

# Academic Dispatch

Communication from the Office of Academic Affairs



University Communication and Marketing photo

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## **Celebrating our success in a season of joy**

Today and tomorrow, The University of New Mexico will hold its [fall commencement ceremonies](#) (this evening's event is to recognize graduate students, with Friday dedicated to undergraduates). More than 1,700 of our students — from both sides of Lomas in Albuquerque as well as our four branch campuses around the state — will receive degrees or certificates representing the successful completion of their respective requirements. Each of these achievements demanded time, effort, commitment, and sacrifice. Each spring and fall, the Pit fills with the friends and family who have provided support for the thousands of Lobos who graduate each semester. I have attended perhaps 50 such ceremonies, but no matter how many, commencement is always an important reminder of our mission as an academic institution. And at a university like UNM, where many of our students have overcome enormous obstacles just to get here and find their place, commencement holds deep significance to both the graduate and their families. Even in the cavernous space of the Pit, the event is intimate and the emotion palpable. The reading of names, handshakes, and all the pomp and circumstance suddenly become not a just a ceremony but a cherished culmination of all we do at UNM.

The majority of our students graduating are receiving undergraduate bachelor's degrees, such as a bachelor of science, bachelor of arts, or bachelor of business administration. When many people think of our educational work at UNM, they think of the bachelor's degree, master's and doctoral degrees, and juris doctor or medical doctor graduate degrees, but we must also remember that thanks to the programs at our four branch campuses — Gallup, Los Alamos, Taos, and Valencia — our students are enriching both their lives and their communities by earning certificates or associate degrees in such important areas as early childhood education, emergency medical services, dental assistance, nursing, welding, and medical laboratory technology.

These are crucial programs, and the learners who pursue them provide immense value to their communities, and through their work, they contribute to the lives of us all. For many students at our branch campuses, these programs are a terminal degree that unlocks a satisfying career path and transforms their lives and their families' lives. We celebrate their success every bit as much as we celebrate the graduates receiving an MBA, MD, JD, or Ph.D. Congratulations to all our Lobos!

Speaking of celebrations, I recently presented some of our student success metrics for the UNM Board of Regents Student Success, Teaching and Research (SSTAR) committee. This was presented in the context of [the UNM 2040 strategic framework's Student Experience and Educational Innovation goal](#). Along with Pamela Cheek, vice provost for student success, we provided updates to the Regents on some of the amazing work that our schools and colleges and academic support units have implemented. This important work is yielding results.

A few highlights:

- Since 2020, UNM's third-semester retention has increased from 66.5% to 74.6% in 2023. Research shows that students who make it to their third semester in college are more likely to graduate.
- This fall, UNM opened a dedicated Transfer and Transition Student Center to support the more than 40% of new undergraduate students who transfer to UNM from another institution.
- In the next year, UNM will start to unveil Student Hub, a new system customized for UNM that will provide students with key information to navigate their academic journey and also allow advisors and others who guide students toward success to better coordinate their work.
- UNM continues to redesign its academic advising around proactive and targeted approaches, supported by well-trained academic advising teams.

Perhaps it is a positive sign that we had so much good news to share that we ran out of time to complete our presentation! To provide an even fuller picture to our student success efforts (including the efforts under the leadership of Eric Scott, vice president for student affairs, who has led a renewed emphasis on student wellbeing and basic needs), the Regents invited us back at a future meeting, so stay tuned for more in 2025. Thanks to all of you — staff, faculty and peer students, advisors and tutors — who contribute to our student success.

## **Creating a new home for humanities**

As many of you know, [the half-century-old Humanities Building is coming down](#), beginning this month with the move-out, followed by abatement and demolition, then the construction of a new facility to house many of our humanities and social science units. There will be much more communicated in the coming months and years about this project, but I want to say here that I sincerely appreciate the hard work in the planning, logistics, and the physical labor involved in moving to temporary spaces, and also the support from our partners in state government and the citizens of New Mexico who have funded this project. Although it might not seem like it now, the temporary inconveniences of the moment will pay off in years to come through an innovative new teaching and learning space. Thank you for your work, and thank you in advance for your patience during this project.

Have a refreshing winter break, and see you in 2025!

**James Paul Holloway**

**Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs**

**Professor of Nuclear Engineering**