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OFFICE OF  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

# Querencia at UNM

THE PROVOST'S PERSPECTIVE FROM THE HEART OF UNM

## Grateful for 2025; inspired for 2026



**A photo of a beautiful morning I captured earlier this month.**

As we say farewell to 2025, let's celebrate the remarkable journey we've shared. This year has been one of growth, innovation, and resilience — a time when we embraced change and strengthened our sense of community. From national shifts in higher education to transitions here at UNM, we navigated these moments together with purpose and creativity. For me, stepping into the interim provost role mid-year has been an opportunity to witness firsthand the dedication and brilliance that define our university.

2026 will be a year to strengthen our sense of purpose and belonging. As we look ahead, this is an ideal moment to pause and reflect — not on the pace or pressures of change, but on the values and commitments that unite us. In times of transition, we find our querencia — our grounding and sense of home — not by resisting change, but by leaning into what matters most: our mission and our community.

Querencia reminds us why we are here. Whether faculty, staff, or students, we share a commitment to teaching, learning, discovery, and service. We empower students to transform their realities, and in turn, become catalysts for a better world. This is the heart of UNM.

This month, I was inspired by students who embody that spirit. Gabriela Guajardo, a master's student in Chicana and Chicano Studies, delivered a powerful LoboBITES presentation on her experiences in casting calls in New Mexico — challenging norms and opening doors. Solomon Gbara, a senior in the Anderson School of Management, is using entrepreneurship not just to spur economic development, but to uplift communities through empowerment. These stories remind us that querencia is not static — it's active, bold, and forward-looking.

Our academic leaders share this energy. I invited deans to reflect on what they are most proud of this semester.

I encourage you to read their highlights — they showcase the incredible work we’ve accomplished together.

Thank you making UNM the vibrant, resilient, and welcoming place that it is. As we head into the holiday season, I hope you find time to recharge and reconnect with your own *querencia* — your source of strength and purpose. 2026 will bring new challenges and opportunities, and I am confident we will meet them with creativity, collaboration, and heart.

I wish you the warmest of holiday seasons. Looking forward to all we’ll accomplish together in 2026!

**Barbara Rodriguez**  
**Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs**



**Gabriela Guajardo**, a master’s student in Chicana and Chicano Studies, could choose to go about her daily life pursuing artistic endeavors such as an occasional movie role (she can be seen as a cast member in the Joaquin Phoenix film from this year called *Eddington*), performing her works as the 10th-ranked female poet in the world, and of course maintaining the busy life of a graduate student.

However, Guajardo believes that going along as if all is well would not be an authentic way to live. And Guajardo has a message to share. As a sometimes background actor on New Mexico films, something came to her awareness, which she was

compelled to share — and push the industry to be better. One of the places she shared that message was at the 2025 LoboBITES competition in November, where she won first place for “ ‘Tamalewood:’ The Sparkling Cinematography of Colonization in the New Southwest.”

The message was powerful: Casting calls for actors in many movie and television productions often contain harmful stereotypes that denigrate groups of people from certain backgrounds and categories, and pigeonhole actors into playing only certain roles. “This kind of meta-representation steals away your identity,” Guajardo said. This can be based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomics, religion and many other factors. And those biases may be evident not only in Hollywood casting calls but also those right here in New Mexico, where a growing number of productions are based.

Although she is looking out for both the industry and New Mexico, her message can strike some the wrong way. “When I tell people what I’m doing, some people feel threatened. A lot of people work in the industry here, and I respect that. This is not a takedown of the industry.”

This message can be seen as a challenge to some, but her calls for change are a welcome message to many audiences, including the LoboBITES audience. “I was surprised at how many people came up to me afterward to thank me for representing them in this way,” she said. “It was very encouraging.”

Guajardo said she seeks a greater awareness of the issue that casting calls often contain problematic stereotypes and misrepresentation.

“I respect people who work on films. It’s a lot of hard work, and not as glamorous as it seems.”

Change is possible through education and discussion, she said, and realizing that the issue isn’t clear cut.

“I think a lot of these issues stem from a lack of awareness,” she said. “It’s a very nuanced situation — two things can be true at the same time.”

Guajardo’s future plans are to finish her master’s degree next year, then pursue a Ph.D. to continue this work about representation in film. Confronting unpleasant truths can be spirit-draining, but she stays inspired because she believes that large shifts begin with convincing just one person.

“If you can make change in a little corner of New Mexico, you’ve changed the world,” she said. “It is possible to change people’s minds.”

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“How can I help as many people as I can?” That’s the question that guides **Solomon Gbara**, a senior in the Anderson School of Management, when approaching his studies and his future career.

Even as a teen, he envisioned studying political science in college and impacting the world through policy change. However, it was a teacher at Sandia High School who changed his mind. It was then that Gbara learned about the transformative power of entrepreneurship. His mission since then is to help people solve their problems through discovering pathways that empower as many people as possible to develop solutions that allow them to shape their destiny.

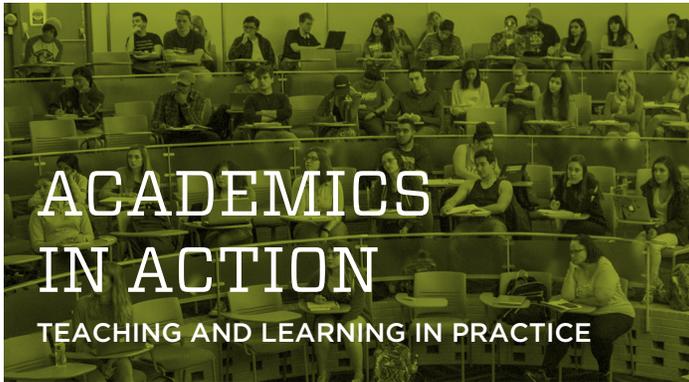
He is currently a marketing and innovation intern at RS21, a data science company in Albuquerque, and an entrepreneur in training at Dangerous Ventures talent lab. And those are just the latest two entries on his résumé. In addition to a variety of undergraduate research and internships (ranging from Meow Wolf to the Air Force Research Laboratory), he participated this summer in the European Innovation Academy in Rome for a three-week venture-building immersive experience led by mentors from companies like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft.

Through his Nigerian-born parents, Gbara has been instilled with the importance of creating community and authentic connection. “I make as many connections as I possibly can.” However, he makes it a point to create meaningful, deeper connections — not just collecting business cards or LinkedIn connections.

Although there are a lot of factors to being successful, Gbara says doing these three things keep him focused in the right direction: 1). Ask: “Can I do anything to help?” 2). Be on time. 3). Always make time for people.

After earning his BBA in May, Gbara plans to (not surprisingly) hit the ground running in pursuing his dream to ignite the New Mexico startup community. He sees great potential in the city's and the state's ability to create a vibrant entrepreneurial and startup scene and hopes to make a big splash in helping it thrive. He also wants to grow his own startup called TalentSync, a platform that helps students and rising professionals land internships and jobs with companies in emerging industries such as quantum, nuclear, advanced computing, and climate tech.

To him, the world is eager for those with valuable skills like the ones he learned at Anderson. The vision and ingredients are here. Now, it's just a matter of putting all the pieces in place. "Here is what is possible. Go out and get it done."



For this installment of Academics in Action, we asked our deans at both the Albuquerque campus and the branches, "What is your proudest accomplishment of fall 2025?" In their words, here is what they shared:

**Anderson School of Management - Dean Alina Chircu:**

I am most proud of the fact that the first initiatives of the new Anderson School of Management strategic plan are now taking shape: exploring new technologies for our courses, enhancing the structure and delivery of our programs, expanding and creating student experience initiatives (clubs, competitions, and more), elevating career

development support and events, jumpstarting new research hubs, and strengthening our relationships with external stakeholders - including the business community, alumni, and donors.

**School of Architecture and Planning - Dean Robert Gonzalez:** The School of Architecture and Planning is proud to have completed its 50th anniversary yearlong celebration in 2025 with honorific lectures, strategic planning retreats, and landmark events, including the inauguration of our new Predock Center for Design and Research studio spaces.

**College of Arts and Sciences - Dean Jennifer Malat:** I'm proud of the progress we have made on the new Humanities and Social Science Building this semester. The old Humanities Building has been demolished, and our design work is nearing completion. The new building will honor New Mexico's cultures and serve our students, faculty, and staff in a beautiful building.

**College of Education and Human Sciences - Dean Kristopher Goodrich:** I am most proud of the passion and generosity of our faculty, staff, and students toward the communities of New Mexico, and of the way we have successfully navigated multiple rigorous state and national program reviews this fall — demonstrating both excellence and responsiveness to state needs while actively living our College's strategic plan.

**College of Fine Arts - Dean Harris Smith:** The recent CCAT beam signing was a meaningful way for our college to express gratitude and recognize our supporters. It marks an important step forward in strengthening our commitment to the fine arts community and to inspiring and empowering current and future artists.

**Graduate Studies - Dean Maria Lane:** I'm really proud of the incredible research our graduate students displayed in this year's LoboBITES 2025 competition.

**School of Engineering - Jim and Ellen King Dean of Engineering and Computing Donna Riley:** I am extremely grateful for the generosity of Jim and Ellen King, who not only have endowed the dean's position but also this fall made an incredible investment in the future of the School with their \$1 million gift that established the Dr. John J. Russell Endowed Professorship. This provides the next LOBOMotorsports director with discretionary funds to continue the incredible legacy that Dr. Russell established during his over three decades at UNM.

**School of Law - Dean Camille Carey:** The School of Law is proud of its prominent role in the legal profession in New Mexico, and this year we are particularly proud of our strengthening ties to members of community who have generously donated significant time and resources to our students, to the tribes of New Mexico, and above all, the exceptional students who choose to pursue their legal education with us.

**Honors College - Dean Naomi Yavneh Klos:** The UNM Honors College is very proud of the deep commitment to engaged teaching and learning by our talented research-active faculty, as demonstrated by recognitions such as the Faculty Mentored Research Award (Jason Moore), the Luminaria Award (Leslie Donovan and Sarita Cargas), Myrriah Gomez's speech at the 80th Anniversary Commemoration Ceremony in Nagasaki (to which she brought several students), and the College's celebration this year of the 40th anniversary of two signature programs, Conexiones and Scribendi, which also won the Pacemaker Award from the National Scholastic Press Association.

**University College - Dean David Weiss:** I'd say it's our development and delivery of a successful response that helps our students in their preparedness for college-level math classes: UNIV 102, our new co-requisite course for MATH 1215: Intermediate Algebra.

**College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences - Dean Mark Emmons:** Inspired by Native American donors working with Native American curator Jolene Manus, the College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences is proud to have developed and implemented a donor agreement that affirms collaborative stewardship with Native American donors. For the first time, this agreement explicitly recognizes that U.S. Copyright Law and Fair Use provide limited protections for Native American cultural and sensitive information, creating a practice in the Center for Southwest Research and Special Collections that honors protections as defined by tribal codified and customary laws.

**UNM Gallup - Dean John Zimmerman:** For fall 2025, UNM Gallup is most proud of recent accomplishments associated with our strategic plan, including the launch of an innovation fund, our student satisfaction survey, an engagement plan for community partners, a culturally inclusive signage project, and enhanced employee recognition events.

**UNM Los Alamos - Dean Brent Pickett:** As part of our work to improve collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Services at our campus, we have moved to building a full-year academic course schedule and bring together Academic Affairs and Student Services personnel in discussions to revise draft schedules to reduce student course conflicts.

**UNM Taos - Dean Randi Archuleta:** At UNM Taos, our greatest pride is that everyone on campus feels welcomed, valued, and connected, supported by the collaboration and teamwork that define who we are.

**UNM Valencia - Dean Laura Musselwhite:** At UNM Valencia, we are proud of our ever-growing commitment to serve students' academic and non-academic needs, evidenced by expanded retention efforts, innovative student/faculty partnerships, and national recognition of faculty teaching excellence.



This is a reminder to all employees that UNM is subject to New Mexico's Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA). As the state's flagship university, UNM receives nearly 1,000 requests each year, many of which include requests for university employee emails. This means that the emails and records we create in the course of conducting University business may be subject to inspection and disclosure under IPRA, with limited exceptions. When a request is received, UNM's Custodian of Public Records works closely with UNM's IT team and other departments to identify and review records that may be responsive. For more information about IPRA and the University's process for responding to requests,

please visit this [FAQ page](#).

Before we say farewell until next year, there is just one more item to take note of. Over the coming weeks, please take a moment to check out the [fall Class of 2025 Inspiring Graduates stories put together by University Communication and Marketing](#). These stories are always a beautiful culmination of everything we do to support students, faculty, staff, and our overall academic mission. Congratulations to all of our graduates!