

University of New Mexico 2010 Benchmark Survey
Shared Governance and Communications

Survey Background and Leadership Comments

In the fall of 2009, the Provost's Office of the University of New Mexico, with the approval of President David J. Schmidly, contracted with Research and Polling Inc. to conduct a comprehensive survey of university faculty and staff on issues of campus climate and shared governance. The survey was commissioned in response to a recommendation made by the University's accrediting organization, the Higher Learning Commission, in its 2009 findings.

Research and Polling Inc. conducted the online survey in March of 2010. The survey results would establish a benchmark and provide insight on how to move the institution forward. The University also contracted with Research and Polling Inc. for a series of focus groups that included the deans, senior faculty, junior faculty, staff leadership and university vice presidents. These were conducted during May and June of this year. As a result of the data derived from the survey and focus groups, Research and Polling submitted several recommendations for future action. The firm presented its final report to the University on September 1. The report has been posted online and can be found in its entirety at <http://www.unm.edu/president/communication-survey/>.

President Schmidly noted, "I know of no institution that has undergone such an intense internal examination of university governance. The data confirms that the steps we initiated as follow-up to the HLC accreditation report are moving us in the right direction."

"I look forward to working with each of the deans, with Faculty Senate President Rich Wood and faculty leadership, Staff Council President Merle Kennedy and staff leadership. Together we will address the issues raised in the survey and work to reduce tensions and build unity."

Faculty Senate President Richard Wood issued the following response to the report:

"The survey being released today was mandated by the Higher Learning Commission as part of UNM's re-accreditation, due to their concerns about the state of university governance at UNM. In the judgment of the faculty, the survey by Research & Polling Inc. was done expertly and to professional standards, with sound social science methodology.

“The survey accurately captures faculty and staff sentiments at the time of the study. It fully justifies the need for a change of direction at UNM, for which the faculty leadership have been making the case.

“We are working with the Administration and the Regents to address severe budget cutbacks, and to design an academically-informed strategic budget process. We are hopeful that these changes can lead to decisions that channel adequate resources to our mission: teaching our students and advancing economic development, community service, and a thriving cultural life in New Mexico. If we can get university governance right in these hard budgetary times, UNM can continue to make a difference to all New Mexicans. Otherwise, both students and New Mexicans more broadly will be hurt for years to come.”

Ursula Shepherd, Chair of the Faculty Committee on Governance, further added this statement on behalf of her committee:

“Faculty Senate President, Richard Wood, has issued a statement on the part of the faculty regarding this survey. As the Faculty Committee on Governance, we agree fully with his comments.

“This survey was developed in response to the findings of the Higher Learning Commission during the 2009 Accreditation Review. In that report the Commission stated that the university was at a serious impasse in its relationships between Central Administration and the Faculty and Staff. That commission stated that this situation must be addressed immediately and urged UNM to conduct a survey to get at the issues underlying this situation.

“We laud the UNM Administration’s hiring of a research group with an outstanding reputation for conducting high quality and trustworthy surveys and for its full support and participation in this study. The survey highlights problems and provides recommendations that can serve to help all of us move to a better understanding of shared governance at UNM and better practices for its success. We face serious budgetary challenges this year, and it will be important to use these recommendations as we work to address these challenges.”

Provost Suzanne Ortega stated, "I believe the actual process of doing the survey reflects the best of the academy. Multiple sources of input were used to help our contract researcher define objective and valid questions and a protocol that accurately reflected the underlying concerns."

“The entire activity was an exercise in shared governance,” Provost Ortega continued. “While there is much more to do, I am hopeful that we can apply what we have learned through this initiative to build inclusive processes for addressing the challenges and opportunities we are facing, as a university community.”

Evidence of positive steps already being taken are found in President Schmidly’s FY 2010-2011 goals and work plan, recently approved by the regents. Several of these coincide directly with recommendations contained in Research and Polling’s survey report. For example, they include the review of best practices from other institutions and also the development of a shared governance matrix that clarifies decision-making, involvement and authority. The President’s Goals and his work plan may be found on his website at www.unm.edu/president/

Merle Kennedy, President of the Staff Council, had this to say about the survey report:

“This survey reveals the depth of concern the staff have for this institution. As staff members work with the faculty and administration, we see our part in the academic mission as being important, yet many times not appreciated. Our role in university governance needs to be better defined and understood.

“President Schmidly and the Board of Regents have shown a desire to improve the communication and transparency of budget and operational issues in recent months. We look forward to helping that spirit of trust and respect to continue.”

On the effects of the recent economic crisis, President Schmidly remarked, “Since 2008, the University main campus has sustained state budget cuts approaching \$32 million. Most certainly, deeper cuts are inevitable. It is imperative that we pull together and work together to continue serving our students and the citizens of New Mexico.”

President Schmidly noted that while the survey results were sobering, he was heartened to see that the majority of faculty feels empowered in areas where the faculty has primacy according to traditional definitions of shared governance. These include such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. In these areas, faculty satisfaction was approximately 60 percent.

“Based on my conversations with faculty and staff, public comments made in the last several months and the results of the survey, it is clear they desire greater participation throughout the university’s budgetary process,” President Schmidly emphasized. “We have begun that process for FY 2012 and input is actively being sought. We continue our commitment to maximum

participation. However, the final responsibility for the budget, as stipulated in Regents policy, lies with the office of the President.

“The academic mission is primary,” he notes. “Since the budget cuts began, administrative functions of the university that support its teaching and research missions have been cut as much as 20%. At the same time, funding for instruction has actually increased 2.2 percent.

“We have protected the academic mission of the institution during the economic meltdown. Now we have embarked on a comprehensive program review to determine what is core to the mission and what support will be needed to insure that we fulfill our role as the Flagship University and economic engine for the state of New Mexico.”