



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE



April 27, 2020

Good afternoon.

The Spring Class of 2020 will be one for the history books—perhaps one of the most unique groups of graduates our country has ever seen. In the midst of a global pandemic, we've asked our students to adapt and improvise—taking courses with their professors and classmates reduced to the size of Zoom video windows, seeking answers from instructors over e-mail, and submitting exams with the push of a button. Our students have been remarkably resilient in the name of public health and safety, and I'm grateful to all of them, and all of you, for your patience and dedication.

But for the Class of 2020, the very policies put in place to keep everyone safe and healthy deprived these Lobos of a vital part of the college experience: their 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.

Graduation isn't just about earning the degree; it's also about ceremony. The desire to share and celebrate our experiences with others—with family, friends, and others in our pack—is part of what makes us wonderfully human. Commencement is an opportunity to stand and be recognized—and then, with diploma in hand, a time to celebrate with others.

We polled the Class of 2020 for ideas for alternatives to a large, in-person celebration this spring—and they responded with great suggestions. Many also shared with me personal stories of their hard work and sacrifices, explaining why a college degree—and celebrating it at commencement—meant so much to them. Reading their comments was a genuinely moving experience.

After careful review and consideration, 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.](#) Students will receive further details on how to participate in the virtual celebration from the University Secretary this week—but please keep in mind the virtual event is not intended to replace an in-person ceremony. Members of the class of 2020 will be invited to participate in a future “live” commencement when we can be assured of a safe date for the ceremony. Additionally, I know many of our individual colleges are also planning their own virtual celebrations, so students should watch their inboxes for more information.

To say that this is an imperfect solution would be an enormous understatement. Commencement is a genuine rite of passage—and as such, it truly cannot be experienced virtually. We very seriously considered the suggestion of holding a live celebration in August; unfortunately, we still have no way of knowing whether it will be safe or advisable to plan for such a large gathering. The health and safety of our community will always be our first and most important priority, and we cannot put anyone's health at risk.

I admire the sheer determination it has taken for our students to complete their degrees under the most challenging of conditions. The Class of 2020 will always have a special place in our University's history, and in our hearts.

Coming Soon: 2020 University-Wide Risk Assessment

The Internal Audit Department, UNM Health System Internal Audit, and central campus and Health Sciences Center compliance offices are working in collaboration to conduct a joint 2020 University-Wide risk assessment. Risk assessment methodologies will be used to select University colleges, schools, centers, branches, departments, and programs to be included in Audit and Compliance work plans.

On April 30, risk assessment questionnaires will be submitted to selected personnel using UNM's Opinion survey system. The 2020 University-Wide Risk Assessment questionnaire will include both rating and open-ended questions, which will allow identification of risks that may exist within business units across the University.

The audit and compliance process and the resulting recommendations are important tools that can help reduce risk and increase success for UNM. If you are a UNM employee selected to complete a Risk Assessment Questionnaire, please take advantage of the opportunity to make a careful assessment of the risks your unit faces—we can't fix or improve what we don't know about.

Lobo Innovators Honored by STC.UNM

Great creative minds have been hard at work at STC.UNM. Case in point: over the last year – between March 1, 2019 and February 29, 2020—57 UNM inventors received issued U.S. patents. This diverse group of innovative Lobos ranges from first-time inventors to those with multiple patents, and from postdoctoral students to Regents' professors—but they all have one thing in common: their ideas are helping grow the innovation economy of New Mexico and the United States. This Tuesday, [STC.UNM is recognizing these inventors at its 2020 Innovation Awards](#); and while the current lockdown meant the in-person gathering had to be cancelled, STC.UNM is—appropriately—embracing innovation and technology to honor its inventors at an online ceremony. Congratulations to all of our Lobo honorees—and I can't wait to see what you all come up with next!

UNM IT Provides Essential Foundation for Remote Work and Learning

When The University of New Mexico entered a period of limited operations in mid-March, questions arose about how everyday processes would move forward, and whether UNM could quickly and effectively make the transition to remote instruction. Fortunately, the [UNM Information Technology \(IT\) Department had answers](#), moving swiftly to stand up and expand frameworks it already had in place. By doing so, IT ensured the UNM community, and partners across the state of New Mexico, that we have the technology, infrastructure, resources and support needed to work and learn remotely—and that we could continue to carry out our mission as seamlessly as possible.

Please stay safe and healthy—and as always, keep checking [our coronavirus website](#) for the latest information on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our FAQ page is updated regularly, and we're trying to respond to any questions you may submit as quickly as we can.

Let's go Lobos!

Garnett S. Stokes
President