



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE

Good morning.

Re-engineering the University

The challenges facing UNM and much of higher education across the state and the nation are coming to the forefront. The Albuquerque Journal Sunday edition featured an article that focused on the drop in statewide enrollment and the funding models of our higher education institutions. At the state level, the Legislative Finance Committee is conducting a study on the "Cost Drivers of Higher Education," while the Higher Education Department has launched an effort to look at the higher education system in New Mexico and its challenges. The Council of University Presidents will also be addressing the matter in their upcoming annual retreat. These activities confirm the need for a timely effort to re-engineer UNM. While external studies and efforts are useful to set the context, we have control over the ideas and resulting actions we take to position our university for health and growth. I will be updating the campus community on the status of our efforts as they develop, which will include a wide circle of participants. This Friday, July 14, I will begin the conversation at a university leadership retreat that includes the three Executive Vice Presidents (HSC, Academic Affairs, and Administration & Finance,) and will soon thereafter launch the effort officially at the upcoming Board of Regents retreat. There will be subsequent discussions with faculty senate, staff council, student government and other constituencies.

Graduation Rates in Context

As an example of our national propensity for measuring what can easily be measured, let us clarify how we measure graduation rates. This metric was originally designed for student-athletes, and then became the standard reporting metric for all students. It measures the rate at which first-time, full-time freshmen graduate from their starting institution in either 4 years or 6 years. As demographics have changed, this measure has become less and less appropriate for isolating the performance of universities, because it actually reflects the combined outcomes of incoming students' characteristics AND university effects. Nevertheless, by considering different segments of incoming students, one may see how universities perform according to this metric. The National Student Clearing House Research Center has conducted such an analysis. According to their data, starting with the 2010 freshman cohort, 59 percent of our full-time students completed their degrees in 6 years, at UNM or elsewhere. Of those who did not complete in that timeframe, 34 percent have dropped out while the remainder are still enrolled somewhere. The numbers are even higher for traditional students (full-time students 20 years old or younger): 65% completed their degrees within 6 years. While we still lag behind other universities of comparable quality, our numbers have improved considerably since the 2010 cohort and continue to rise.

UNM Research has Global Reach

Research is our opportunity to make a difference. It is open to everyone who desires to have a hand in the creation of knowledge, and is fueled by a diversity of ideas, approaches and perspectives. Just before the Fourth of July holiday, UNM promoted a groundbreaking research story on the [existence of supermassive black holes](#). UNM Department of Physics & Astronomy graduate student Karishma Bansal is the first-author

on the paper, '[Constraining the Orbit of the Supermassive Black Hole Binary 0402+379](#)', recently published in The Astrophysical Journal. She, along with [UNM Professor Greg Taylor](#) and colleagues at Stanford, the U.S. Naval Observatory and the Gemini Observatory, has been studying the interaction between these black holes for 12 years. Within two days the story garnered over 135 news mentions, with an online viewer reach of 382,506,891 and an estimated publicity value of more than \$5 million.* Of course, the value of research far transcends the value of publicity, but this is an excellent example of how important it is to make our accomplishments known to interested individuals worldwide. Congratulations to this exceptional team of scholars and the promotional efforts of our University Communication and Marketing (UCAM) news team!

Until next week,

Chaouki T. Abdallah

Acting President

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There is so much more that happens on the UNM campus than can be conveyed in a weekly message. To find out about the latest stories and events, please visit the [UNM Newsroom](#), the central source of news and information for the UNM community.