



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE



March 30, 2020

Good afternoon.

As we enter the first week in April, we are continuing to adapt to how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed all our lives. I know we are all worried about how the situation will affect us – not only here at UNM but also in our families and communities. On behalf of The University of New Mexico, I hope that you, your loved ones, friends, and colleagues are healthy. Our thoughts also go out to those who are ill, and we wish them a full recovery.

I want to thank all of you for your patience and realization that this is uncharted territory that has included daily and sometimes hourly modifications, as well as [a rapid transition to remote instruction and learning](#). I also want to thank our devoted healthcare providers, essential services employees, faculty, students, staff and administrators who have been working around the clock to face this crisis as one university – they are inspiration to us all.

Virtual Town Hall Connects Lobo Community

On Friday, members of University leadership and I were joined by over 2,400 attendees, including those who joined by phone, via Zoom for a [virtual town hall to discuss UNM's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#). We received over 300 questions in advance of the Town Hall and more than 100 during the event. Thank you so much for sharing your concerns and for letting us know which issues are most important to you. Many of the most frequently asked questions were answered, and some are still being decided. Three of the top questions were:

- **What is the plan for the postponement of commencement, convocation and other recognition ceremonies?**

There is understandably much anxiety about our announcement that the Spring 2020 commencement exercise and associated events would be postponed to a later date. This was a tough announcement to make because it is our favorite event of the year. Seeing our graduates—along with their families, faculty and staff who have supported them along the way—exuberant at reaching the end of a gratifying journey is a monumental event at any university and we would not ever dismiss its significance.

While we cannot set a specific date for the events at this time, I hope we can aim for late summer or early fall. We are anxious to learn of innovative ways to recognize the class of 2020, so if you have ideas please submit them to the [University Secretary](#).

- **How will operations continue for the university beyond the extended Spring Break that was designated to end April 5?**

We quickly took action to extend Spring Break two weeks beyond schedule to align with planning at APS and CNM, as well as to comply with statewide directives. It has become increasingly clear that this crisis and our improvised operations will extend much beyond that.

We have already made the decision to transition all possible coursework to digital formats and informed students that they should not return to campus from Spring Break if they have a safe alternative living arrangement. Therefore, the bulk of the online educational delivery plan is being continued through the end of the semester. Decisions about summer school, followed quickly by the fall semester, are currently being deliberated.

We also immediately adhered to guidance and directives from the governor and the State Department of Health to limit personal interactions and assign most employees to work remotely. Going forward, we'll need to keep the campus safe, maintained and operational so we can quickly restore all functions when conditions allow. This will require continuous assessment of our employees' well-being, human resources policies and financial circumstances, just to name a few considerations.

- **What do we know about the financial impact and future budgetary concerns we face?**

These questions weigh heavily on everyone's minds and we cannot predict the fiscal impact on our world, nation, state or university. We do know it will be substantial, and we know UNM won't be alone in this predicament.

The key variables in this equation are how long this economic pause will last and how long it will take to recover. I have started these conversations with the Governor's Office, the Department of Finance and Administration, the Legislative Finance Committee and the Higher Education Department. There is no question that things have taken a stark turn from just a few weeks ago when the State of New Mexico FY21 budget was signed into law. It appears FY20 will conclude without much disruption but as Senator John Arthur Smith stated, "We're not looking at 'if' there will be a special session but when." The primary intent of that legislative agenda will be to address the very large shortage in projected revenues for FY21.

We are planning strategies with other universities on how best to approach what we may be facing. Naturally, there are different perspectives. As always, we will advocate for what is best for UNM to be able to carry out our multi-faceted mission. There unquestionably will be cuts, the severity of which will depend on the previously stated variables. Our strategy will not be much different than other legislative priorities where we will value our people foremost and the support that allows them to carry out our primary educational,

research and clinical goals. I am certain that public research universities will offer multi-dimensional solutions to this crisis, just like we have during past periods of disruption in our history.

2020 Census Day

Census Day 2020 falls on Wednesday, April 1. This date is not a deadline but rather a reference point for our citizens to tell the Census Bureau where they reside. The 2020 Census will determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and influences how hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds are allocated for critical public services like emergency response, schools, hospitals, roads and bridges over the next 10 years.

Local efforts to reach citizens in person may not be possible because of social distancing in the coming weeks, so the UNM Complete Count Committee will be hosting a [virtual block party](#) on April 15 to raise awareness in a creative way. I encourage all of you to respond to your Census invitation online, by phone or by mail.

I'd like to conclude by saying that what we are experiencing calls for us to [be our best selves with care and compassion](#). We are all connected as Lobos and we will come out stronger together.

Sincerely,

Garnett S. Stokes
President