

Academic Dispatch

May 11, 2020



News and Updates from Academic Affairs

This begins the final week of a most complex and challenging term. Students are doing those final projects, papers, and exams. Faculty are grading, evaluating, and providing feedback. And all of this is happening at a time when public health orders to remain home as much as possible and practice extensive social distancing dominate our minds. I've been asked if the changes we have undertaken this term demonstrate that university education can simply become a virtual experience, mediated by digital media. After all, the logic goes, we are doing it now! I think the evidence points in exactly the opposite direction. Our students have been very clear – they need us, faculty and staff, and they need each other, and they need the environment for growth and development that is created on a college campus where we come together physically as a community. Place and space matter – its organization, shape, patterns of use – because true learning is not just about learning content. Content matters, of course. **But** university learning is about more than learning established facts, ideas, and concepts. It is also about discovery, critique, and developing the tools to find new truths, build new ideas, and create new concepts. This requires personal connection, serendipity, and the unexpected collisions of ideas and the stimulation that takes place in physical spaces. College is not just about learning facts in the classroom. It's about creating the future on Smith Plaza or in the stacks.

Given the importance of space, buildings, design, and planning to our human experiences, I'm excited to announce the appointment of Dr. Robert Gonzalez as the next dean of the School of Architecture and Planning, effective July 1, 2020. Prof. Gonzalez studies Latin American and LatinX architecture, Pan-American Architecture & Urbanism, US-Mexico border issues, and other topics as well, including the intersection of film and architecture, and the architecture and history of world's fairs and expositions. Dr. Gonzalez is currently Regional Site Director for Texas Tech's El Paso programs and Director of the Architecture program there. Since assuming oversight of the El Paso site in 2011, he has grown the programs there in both size and scope, greatly enhancing the community partnerships that were critical to their success. In a visionary move, he partnered with the city of El Paso to put the Texas Tech Architecture program into the working Union Depot train station, a historic building designed by world renowned architect Daniel Burnham. We look forward to having Robert Gonzalez join the Lobo family.



Like all of you, I look to the summer and fall, and wonder what they will bring. I described last week that the state is developing a three-phase plan on moving forward from our current condition through phases of increasing engagement and interaction, all triggered by public health data and COVID safe practices. An aligned plan for higher education is also being developed. As these plans are refined and approved at the state level, and UNM's implementation of them are developed, we will communicate with you all about how our work will flow over the next months and year.

We are always looking to the future, to grow and improve UNM's approaches to research and education and our impact on the state. In collaboration with Dr. Assata Zerai, VP for Equity and Inclusion, I am pleased to announce the first of several initiatives in the Provost's Challenge for Excellence and Equity: Lobos Connect. This initiative invites faculty to participate in one or two grant-funded projects focused on improving the experience of students enrolled in general education courses. Across the nation, general education courses too often sift structurally disadvantaged students out of college. Lobos Connect takes on the challenge of fostering a climate in which structurally disadvantaged students can experience college as an equitable environment where they feel they belong and can persist to graduation at an R1 through engaging in our mission of discovery. Faculty can participate in Lobos Connect by becoming supported Fellows in the [Student Experience Project \(SEP\)](#), which offers simple research-based tools to support student belonging and growth mindset, and also in the [Expanding Course-Based Research Experiences \(ECURE\)](#). More information, along with the application form (due May 29), is available at <https://provost.unm.edu/initiatives/lobos-connect.html>. Two open information sessions on SEP and ECURE will be held on May 11 at 2 p.m. and May 14 at 2 p.m. on Zoom (information on these sessions can be found on the [Lobos Connect webpage](#)).

To all of you, students, faculty, and staff, thanks for all you do, and good luck in the final work of the term.

James Paul Holloway

Professor of Nuclear Engineering

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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