



# Academic Dispatch

**July 2, 2020**

## **COVID News**

I have been reading the delightful book by Dorothy Hughes, *Pueblo on the Mesa*, which was written in 1939 to commemorate the first 50 years of the University of New Mexico, and to serve as something of an ode to then UNM President James Zimmerman. This book, and the later and rather more ponderous companion, *Miracle on the Mesa*, by William Davis, remind me that UNM students, faculty, and staff have confronted many challenges, including the simultaneous upheavals of WW I and the 1918-1919 flu pandemic, when the US Army largely ran UNM and set the curriculum to prepare officers for the trenches of France, and the campus had to be quarantined for two months because of the H1N1 virus.

Now we face a new test, driven by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, that threatens our health and our mission.

I write this on July 1, 2020, the first day of Fiscal Year 2021. Governor Michelle Lujan-Grisham just signed House Bill 1, amending the state's budget for the forthcoming year. This revision was necessary in the face of the significant economic difficulties wrought by COVID-19, requiring the removal of some two billion dollars from the state budget. For UNM, this new budget imposes significant challenges: the state removed 22 million dollars of funding for UNM main campus in Albuquerque, a reduction of over 10% from the anticipated allocation. HSC and UNM branch campuses are encountering commensurate cuts. The state indicates that further reductions might be imposed yet this year and next. On top of this state decline, we see a significant reduction in student credit hours, pointing towards tuition revenues falling as much as 8.6 million dollars short of expectations, along with a decline of student fee collections of perhaps \$2.5 million.

UNM operates in a financial system wherein the revenues collected in a given fiscal year are expended in that same year. The funds from the state and those we collect from our students as tuition and fees immediately pay for the faculty who teach and create, for the staff in the student support units, for those who maintain the grounds, for the utilities to illuminate the buildings and pump water through the pipes, the fuel for the buses, the interest on the mortgages, and all the rest. Hence, a large revenue drop requires hard and immediate choices. The UNM Budget Leadership Team, comprised of faculty, staff, and administrative leadership, advises on these choices, so that many voices are guiding the budgeting process. These choices are aggravated this year, for no matter the form of instruction UNM follows – be it our planned hybrid fall term or a more remote approach – we will incur extraordinary expenses to help ensure the health of our community.

While recognizing that we must be flexible and might need to shift, we are still planning for a fall term that will provide education in a hybrid mode: some remote instruction, and some in person, and similarly

hybrid for a full set of student services and for research activity. Operational protocols to support this are being designed and led by experts in public health. The modalities of individual courses are now populating in the UNM scheduling system, and we currently have some 30–40% of courses having an in-person component and 60–70% of courses being planned in remote form. This mix will continue to evolve over the next couple of weeks as we explore the implications of the schedule on available rooms and spaces, with their normal capacity reduced to allow 6' distancing for all masked learners. Over 600 faculty are engaged this summer with programs from our Center for Teaching and Learning, developing the skills to bring best practices to teaching in both hybrid and remote environments. Academic Technologies is fitting 150 classrooms with new cameras and microphones to enhance instruction.

SARS-CoV-2 is still very active in our community, and the current trends in our state cause considerable concern. UNM's ability to move forward with a hybrid fall will be determined over the next couple weeks; a determination ultimately dependent on all of us as residents in the state. It is our behaviors that either inhibit, or conversely and less desirably, promote, the spread of the virus. If the trends do not support our plan for a hybrid fall term, we will pivot to more remote modes of research, discovery, and learning.

No matter the path, we face a challenge – pursuing an unusual form of instruction and research while managing one of the largest fiscal cuts that UNM has ever experienced. The heroic efforts of faculty, staff, and students to complete Spring 2020 under duress indicate that we are up to this challenge. Together, we will find a path forward that ensures a strong education for our students, that promotes their social mobility, that protects the health of our community, and that enhances human knowledge through our work of discovery and creation.

Enjoy your 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and please wear a mask.

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