

# Rooted in place. Ready for the future.

February is often called "the month of love" but at UNM, our commitment to and affection for this place extends far beyond a single season. Our querencia — our deep connection to and responsibility for this university and the state we serve — is expressed not only in appreciation, but in action. We are rooted in place, grounded in purpose, and steadily preparing UNM for what lies ahead.

That preparation requires more than goodwill; it requires stewardship. At UNM, querencia is reflected in the discipline of planning, the clarity of our priorities, and the sustained work of strengthening our academic



## **Lobo spirit was on full display during UNM Day at the New Mexico Roundhouse on Feb. 4.**

foundation. As February comes to a close, I want to highlight several ways Academic Affairs and our partners are translating that responsibility into meaningful progress.

This year has already proven to be dynamic and meaningful. February marks Black History Month, a time to reflect on the rich history, enduring resilience, and profound contributions of Black Americans, whose stories are inseparable from both American history and the history of New Mexico. I had the honor of offering welcoming remarks at the 41st Annual Black History Month Kickoff Brunch and spending time with members of UNM's Black community — students, staff, and faculty — whose tapestry of lived experiences strengthen our institution in countless ways. Their presence and contributions are woven into the fabric of who we are as a university and as a state.

Care for an institution is also reflected in how we invest in our people. From faculty development and research support to teaching excellence, Academic Affairs continues to strengthen our "faculty ecosystem." In the coming weeks, we will share more about the integrated and sustained approach to faculty support.

In this issue, I highlight several initiatives that demonstrate our shared commitment to preparing UNM for what lies ahead — through thoughtful AI governance, strategic planning focused on undergraduate education to position UNM to meet New Mexico's healthcare workforce need, and to assess STEM teaching and laboratory spaces across campus.

Across all these efforts, a common thread is clear: readiness. Readiness to lead in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Readiness to strengthen undergraduate access to health professions. Readiness to assess the infrastructure that supports discovery and learning.

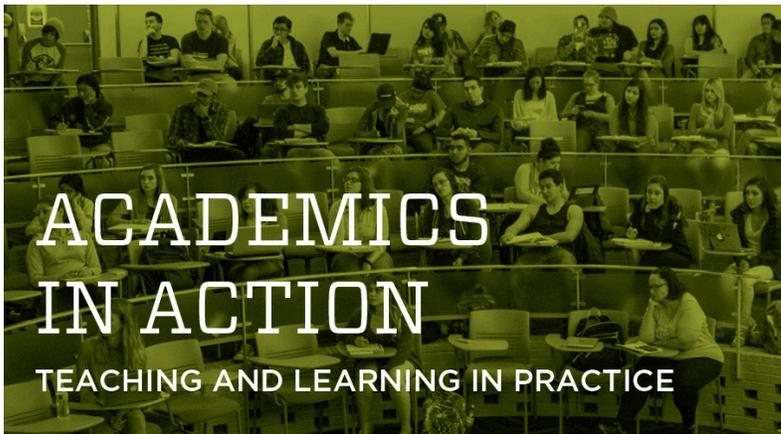
This is how we demonstrate care for an institution — not through words alone, but through disciplined preparation and intentional action.

Thank you for the many ways you demonstrate your care for UNM and for the state we serve. Together, we are building a university prepared not only for today, but for the generations to come.

With deep appreciation,

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

### **Rooted in our mission. Ready for AI's future.**



Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping teaching, learning, research and administrative operations across higher education. To ensure that UNM leverages AI ethically, responsibly and in support of its mission, the Artificial Intelligence Steering Committee has been charged by Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Rodríguez with coordinating AI strategy across the academic and administrative units of UNM. The committee's leadership will help ensure that AI advances UNM's mission of discovery, community engagement, and intellectual and cultural contribution. The committee is charged with guiding

institutional strategy on the complex and rapidly evolving issues across UNM.

The steering committee is chaired by Mark Emmons, dean of the College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences, and includes representatives from academic units, research, information technology, as well as a student leader.

## **Rooted in undergraduate education. Ready for health professions.**

Interim Provost Rodríguez this month also launched a task force to ensure that UNM is strategically positioned to support student enrollment and strengthen pathways for students pursuing careers in health care. The initiative called BELONG — Building Environments for Learning, Opportunity, Navigation and Growth — is a comprehensive, strategic enrollment and academic planning effort focused on health professions enrollment growth as well as its impact on undergraduate education, student support systems, academic resources and institutional capacity.

The task force will: assess current and projected enrollment; evaluate institutional capacity and resource needs; identify impacts on undergraduate programs and student support systems; develop actionable strategies with defined timelines, responsibilities and measurable outcomes; and recommend sustainable approaches to enrollment growth that advance student success.



“Addressing New Mexico’s health provider shortage — and preparing for the demand for care in the years ahead — is a clear priority at UNM,” Rodríguez said. “Through BELONG, we are examining the academic pathways, student support structures and institutional capacity to support students pursuing careers in health professions. At the same time, this work builds upon — rather than diverts from — our broader academic mission.”

BELONG brings together leadership from the Albuquerque campus, including the Health Sciences Center, and UNM’s branch campuses. The task force is co-chaired by Pamela Cheek, vice provost for student success, and Jennifer Love, chief of staff for the Office of Academic Affairs, in collaboration with national higher education partner, Encoura. A summary of the task force findings will be prepared by Oct. 31, 2026.

## Rooted in discovery. Ready to strengthen infrastructure.

UNM has engaged the Smith Group and FBT Architects to conduct a comprehensive, campuswide assessment of STEM teaching and laboratory spaces to better support student success, faculty innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The assessment will inform a long-term roadmap for strategic investments, including lab renovations, modernization, and potential new construction that enhance the teaching, learning, and research experience for students and faculty across disciplines.

These improvements will strengthen UNM's ability to remain competitive in securing research funding while preparing students for STEM careers in a rapidly evolving workforce. By aligning spaces with current and future academic priorities, this initiative will help ensure UNM's environments are safe, functional, and reflective of a flagship research institution.

This work is a key priority of Interim Provost Rodríguez and is integrated into the University's capital planning strategy, reinforcing UNM's commitment to providing high-quality spaces that support discovery, innovation, and student achievement for years to come.

The assessment is expected to conclude this summer. Questions about this initiative can be directed to Nicole Dopson, assistant vice president for academic resource management, at [nicole14@unm.edu](mailto:nicole14@unm.edu).

Teaching excellence is central to UNM's academic mission and to the success and wellbeing of our students. Supporting instructional quality is core to who we are as a flagship research university. We remain committed to strengthening teaching through professional development, recognition of excellence, and opportunities for collaboration across disciplines.

The annual UNM Spring Teaching Conference and Teaching Excellence Awards, organized by Center for Teaching and Learning in partnership with the Faculty Senate Teaching Enhancement Committee, reflect that commitment. This event convenes educators from across the university to engage with emerging pedagogical practices, share effective strategies, and recognize outstanding contributions to student learning. This year's conference will be held April 8-9, 2026. For schedule details and registration information, please visit the [Spring Teaching Conference website](#).

