

Academic Dispatch

Communication from the Office of Academic Affairs



The UNM Duck Pond. (University Communication and Marketing)

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Navigating freedom of expression

“If we are to be precluded from offering [our] sentiments on a matter ... reason is of no use to us; the freedom of Speech may be taken away, and, dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep, to the Slaughter.”

— George Washington, 1783, Newburgh, New York

After a long hiatus, I am happy to report that the Academic Dispatch is back and going forward on a regular schedule. There is much to discuss within the UNM community, and dialogue is essential for keeping a free flow of ideas from which new ideas might arise. I hope these Dispatches stimulate such dialogue.

You may be wondering why I began with a rather strange 241-year-old quote from George Washington. Allow me to reveal some context.

We are well into our fall term, and our students, faculty, and staff are, as usual, bringing energy and creativity to our campus. For many of our students, this is their first time here, and I had the pleasure of addressing them at the 2024 First-Year Convocation, where we welcome Lobos just beginning their academic journey. I chose to address the issue of freedom of speech, particularly in the university environment where we create, preserve, and propagate knowledge.

After high school, my first job was as a security guard at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where I had the opportunity to ponder a most odd, life-sized statue housed at the National Museum of American History that depicts George Washington as Julius Caesar. This statue is completely unaligned with who Washington was. Caesar was a despot who seized power in Rome and ruled as an autocrat. Washington believed deeply in liberty and in what he called a government “of popular character” and “purely elective.”

In March 1783 while encamped at Newburgh, officers in Washington's army were proposing to mutiny against Congress, and so sure were they of the justice of their cause that the mutineers asserted that those who disagreed should be censored. Washington disagreed. The rights of others were not overruled by the supposed justice of the mutineers' cause - even though Washington was himself sympathetic to their concerns, if not their methods. He prevented the possible mutineers from meeting, instead arranging for them to gather a few days later. At this time, he spoke, sharing, in part, the thought quoted above, and allowed others with differing views to speak also. Ideas were heard, thoughts were shared. There was no mutiny.

Later, in his 1796 farewell address, Washington promoted a theme of unity, warning us against allowing our differences to become rancor that divides us. He asked that the people of the United States should "indignantly [frown] upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest." And he cautions against factions that may encourage some to "misrepresent the opinions and aims of others." He argues not against disagreement, but against divisiveness. He warns also against relying on our passions to determine our decisions and exclaims how critical is education to democracy. "Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. [For] in proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened," he proclaimed.

Fast forward, and here we are, in 2024, at UNM, one such institution created for the "general diffusion of knowledge." And we are in the midst of a contentious election season, where national and international events loom large on our campus. Many in our community will have passionate views and modes of expression in reaction to these important issues. It seems the weighty events of our time could result in the alienation of one portion of our community from the rest. We might each be tempted to misrepresent the opinions and aims of others.

Education, such as UNM provides, should secure for you the intellectual tools to navigate this turmoil. You can develop an understanding of history, of human aspirations, of how information and evidence can be evaluated and understood using different modes of analysis, of how values influence decisions, of your own and others' fallibility, and, perhaps most importantly, of how the perspectives of others can be understood with empathy even when not with agreement.

Free speech can become complicated and acrimonious, especially on a campus with thousands of passionate people of differing views. But the right is not absolute: as with Washington in 1783, the right to speak does not overrule the rights of others or overrule the laws that govern us. So Lobos, listen with care, disagree or agree based on a foundation of evidence rooted in your values, seek to promote and not to provoke, and remember that you are in control of how you respond to the ideas of others.

I encourage you to peruse freespeech.unm.edu, which has much helpful information for the UNM community to understand your free speech rights.

I hope that your semester is a productive, positive, and joyful one.

James Paul Holloway

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Professor of Nuclear Engineering



Bill Stanley



Pamela Cheek



Barbara Rodriguez

Deepening the bench

As many of you may have seen, [there are a few changes going on in the Office of Academic Affairs](#). Bill Stanley, associate provost for faculty success, has done an amazing job the last few years, but as his term as associate provost ends, he has decided to return to his position as a professor of political science for the spring term. Pamela Cheek has been promoted to vice provost for student success and Barbara Rodriguez continues as senior vice provost. In order to ensure strong support for Professors Cheek and Rodriguez and to provide for succession planning, we have launched a search for two faculty to fill two assistant vice provost roles — one for academic success reporting to Vice Provost Cheek, and one for faculty affairs reporting to Senior Vice Provost Rodriguez, both starting January 2025. Read more about the changes here <https://news.unm.edu/news/unm-creates-two-assistant-vice-provost-positions-to-boost-faculty-student-success>.

Introducing the Transfer and Transition Center

Kicking off National Transfer Student Week, the newly created [Transfer and Transition Student Center](#) will hold a grand opening from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 21. The center is located in the University Advisement and Enrichment Center (UAEC), Suite 170, Building #85. The center will create a welcoming and dedicated space for this special population of students. Stay tuned for much more to come from this new center. To attend the grand opening, RSVP here. To attend the grand opening, RSVP at goto.unm.edu/rsvp.