



**UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO  
SHARED GOVERNANCE AND  
COMMUNICATIONS**

**FOCUS GROUP REPORT  
SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

***AUGUST 2010***

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## METHODOLOGY

This focus group research was commissioned by the University of New Mexico to supplement a quantitative survey of faculty and staff that was conducted in March/April 2010. The objectives of the focus groups were to provide more in-depth qualitative information about the climate, communications and shared governance issues surrounding the university, as well as to identify specific suggestions/recommendations of faculty, staff, deans and vice presidents towards moving the university forward in these areas. A 2009 Higher Learning Commission (HLC) report suggested that UNM conduct “a survey or other assessment measures of campus constituents intended to assess perceptions of the campus climate regarding progress in shared governance and communication.” It is anticipated that follow up research will be conducted in approximately one year to measure progress, if any, in these areas.

Neither the quantitative survey nor the focus groups included the Health Sciences Center faculty, staff or administration.

The five focus group sessions were conducted in May and June 2010. The duration of each session was approximately 2 ½ hours. Each focus group consisted of approximately eight to 12 participants.

The focus groups began with a summary presentation of the results of the online faculty and staff opinion survey conducted by Research & Polling, Inc. Then, from among eight to 10 themes, participants were then asked to select the issues they found most important for discussion. The results of this exercise guided the ensuing discussion. The focus groups were moderated by Marie Mound of Insight Out. Brian Sanderoff, President and Nancy Kastanek, Vice President, of Research & Polling, Inc. coordinated the focus group project.

Focus groups were conducted among the following populations:

- Staff leadership
- Junior faculty
- Faculty leadership/Senior faculty
- Deans
- Vice Presidents

## RECRUITMENT OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

### FACULTY LEADERSHIP/SENIOR FACULTY

This focus group was comprised of half Faculty Leadership and half Senior Faculty. Faculty Leadership participants were chosen because of their leadership position or were recommended by the Faculty Leaders. The Senior Faculty participants were chosen using random selection among all Senior Faculty members on the main campus who completed an online survey and self-reported (via a question in the survey) that they were at least *somewhat active* in shared governance activities at UNM. Consideration was taken to ensure that the focus group was comprised of a broad selection of faculty from different schools within UNM.

### **JUNIOR FACULTY**

The Junior Faculty participants were recruited using random selection among all Junior Faculty members on the main campus who completed an online survey and self-reported (via a question in the survey) that they were at least *somewhat active* in shared governance activities at UNM. Consideration was taken to ensure that the focus group was comprised of a broad selection of faculty from different schools within UNM.

### **DEANS**

All main campus Deans and a sample of Branch Campus Deans were recruited for this focus group.

### **VICE PRESIDENTS**

All Executive Vice Presidents and Vice Presidents at UNM were recruited for this focus group.

### **STAFF LEADERSHIP**

Approximately half of the UNM Staff Leadership focus group participants were recommended by the Staff Council President and the remaining participants were recruited using random selection among members of the Staff Council who completed an online survey and reported (via a question in the survey) that they have at least *somewhat active* participation levels in institutional and staff committee meetings. Consideration was taken to ensure that the focus group was comprised of a broad selection of staff members from different departments/schools.

## **SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are summary observations made during the focus group research, followed by recommendations developed by Research & Polling, Inc. based on the focus group observations.

### **CURRENT CLIMATE**

#### Observation:

The climate of distrust at UNM has created a situation in which the faculty/staff and Central Administration/Board of Regents view each others' statements with skepticism and suspicion, making it difficult for a collaborative environment to emerge. Faculty and staff identified numerous concerns and issues that they feel have contributed to the lack of trust between themselves and the Central Administration. Tremendous differences in opinion exist between faculty/staff and the Central Administration as to the underlying root causes of the current climate of distrust.

#### Recommendation:

*The Central Administration, together with faculty/staff, need to determine the best means to move forward in building a sense of trust, or at a minimum, creating an environment based on respectful co-existence.*

### **NEAR-TERM REASSESSMENT**

#### Observation:

This research project, which includes both a quantitative and qualitative assessment, identifies the set of problems underlying the tension between faculty/staff and the Central Administration and reports those suggestions made by respondents for remedying these problems. Time is needed to review suggestions and implement improvements.

#### Recommendation:

*In eight months to one year, revisit climate (shared governance, transparency and mutual understanding) to assess whether constituents and stakeholders perceive improvement.*

### **RESOLVING TENSION**

#### Observation:

All parties participating in the focus group discussions acknowledge the emotional tension between faculty/staff and the Central Administration/Board of Regents. Both sides acknowledge that rash public statements have harmed relationships. Both sides believe the other is not accountable for their words or actions.

#### Recommendation:

*In the effort to improve the overall atmosphere, all sides should communicate fact-based information only and show restraint in making unsubstantiated or emotion-based public comments.*

## SHARED GOVERNANCE

### Observation:

The current definitions of the role and responsibility of faculty in shared governance are vague, leaving room for misunderstanding and differing sets of expectations by Central Administration and the faculty.

### Recommendations:

*The Board of Regents and Central Administration, working in conjunction with deans, department heads and faculty leadership, need to clearly define the role and responsibility that faculty should play in shared governance activities.*

*Similarly, the role and responsibility of staff in providing input to the administration should be more clearly defined so that staff expectations can be met.*

## COMMUNICATION

### Observation:

Faculty and staff perceive the current style of communication between themselves and the Central Administration as lacking the necessary feedback for them to assess the influence of their voice in the decision making process. They seek greater collaboration and a more complete communication loop with Central Administration. On the other hand, from the perspective of some vice presidents, faculty and staff representatives who attend key meetings contribute to the disconnect in communication flow by not passing on vital information to their respective constituencies.

### Recommendation:

*Assess current communication mechanisms with an eye toward creating greater collaboration and development/refinement of communication avenues in order to complete the communication loop between faculty/staff and the Central Administration.*

## FINANCIAL

### Observation:

In the spirit of shared governance, faculty perceive their voice in budget development as inadequate. They feel their perspective is considered too late in the budgeting process to be effective.

### Recommendation:

*The Central Administration, with approval of the Board of Regents, should devise and formalize a system by which faculty can participate in the financial decision making process that begins with the earliest phase of budget development, i.e., revenue projections, and culminates in the final phase of budget formulation and approval.*

### Observation:

Whereas administrators feel all financial information is made available to faculty and staff, the faculty and staff feel too much information is withheld. The administration would like its efforts at transparency acknowledged; faculty and staff would like evidence of transparency.

Recommendation:

*In the spirit of transparency, this formalized process should require formal notification of faculty when a discretionary adjustment (transfer of funds outside the formalized budget) is made to the budget. Large shifts in the budget should include consultation with deans and department chairs whose area will be affected. Staff also should have a more defined and formalized means of providing input regarding budget development.*

Observation:

From the perspective of the Central Administration, faculty and staff are oftentimes unaware that the Central Administration is exercising transparency in certain areas (e.g., providing budget and other pertinent information online) and is including faculty and staff representatives in decision making efforts at the university.

Recommendation:

*Improve communication of Central Administration's efforts so that the greater faculty/staff community is made aware of Central Administration's actions to increase transparency and collaboration.*

Observation:

In spite of efforts to clarify issues of disparity in salary levels for faculty and administration relative to comparable universities, considerable frustration exists among many faculty members.

Recommendation:

*Public clarification of salary parity needs to occur. Faculty and staff leadership should continue to meet with the appropriate administrators to review data (reports) comparing UNM salaries with those of comparable universities and come to an agreement on interpretation of the data, then release the information to the larger university community.*

Observation:

The level of independence of three organizations (Lobo Energy, Lobo Development Corporation and UNM Foundation) needs to be assessed in terms of transparency and current placement with respect to fiduciary responsibility.

Recommendation:

*Review current level of independence and transparency of UNM Foundation, Lobo Development Corporation and Lobo Energy to determine whether sufficient accountability exists.*

## **EDUCATIONAL MISSION**

Observation:

Considerable concern is expressed over the decline in tenured and tenure-track faculty in recent years. Faculty, staff and deans feel this trend has increased workload among existing faculty, reduced availability to students, reduced student access to required courses, and decreased UNM's potential to attract research grants.

Recommendations:

*Reprioritize budgets in order to increase hiring of tenure-track faculty over the next few years to improve 'public service' to students and enhance UNM's potential for attracting research grants.*

*Clarify and emphasize the university mission as a research university by which budget formation should be guided. Streamline elements of the 'bureaucracy' that encumber the grant writing and grant administration process.*

Observation:

With regard to mission, faculty and Central Administration do not see eye-to-eye with respect to capital projects (ACC dorm development, Rio Rancho campus development) or reorganization efforts, e.g., Enrollment Management Division. From the administration's point of view, faculty is provided ample opportunity to participate in or be informed of those processes that lead to major decisions. From the faculty point of view, these major decisions come as a surprise and some are contrary to their wishes.

Recommendations:

*Acknowledge UNM's responsibility to meet the needs of the broader community (one million area citizens visit the campus for events each year). Ensure UNM is competitive with other universities in attracting students. These executive level concerns need to be evaluated and prioritized in the context of the overall university mission.*

*Improve collaborative processes between faculty/staff and Central Administration regarding mission-critical decisions impacting the university.*

## **MANAGEMENT MODEL**

Observation:

Central Administration and faculty/staff characterize the current model of decision making differently. Faculty and staff perceive the model as 'corporate', while administrators believe it primarily remains a 'traditional academic' model. This confusion over UNM's management model is in need of clarification.

Recommendation:

*In collaboration with faculty leadership, the Central Administration needs to develop a clear definition of the university's management model and articulate how the current management structure fits with the university mission.*

## **EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADMINISTRATION AND PROVOST POSITIONS**

### Observation:

The position of Executive Vice President for Administration is charged with being responsible for many of the university functions that do not fall under academia, including finance. However, the faculty and staff leadership perceive the position as having primary control and influence over financial decisions impacting academic programs and services. There is confusion and concern among faculty over the role and influence of the Executive Vice President for Administration position vis à vis the Provost position as it pertains to budgetary decisions affecting the academic mission of the university. This confusion exacerbates the faculty's feelings that the core academic mission at the university does not receive the top priority.

### Recommendations:

*Clarify to faculty and staff the specific roles, responsibilities and authority of these two positions and how they impact budgets and expenditures affecting the academic mission.*

*Constituents want clarification of the breadth of responsibility of the Executive VP of Administration to understand the impact of the position on academic program funding. Some participants suggested the position come under the supervision of the Office of the Provost to ensure greater consideration of academic needs. Others suggested that the Provost position have more influence over budgetary matters affecting the academic mission.*

## **PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

### Observation:

All parties are open to annual performance evaluations of the President and vice presidents. Members of the Central Administration feel performance evaluations will assist them in meeting their goals. Faculty recognize that they should only evaluate those administrators with whom they interact or those who have an impact on their respective departments.

### Recommendation:

*Develop an enhanced performance evaluation system for the President and vice presidents.*

## **MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

### Observation:

Some faculty participants feel some Regent members and Central Administrators do not understand the scope of responsibilities necessary to perform the job of full-time tenure-track faculty (counseling students, developing grants, etc.). Administrators feel misunderstood on issues pertaining to financial decision making. They feel too few faculty and staff understand budgeting. It was suggested that efforts be undertaken to educate faculty and staff on budget development and financial decision making.

Recommendations:

*Job shadowing was suggested by both parties as a means for Board of Regents members to learn the scope of work and responsibilities of faculty beyond teaching classes and for faculty to learn the scope of work and responsibilities of vice presidents.*

*Advise faculty and staff of the online availability of goals set for vice presidents. If desired, establish presentations by vice presidents at faculty and staff forums, including written material.*

**SELECTION OF REGENTS**

Observation:

Many participants, regardless of role, express concern over the historic politicization of the Board of Regents in New Mexico.

Recommendation:

*Senior faculty recommend the Governor establish formalized criteria for selection of Regents to reflect the academic perspective through such measures as appointing a retired faculty member or dean to each Board of Regents. They also recommend the Office of the Governor establish a formal vetting process by which Regent candidates are considered and ultimately appointed.*