

February 4, 2010

President's Message to the UNM Community

The Recent Past

As most of you know by now, confirmation hearings were held last Monday in Santa Fe for Governor Richardson's three nominees for UNM's Board of Regents. The confirmation process was carried out according to the Constitution of the State of New Mexico and resulted in all three of these individuals – Gene Gallegos, Jamie Koch, and Cate Wisdom – being confirmed by the Senate.

As part of the process, several faculty, students, and staff participated in the hearings. There was a lot of passionate discussion, both pro and con, and I want to commend and thank everyone who took the time to participate. These UNM colleagues did a great job of presenting their ideas and viewpoints with clarity and thoughtfulness. The process was a real-time example of two of UNM's Core Values in action: Everyone who participated was able to exercise her or his *freedom* of speech, and *diversity* of opinion that is absolutely essential to a strong society, both on campus and in the larger community.

The Present

And now, with the confirmation hearings behind us, we must turn our sights toward the future. Since I came to UNM nearly three years ago, we have encountered challenges, many of which could not have been predicted. We know that we will be moving into the future with some burdens that no one asked for, and no one deserves. And everyone in our community has been touched in some way by these challenges.

We know that the burden of the economic meltdown is leaving us with fewer resources to meet growing needs. We have been chastised for low graduation rates and questioned about our allocation of resources. We have been criticized for the size of our administration, challenged about our teaching loads, and called to question over our governance practices. Taken individually, these challenges are difficult, yet manageable. Taken all at once and we find the very ground upon which we are standing no longer feels secure. Some have become fearful, while others have become angry. Yet fear and anger, while understandable, will not provide a strong platform upon which to build for the future.

There is no question in my mind that the reality in which we find ourselves has changed us, demands much of us, and dictates that we cannot move forward doing more of what we did in the past. Rather, we must find new ways to understand our differences and invite all of our talents to the table. We must engage in new conversations, entered into with respect and in the spirit of building unity. I write to you today knowing that we must resolve to help each other to move past our fear, and to only use our anger as fuel for creativity, innovation, and a fresh determination to work together for the sake of those I am convinced we all hold dear: Our students.

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The Future and Call to Action

So as we move forward, I ask all of you to join me in a renewed commitment to focusing on our mission and to nurturing the authentic and collegial relationships with each other that will be essential if we are to effectively navigate the challenges that still lay ahead. Indeed, we will shortly be taking a serious look at how we can reduce our expenses in order to protect and invest in both faculty and in the classroom. We will also be working to improve processes to better ensure the accuracy, clarity, and communication of all university-related information. Finally, we will investigate new ways to support a culture in which the open and constructive sharing of aspirations and ideas becomes the norm.

During a speech delivered in Philadelphia during his campaign, President Barack Obama told his audience:

“We cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together – unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes... We all want to move in the same direction – toward a better future for our children and grandchildren.”

I believe we *can* successfully address our challenges, but that doing so will require the will to work on them together and remembering every step of the way that we do, indeed hold common hopes.

At the beginning of this message, I referenced *freedom* and *diversity*, two of UNM’s seven core values. As I close, I would like to highlight two additional values that I believe will be crucial touchstones for the UNM community in the coming months. The first, *respectful relationships*, will be key to our ability to build the trust and teamwork required to see us through the challenges ahead. And, *integrity* must be at the heart of all we do, serving as a constant reminder that we are accountable to our students, for managing our resources wisely, and for doing everything possible to honorably fulfill the promise of our mission.