

Academic Dispatch

Communication from the Office of Academic Affairs



University Communication and Marketing photo

The UNM community came together recently for UNM's Big Give. Among the fundraisers: Quack and Give Back, which benefitted the UNM Sustainability Fund.

"There are more things, Lucilius, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. ... some things torment us more than they ought; some torment us before they ought; and some torment us when they ought not to torment us at all."

— Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*

February 20, 2025

Let our values serve as our guide

Lucius Annaeus Seneca wrote this in his 13th letter to Lucilius Junior, procurator of Sicily, sometime around 65 CE. Seneca was a stoic philosopher who believed that a well-lived life could come only from practicing the cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. The stoics had a values-based philosophy.

Values, which most of us begin to absorb from our parents as children, help us make decisions and respond to challenge. Indeed, we often filter facts in order to reach conclusions that are acceptable within our values framework. In his debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858, Lincoln talked about this in describing the values of the two political parties vying for the senatorial seat in Illinois, saying that "the action of each is squared to meet their views [values]."

At UNM, we, too, have adopted a set of [institutional values](#) within our UNM 2040 framework:

- **Excellence** – We value excellence in all our work
- **Inclusion** – We value and celebrate the differences of all peoples working in a diverse community
- **Environment** – We value our planet, which supports us and future generations
- **Integrity** – We value fairness, transparency, honesty, and good stewardship
- **Place** – We value the peoples and places of New Mexico.

Today, we are subject to many changes in the milieu of our work. This creates unhelpful and even stressful uncertainty, and it's not always clear from day to day what is happening. Faced with this, I fall back on my values and on our institutional values.

Even as we navigate a stream of shifts in federal policies and priorities, our work should go on unabated. Earlier today, I attended the Board of Regents' meeting and helped to update them on all the amazing work ongoing at UNM in all our mission elements. Despite everything, our work goes on. Tomorrow, I'll attend President Stokes' State of the University address and hear her perspective on where we have been, where we are, and where we are going as a university dedicated to learning, discovery, patient care, and service. Next week, I'll make opening comments at the School of Engineering's JEADI (Justice, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion) Summit. On March 12, I'll attend the State of Research event and join a panel to answer questions about what we understand of the impacts of federal policy changes might be.

I've had people reach out to me to ask: do these changes in federal policy mean our areas of study or discovery are limited? I don't think so. We can study the important questions that we always have as a university. It's possible that research which once was funded federally might no longer be funded federally, but that does not mean we cannot study those areas, it means only that a funder elects no longer to fund, no more. This might indeed make some research more difficult to carry out, but academic freedom is not about funding, it is about the freedom of inquiry. This freedom remains.

I've also been asked if folks should cease attendance at conferences that some might find controversial. This is an individual decision, but if I were facing this choice, I would attend — I have the freedom to hear others and to share my research. This freedom remains.

I'm not avoidant. I'm not ignoring the challenges presented to us. Quite the opposite. Yet the great contest in moments of countless uncertainties is to avoid reacting to the noise. Every day we hear a new announcement of federal policy or practice, or a legal response to such a change, too often with each announcement apparently inconsistent with the last. Navigating through this is exhausting. Yet it requires that we not amplify the noise by responding too quickly, when unnecessary, to each event. It's frustrating, at least to me, because I want to create certainty where little is to be had.

So I come back to our values. We concentrate on excellence in research and learning, we cherish inclusion and diversity, we care about our natural environment and its future, we contemplate truth, and we continue to celebrate New Mexico.

James Paul Holloway

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Professor of Nuclear Engineering