

Academic Dispatch

June 30, 2023

The Work Does Not Stop

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled yesterday that race-based admissions processes in higher education violate the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, although some race conscious decisions do not. This ruling takes place in a context of numerous legislative actions in at least 21 states intended to thwart diversity, equity, and inclusion work and even to restrict what we teach or research. With so many steps simultaneously taken in apparent alignment, we have the sense that our values are under assault and that the very principles that drew many of us to UNM are being diminished. And frankly, in some quarters, they are.

At UNM we celebrate, and we will continue to celebrate, the broad scope of New Mexican peoples and cultures, and of the many societies of the world. We are proud to do so. Over the past two years, UNM came together in the 2040 planning process to articulate our values and to describe the center of learning we wish to create over the next two decades. And so, in our UNM 2040 framework, one of our core values is inclusion and “we respect and celebrate the differences of all persons and value working in a collaborative environment where diversity is cherished and there is a shared sense of belonging.” In valuing diversity in an inclusive university community, we affirm the relationships, furnish the knowledge, and support the health of peoples and places, necessary for a better and more equitable world.

UNM 2040 takes ownership of the promise of inclusive excellence, and rather than assuming that we are inclusive because our constituents are diverse, we center the value of inclusion and recognize that we must strive for diversity and equity, not because we have attained these goals, but because we know we have not and must continue to reach. Our values provide us with an ideal to strive for, but seldom an end achieved. And so is it with inclusion – to create the environment in which all are welcome and all have a fair chance for their own success, our choice should be in how to strive, not whether to try.

Inclusion is ours. It is cherished at UNM, and it cannot be separated from us by a court ruling or a legislative action. Nor can such a ruling or action destroy UNM’s promise or poison our beliefs. The only way we can lose our dedication to inclusion and diversity is if we surrender it within ourselves. And so how we respond to these national events will reflect the extent to which we elect to retain our character, or surrender it.

Whatever the law, as a public institution we have a duty to obey it. But our values are not dictated by the law. What do we do if a court ruling says we cannot do what we have done in the past? We rethink how we realize our values in programs, practices, and processes, and push forward. If old tools are denied to us, we seek new tools. It's vexing, it's frustrating, it's maddening. But we will find ways, and the work will not stop.

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