



# OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF UNM

## 2026 State of the University Opportunities Ahead: A Conversation About the Future of UNM

President Garnett S. Stokes | March 23, 2026

Good morning, Lobos! What a joy it is to see so many members of the Lobo community gathered here this morning. It's my pleasure to welcome you to Keller Hall for this special look at Opportunities Ahead for The University of New Mexico.

However, before we talk about the future, it is our responsibility to honor our past:

*Founded in 1889, The University of New Mexico sits on the traditional homelands of the Pueblo of Sandia. The original peoples of New Mexico – Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache – since time immemorial, have deep connections to the land and have made significant contributions to the broader community statewide. We honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations and also acknowledge our committed relationship to Indigenous peoples. We gratefully recognize our history.*

Thank you. As you may know, this is the time of year when I normally stand before you to deliver my annual State of the University address, reflecting on all we've accomplished over the past year and advancing our mutual hopes and ambitions for the future. However, as this is the last opportunity I have as your president to have you here as a captive audience, I'm going to do something just a little different. More on that in just a bit—and I hope you'll indulge me for about 10 minutes to reflect on these last eight years.

### INTRODUCTION

When I arrived at The University of New Mexico in the spring of 2018, one of the very first things I did was travel across our magnificent and very big state. I wanted to listen and learn. I wanted to understand the communities that make up this remarkable place we love and call home.

Over the course of several months, I visited all 33 counties and a lot of cities and towns in New Mexico. Let me tell you, that's a *lot* of travel. But I loved it.

I met with educators and civic leaders, tribal leaders and business owners, alumni and families—and of course, many loyal Lobos who wanted to wish me well even as they told me in no uncertain terms that I had better take care of their alma mater! Those conversations were incredibly meaningful to me, and they shaped my understanding of this institution in lasting ways.

Again and again, I heard the same message: The University of New Mexico matters deeply to the people of this state. That message reinforced something I have said many times over the last eight years, something that's come to be incredibly important to me.



# OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

UNM is not simply in New Mexico; it is of New Mexico. That's the reason I always refer to us as The University *for* New Mexico. Everything we do—our teaching, our research, our patient care, our partnerships—is grounded in our roots in, and responsibilities to, the State of New Mexico and New Mexicans everywhere.

Let me explain.

## A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

I have said before that universities are places that must always look ahead.

Early in my presidency, we came together as a community to think carefully about the future of this institution. That work led to the development of *UNM 2040: Opportunity Defined*, and it's something I'm really proud of.

UNM 2040 is a framework that reflects the collective aspirations of our university and of the greater university community. It asks us to consider how we can expand opportunity for students, strengthen discovery and innovation, and deepen our engagement with the communities we serve.

Importantly, UNM 2040 reminds us that our work is never just about the present moment. It is about building a university that will serve New Mexico—and the world—for generations to come.

And let me add that creating this framework was a challenge because something *really* big happened at our university and to our planet that slightly delayed our work—or, at least, made it more difficult. It was a global pandemic.

It was a difficult time, with no small share of challenges. As the state's only academic medical center, we had an obligation to our patients, and to our community, to be as safe and as responsible as possible. By putting in place thoughtful policies and procedures, The University of New Mexico remained safely open.

I'm proud of all we did to keep New Mexicans safe throughout that time—a testament not only to our health care workers and our UNM leadership, but also our students who constantly adapted to changing situations. Ultimately, it was all of you who kept this university open and running and safely serving the public. Thank you for that.

## RESEARCH THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Another of the many ways we've brought a forward-thinking vision to UNM is through our Grand Challenges, which many of you have been involved with since their launch in 2019.

The idea behind Grand Challenges was straightforward: bring together researchers from across disciplines to address complex issues facing our communities. What we saw in response has been, and continues to be, genuinely inspiring. Faculty, students, and partners from across campus came together to work on projects focused on sustainable water resources, substance use disorders, successful aging, and other pressing challenges.

The initiative quickly grew, attracting significant external funding and generating new collaborations across our university. But perhaps most important, it demonstrated something that has always been true about UNM: When we bring our talents together—across disciplines and across campuses—we can make a real difference for the people of New Mexico.



# OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

As we look to the future, one thing is also certain: as premier Research 1 institution in New Mexico, we're going to be leading the way in ground-breaking research, whether it's increasing resilience on New Mexico's dry climate through our ARID Institute, leading the nation in innovation in quantum technology, or figuring out how much microplastic is in your brain . . . this is what we do. It's who we are.

## **SERVING STUDENT SUCCESS**

What really makes us the university that we are, however, is our students. Their aspirations drive our work, and their success defines our mission. Without them, there is no University of New Mexico.

Over the past several years, we've worked to strengthen the systems that support student success—enhancing advising, expanding mentorship opportunities, increasing the use of open educational resources, adjusting our curriculum, and addressing basic needs such as food security and housing.

These efforts have contributed to several years of encouraging enrollment growth, improved retention rates, and to increasingly strong incoming classes. But those statistics only tell part of the story.

What really stays with me are the countless moments I've spent with our students, whether in classrooms and laboratories, at cultural celebrations, at athletic events, or—perhaps most memorably—on commencement day.

Each of those moments remains with me as a reminder of the power of an education, and the joy we take in our unique shared culture as Lobos. Every graduate who crosses that stage in The Pit embodies the hopes, the promises, and the potential of this university. Our legacy lives on through them as students and as loyal Lobo alumni.

## **HEALTH CARE AND SERVICE TO THE STATE**

I alluded to this earlier, but one big thing that sets us apart from other institutions in the state is the unique responsibility we have as the state's only academic medical center.

Through the UNM Health Sciences Center and UNM Hospital, we provide essential care to communities across New Mexico while educating the next generation of health professionals. And at our School of Medicine, we're preparing the next generation of health care providers that will be so critical to our state in the coming years.

Over the past eight years, we have expanded programs in nursing, pharmacy, and public health, strengthened clinical services, and continued to grow our research enterprise. And the work continues. The new Critical Care Tower at UNM Hospital literally stands as physical testament to the work we do, ensuring that New Mexicans have access to world-class care. And before too long, it will be joined by a new, state of the art School of Medicine facility that will double the number of medical graduates in our state.

But as impressive as our new facilities are, what matters most are the people inside it. I am continually in awe of the physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and health professionals—many of them trained right here at UNM—who dedicate their lives to bringing our unique brand of compassionate care to our communities. I am truly grateful for all that you do.



# OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

## AN EXPANDING CAMPUS SKYLINE

Walk across our campus today, and you'll see the many ways our university continues to evolve. There are new research and academic facilities. There are countless new spaces for collaboration and creativity. We have a revitalized Duck Pond that has once again become a gathering place at the heart of our Albuquerque community. We have a beautiful new welcome center. Our ROTC students have a new home. There's a new humanities complex under way on mid-campus, and the Center for Collaborative Arts and Technology is slowly going up on Central. Each of these projects reflects our commitment to creating an environment where teaching, learning, and discovery can flourish.

But—again—what makes this campus so special has never been these amazing buildings themselves; it's the remarkable people inside them: the students, faculty, and staff who bring this university to life every day.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES

Another of the defining strengths of The University of New Mexico is our deep connection to the communities we serve. From our branch campuses in Gallup, Los Alamos, Taos, and Valencia, to partnerships with tribal nations across the state, and collaborations with industry leaders and our national laboratories . . . UNM's work extends far beyond the boundaries of our campuses.

That commitment to engagement was recognized when the University received the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, an honor that reflects years of collaboration and partnership. For a public research university, that kind of engagement is essential. It's a critical part of our mission, and a key part of our identity.

There's another big component of our community identity where we've come a long way over the past eight years, and that's Lobo Athletics. Since 2018, we've experienced a steady resurgence marked by fiscal accountability, competitive success in multiple sports, academic achievement, and renewed Lobo pride.

More recently, football's return to bowl eligibility and men's basketball's momentum have energized fans and changed the very culture of sports in our community and our state. All of these gains reflect a department increasingly aligned with UNM's mission—developing student-athletes and strengthening community pride across New Mexico.

## GRATITUDE FOR THE LOBO COMMUNITY

I am incredibly proud of all that has been accomplished since I arrived here in 2018—whether it's putting in place our Grand Challenges, investing in athletics and campus infrastructure, advancing our university as a global leader in quantum technology, or helping to guide the implementation of UNM 2040.

While all of these things happened during my presidency, none of them happened alone.

I'm grateful for our faculty, who shape our identity through their knowledge, research, and mentorship . . . for our staff, who bring the energy and commitment that keep our institution moving forward every day . . . for our Lobo health care professionals provide compassionate care that touches lives across New Mexico . . . and for our remarkable students, who embody what it truly means to be a Lobo.



# OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Through all that we've accomplished together, I have been so, so fortunate to work alongside an extraordinary leadership team that guides this university with vision and integrity.

And now, as we continue looking at where we've come from as a university and where we're going, I'd like to continue this conversation by inviting some very special guests from the Lobo leadership team up here on stage with me.

Please join me in welcoming to the stage Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Rodriguez, Executive Vice President for Health Sciences and CEO of UNM Health System Mike Richard, and Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration Teresa Costantinidis.

**Conversation between President Stokes and UNM Executive Vice Presidents on key topics including: UNM2040; Research at UNM; Improving Health Care for New Mexicans; Campus Skyline (Capital Projects); Safety initiatives; Student Success; and Lobo Athletics.**

## CLOSING REMARKS

This has been a wonderful conversation, and I'm more optimistic about the future of UNM than ever. Barbara, Mike, Teresa . . . thank you for being here with me.

And my thanks to all of you for the opportunity you've given me to serve this institution. Thank you for the work you do every day on behalf of our students and our communities. And thank you for all that I know you will continue to accomplish in the years ahead.

Serving as your president has been the greatest honor of my career. While it's been the toughest job I've ever had, it's also been the most joyful—and that's because we've done this work together. I am grateful for your support, your pride in UNM, and your belief in what this University represents.

My husband Jeff and I will always be proud to be part of the Lobo family—and I have to tell you, the other week, the UNM Alumni Association presented me with what is perhaps the most special award I've ever received when they made me an honorary Lobo alum. That means more to me than you can possibly know.

It has been a tremendous privilege to be part of UNM's story with all of you—and, more importantly, it's been a joy to be a part of the Lobo family. Thank you for making me a part of such an extraordinary pack.

Thank you all for coming today, and Go Lobos!