



Querencia at UNM

THE PROVOST'S PERSPECTIVE FROM THE HEART OF UNM

A new semester at a moment of change

A new year and a new semester arrive at a moment of both opportunity and complexity. Across higher education and beyond, we are navigating change, uncertainty, and evolving expectations, even as our shared mission remains constant. I hope the winter break provided time to rest and renew — to return grounded, focused, and ready to meet this moment with creativity and resolve. Though the year is still young, the momentum of a fresh start remains strong, and 2026 is already unfolding with a clear sense of purpose.

As we begin 2026, I am pleased to share leadership updates that signal both continuity and renewed momentum. [Ellen Fisher, who has served as vice president for research since 2021, has been reappointed to a second five-year term.](#) Mary Gutierrez, UNM Taos chancellor since 2021, has also been reappointed to a second five-year term. These reappointments reflect both the strong foundation they have built and our confidence in the leadership they will continue to bring as UNM moves forward. Their work has strengthened our institution, expanded our reach, and positioned us well for what comes next.



This new year also brings renewed national recognition. Earlier this month, UNM received the [2026 Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement designation](#), a designation we first earned in 2020. This reaffirmation reflects the depth, strength, and evolution of our partnerships in the community, and the meaningful, measurable impacts those collaborations continue to generate. From education initiatives to efforts that promote health communities, these projects demonstrate how UNM's engagement evolves to meet emerging needs. This achievement is made possible by the dedication of our faculty, staff, and students, and I extend special thanks to Tim Castillo, director of the Office of Community Engagement, for leading this extensive effort. It is inspiring to see how this work continues to grow and adapt in response to new challenges and opportunities.

I am also pleased to congratulate the Associated Students of the University of New Mexico (ASUNM) for their leadership in advancing LoboLift. [LoboLift is a new, free on-demand ride service](#) between any location on UNM's central campus during evening hours. LoboLift is available Monday through Friday, 6 p.m. to 11 p.m., with the last

pickup at 10:45 p.m. Call 505-706-3430 and a driver will be dispatched to take you to your car or other campus location. This valuable service reflects ASUNM's strong sense of purpose in enhancing campus safety and ensuring every Lobo can move confidently across campus.

A new semester at a moment of change offers space for new voices to emerge, and this month's *Querencia* highlights faculty and staff who joined UNM this fall. These new voices are already shaping our campuses in meaningful ways. Their profiles reflect not only what they have accomplished so far, but how they are listening, learning, and engaging with New Mexico and Lobo culture — creating their own sense of *querencia* from Los Alamos to Bratton Hall.

Whether you are continuing your first year at UNM or entering your fourth decade, a new semester at a moment of change offers an opportunity to pause, reflect, and move forward with intention — to reimagine our work, strengthen our connections, and recommit to our shared mission. Thank you for all you do in advancing our shared mission and uplifting our students, faculty, staff, and the communities we serve.

With much appreciation,

Barbara Rodriguez
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs



Myka Curtis' relationship with the School of Law has come full circle. A recent law school graduate, Curtis returned to UNM in fall 2025 as associate director of admissions and pathway initiatives. In her role, she works closely with Director of Admissions and Financial Aid Renée Ferrell and the admissions team to support enrollment admissions growth, strengthen recruiting efforts, and expand outreach.

Curtis, who is Diné and a first-generation college graduate from San Juan County, N.M., brings a deeply personal understanding to her work. As a student, she benefited from the guidance of staff who helped demystify the law school admissions process — support she now strives to provide to others. She credits Ferrell with helping her recognize a defining factor in selecting a law school: knowing that the law school is genuinely invested in each student's success.

“Her simple question during my law school admission experience — ‘How can I help?’ — has since guided me in my first semester as a School of Law staff member. I ask that same question when I interact with prospective applicants. Listening to prospective students share their goals has been extremely humbling. It is rewarding to be surrounded by future lawyers with deep commitments to legal advocacy, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to support them on their journeys.”

Curtis is especially grateful that her role allows her to give back to her home state — and to Indigenous communities across New Mexico. “Sharing resources and guidance on admissions is one of the best things about my role,” she said.

As the semester unfolds, Curtis is most excited to watch first-year students begin their legal careers, build community, and engage with the School of Law's programs, events and traditions. “It will be a special experience to witness prospective applicants graduate from the law school and become mentors themselves,” she said.

Brent Pickett joined UNM Los Alamos as dean of instruction on August 4, 2025, bringing more than a decade of experience as a dean and professor from the University of Wyoming at Casper. Since arriving, he has immersed himself in the distinctive culture of Los Alamos — learning about its people, institutional history, and regional context. “I quickly came to appreciate just how supportive and welcoming the people around me are,” Pickett said, noting strong collaboration across UNM Los Alamos leadership, UNM’s Office of Academic Affairs, and fellow deans at Taos, Gallup and Valencia.

The transition has been a positive one for Pickett and his family. “My family and I have already fallen in love with northern New Mexico. The vistas, the cultures, and the food are unbelievable.”

Professionally, Pickett’s first semester has been marked by improved coordination between Academic and Student Affairs at UNM Los Alamos, with a clear focus on student success. By reestablishing regular collaboration with advisors, the campus refined class schedules to reduce time conflicts and support timely degree completion. At advisors’ request, the team also developed a full-year course schedule—an approach that quickly proved beneficial.

Looking ahead, Pickett will play a leading role in developing a new Academic Master Plan (AMP). “I look forward to contributing to a vision of how both the credit and non-credit parts of UNM LA can best advance our mission and contribute to the prosperity and civic life of our service region. After completing a new AMP, our branch campus will work on creating new programs and certifications, credit and non-credit, including in career and technical fields.”

Faculty in Focus

Brent Pickett



Faculty in Focus

Erin Shortlidge



Erin Shortlidge joined UNM from a combined faculty and administrative role at Portland State University to step into leadership as executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). In this role, she leads a wide-ranging portfolio of initiatives and programs that support teaching excellence and student learning.

Immersing herself in campus life — while guiding a center so central to UNM’s academic mission — has proven both energizing and demanding. Reflecting on her first semester, Shortlidge described the experience as one of growth and discovery. “My first-semester experience at UNM was exciting, a bit intimidating, but also oddly familiar,” she said. “I have been very warmly welcomed and am feeling that I made some good decisions along my path, along with some good luck, to end up here at UNM.”

Like many new leaders, Shortlidge quickly found that learning the rhythms of UNM — its students, systems, buildings, and acronyms — could easily fill an entire semester. Even so, she made it a priority to meet individually with every member of the CTL team during her first months on campus. “Through those conversations, I have begun to understand the depth of expertise within the CTL,” she noted. “UNM’s support for CTL allows for an amazing service that, ideally, can be accessed by anyone on campus.”

With this foundation now in place, Shortlidge is turning her attention toward the next stage of CTL’s evolution. “I am looking forward to continuing to walk alongside my CTL colleagues toward a more integrated center. I also plan to engage with others across campus and in the community to continue to optimize CTL’s reach.” Beyond her professional transition, Shortlidge is also embracing the personal experience of beginning anew in New Mexico. “I am also looking forward to getting to know more of New Mexico — in particular, the great food and the gorgeous mountains and sky.”



We are introducing a couple of new tools designed to make our work a bit easier. First, we have launched a new online form to request the provost’s participation in events. This form streamlines the process by gathering information needed to understand the request. [The “request the provost’s participation at an event” form is found in the dropdown menu titled People and Offices on the Office of Academic Affairs website.](#)

Another new tool you’ll want to become familiar with in the coming weeks is [LoboTime](#), UNM’s new timekeeping system, which goes live Feb. 21. All UNM staff — exempt and non-

exempt, full-time and part-time and on-call employees — as well as all student employees will use the UKG/LoboTime system. LoboTime replaces the current timekeeping systems, offering a more efficient and streamlined way to track time and manage leave requests. Key features include automated approvals, enhanced scheduling, centralized data, automated reporting, and integration with payroll. Training is currently available through Learning Central for supervisors, staff, and student employees. Additional resources and job aids can be found on time.unm.edu. Questions regarding LoboTime can be directed to time@unm.edu.

Querencia at UNM is a monthly publication of the Office of Academic Affairs. Find previous issues at provost.unm.edu. Do you have ideas for content? Please send them to querencia1@unm.edu.