Mexico. We cannot go it alone, because we are not alone.

As we design our plans for fall in tandem with state criteria, our first principle is to protect the health of our faculty, staff, students, and all New Mexicans. Our second principle is to provide education, create new knowledge, develop creative works, supply patient care, and perform public service. This crisis may exacerbate inequality. We at UNM must make decisions to protect our most vulnerable students, staff, and faculty and to continue to ensure social mobility for our students through education.

I'd like to close by recognizing and thanking all of UNM's employees who are on campus still, undertaking critical functions that all of us rely on – keeping the lights on, the water flowing, the internet humming, our research infrastructure operating, and more. Thank you for making us a university that strengthens the world inside and beyond our campuses!

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