

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

TO OUR MAY 2020 CANDIDATES FOR GRADUATION

Celebrating the Class of 2020

Dear fellow Lobo,

As a member of the Class of 2020, you're part of a very special graduating group—perhaps the most unique in our nation's history. With nearly the entire world on pause and locked down during the COVID-19 pandemic, you've done something incredible: you've completed your college degree. For most of your final semester, you've finished courses with your professors and classmates reduced to the size of Zoom video windows, e-mailed instructors with your questions, and submitted your final papers with the push of a button. You and your fellow members of the Class of 2020 will long be remembered and admired for your courage, adaptability, and constant patience in the face of extraordinary circumstances.

But that courage and flexibility came at a cost. The very policies put in place to keep you safe and healthy also deprived you of a vital part of the college experience: your commencement ceremony. With large gatherings banned across our state and much of the nation, postponing commencement was a necessary but heartbreaking obligation—certainly one of the toughest decisions I've had to make in my four decades as an educator and as a university leader.

Still, it has always been my hope that we could celebrate your accomplishments together. Because graduation isn't just about earning the degree; it's also about ceremony—something we as human beings have been doing for thousands of years. Part of what makes us human is our desire to share and celebrate our experiences with others—with family, friends, and others in our pack. Commencement is an opportunity to stand and be recognized—and then, with diploma in hand, a time to celebrate.

As we so often do when pressed for creative solutions, we turned to you, our fellow Lobos, for guidance. We asked you, the Class of 2020, for alternatives to a large, in-person celebration this spring—and you not only responded with great suggestions, you also responded with grace and gratitude. Many of you also shared with me personal stories of your hard work, sacrifices and successes, and explained why a college degree—and celebrating it at commencement—meant so much to you. I am moved and inspired by hearing these stories, and I thank you all for sharing them.

After careful review and consideration of your suggestions and comments, University leadership has determined that **The University of New Mexico will conduct a virtual celebration of the Class of 2020 on Saturday, May 30 at 9 a.m. You will receive further details on how to participate from the University Secretary this week, including information on ways to personalize the experience, both online and through social media.** The virtual event does not replace an in-person ceremony and members of the class of 2020 will be invited to participate in a future in-person commencement.

April 27, 2020

To say that a virtual celebration is an imperfect solution would be an enormous understatement—and believe me, I'm as upset as you are that we won't be celebrating your new degree in person, in a crowded Dreamstyle Arena (Pit) filled with family and friends. Commencement is a life experience, a genuine rite of passage—and as such, it truly cannot be experienced virtually. There were many of you who proposed holding the celebration in-person in August—a suggestion we took very seriously. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing what our situation will be at that time, and whether it would be safe or advisable to plan for such a large event. Your health and safety—and the health and safety of those who have loved and supported you on your journey—will always be our first and most important priority, and it would be devastating to put anyone's health at such risk.

Please know, Lobos, that all of us at The University of New Mexico are here for you and want to celebrate your achievements as safely—and as loudly!—as we possibly can. I know that many of our individual colleges are also planning their own celebrations, so please watch your inboxes for information from the Dean of your particular college.

I admire the sheer determination you've shown to finish your degree under the most challenging of conditions, and I thank you for the courage and compassion you've shown even as your college experience was unexpectedly altered. The Class of 2020 will always have a special place in our University's history, and in our hearts.

Go Lobos!

Warm regards,

Garnett S. Stokes
President