



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE



July 20, 2020

Good afternoon, colleagues.

It's time for a frank conversation.

As our state and nation continue to adjust to the realities of life—and loss of life—during a global pandemic, the impact on state economies and state budgets has been nearly as devastating. New Mexico, which started the year looking at encouraging increases in revenues and state spending, has seen revenues spiral downward by nearly \$2 billion in the face of COVID-19. To meet the new fiscal realities, the state legislature and governor recently revised the 2020 budget to cut spending by \$415 million.

Those cuts directly affect the bottom line here at The University of New Mexico. Overall, UNM and its Health Sciences Center (HSC) are looking at a loss of nearly \$44 million. That figure includes a reduction of more than \$22 million in state funding on the main campus, and an anticipated \$11 million in lost tuition and fees due to declining enrollment, while HSC will see a loss of \$11 million in state revenue, including declining clinical physician fees.

Making things worse, additional revenue shortfalls are expected due to COVID-19 related expenses and a reduction in housing, food service, parking and event revenue. And just as disappointing, the state also withdrew funding for the 4 percent salary increase for main campus employees that was approved in the earlier budget.

In light of these mandated reductions, we are forced to go back and re-examine our budget and our spending priorities for the coming year. Last week, the UNM Board of Regents voted unanimously to approve a Budget Readjustment Request (BAR) to reduce the FY21 budget, initially approved earlier this Spring, to bring it in line with the loss in revenues.

There is no easy way to say this: these reductions, while necessary, present serious challenges both to the University and to the entire UNM community. We are continuing to look for ways to absorb these funding shortfalls without compromising our underlying mission—which includes providing our students with access to a quality education in as safe an environment as possible.

I know, too, that during this time of uncertainty our students have questions about the cost of tuition and the value of hybrid instruction. The tuition level that was established by the initial FY21 budget in the Spring—a slight increase to the base tuition over the prior year level, though for some students a larger financial impact due to a reduction in the discount for taking more credit hours—is expected to remain in place. We remain committed to working with our students to provide them with access to the resources they may need to continue their education during a time of hardship. We are also closely examining student fees to see if there may be some savings that can be passed on to students.

Additionally, as we prepare our students for this Fall's hybrid instruction, we're being very flexible in helping our students put together their schedules to make them as comfortable with their educational experience as possible. If students prefer to take an entirely remote course load, we'll help them do that. Or, if they prefer to take classes in person, on campus, we can do that, too. And if they'd like to take some in-person and some remotely—a true “hybrid” schedule—we can accommodate that as well. Our advisors have really stepped in to help students build or modify their Fall course schedules to meet both their learning and their health needs. We're continuing to monitor COVID-19 outbreaks and trends around the state, and if we need to revert to an entirely remote mode of instruction to keep students safe, we'll work with students to make the process as painless as possible.

And let me say a quick word about distance learning: while online instruction is a different instructional experience, it's not necessarily an inferior one. Online instruction is not a Zoom meeting. Our instructors still work just as hard to prepare for their classes. They still develop curricula and reading lists; they still lecture and take questions and lead discussions. Talking with students, we've found that, for some courses, they actually prefer online instruction, as having an entire course pre-loaded into the system permits them to progress at their own pace, and seek feedback as needed. Interestingly, when we first went to entirely online instruction in March, we found that fewer classes were dropped. If there's anything good to come out of this experience, it's that our students are adapting to different teaching and learning modalities.

Given the current economic outlook, it is likely we should brace for additional reductions in this year's funding—and likely next year's as well. However, our faculty, staff, and students have proven remarkably adept when it comes to confronting the obstacles presented by life under a global pandemic, and I am confident we'll respond to our fiscal challenges with similar strength and adaptability.

Guidelines Now Available for Student Housing, Students and Faculty for Fall 2020 Semester

The Fall 2020 semester is only a month away, and there has been significant work done across the many areas of The University of New Mexico, including our Health Sciences Center (HSC), to responsibly “Bring Back the Pack.” With our students beginning to move into dormitories and student housing in only a few weeks, we're pleased to be issuing some critical guidance for both new and returning Lobos on how to adjust to living safely on campus under new health and safety rules.

The [Residence Life and Student Housing Re-entry Plan](#) provides students and their parents with information they need on how to safely check-in and move into housing, outlines cleaning plans and familiarizes students with new health and safety protocols, and explains the [14-day limited interactions and self-monitoring](#) process for our students who arrive from out of state and need to comply with New Mexico public health mandates. [Summary guides for students](#) and [faculty](#) have also been developed and communicated in anticipation of the new academic year. I know this is a lot of information – we will be providing frequent reminders via email, social media and signage in the weeks ahead. If you have a specific question, please search the [FAQs](#) and if you still can't find what you are looking for, here is where you can [submit your question](#).

It's July 20. Here's What You Need to Know.

New Guidance This Week:

- Residence Life & Student Housing has issued its [Student Re-entry Plan](#) for students moving into student housing, quarantining (when necessary), and adjusting to life in student housing under new health and safety protocols.
- Guide to [Fall 2020 at UNM for Students](#)
- Summary Guide to [Fall 2020 at UNM for Instructors](#)

Continuing Guidance:

- Summer courses, which began on June 1, are being conducted remotely.
- HR has issued [guidance for staff](#) and [departments](#) on safely returning to campus.
- [Updated travel guidelines](#) have been issued for University employees.
- HR has released *Bringing Back the Pack: Phasing in Our Return to Full Operations Training*. This training is required of all employees before they return to work on campus, and has been automatically assigned in Learning Central.
- Guidance has been issued for [conducting research in both on- and off-campus facilities](#).
- Facilities Management has established [a request process to re-open individual departments](#), designed to organize and prioritize the areas that can move towards an increased on-campus presence. Once a department's Return to Operations plan has been approved by the appropriate dean/director, the next step towards increasing specific department's on-campus presence will be to [submit a formal Facility Re-open Request on the Facility Re-open Request website](#).
- UNM and HSC are continuing with a [daily e-mail screening policy for all employees](#).
- To the extent possible, please continue to work remotely. Some faculty and staff will need to return to campus to carry out their functions; please do so in a safe and responsible manner, following [worksite protocols](#).
- Physical distancing and the use of masks continue to be required whenever individuals are working or spending any time around others. This is in accordance with state health protocols as well.
- The Main Campus and Medical/Legal Bookstores are both open, though with [limited hours and public health/safety restrictions in place](#).
- Parking enforcement has resumed its [normal summer schedule](#).
- Lobo Athletics has issued [guidance for the Lobo football home opener](#) at University Stadium on August 29.
- The [Fall 2020 instructional schedule](#) maintains the same start and end dates for the term, and the same number of instructional days as required by our regional accreditor, but will spread the two fall break days out over early October and early November, including making election day a non-instructional day. We will also end in-person instruction just before Thanksgiving. Finals will take place from December 7 through December 12.
- To help slow the spread of infection, we are continuing with our [policy of self-reporting](#) either symptoms of or a positive test for COVID-19.
- We're also constantly updating our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) as new questions arise.

Parents of Pre-K-12 Children Encouraged to Take Planning Survey

Along with our own Fall instruction plans, we are also closely following guidance coming from the New Mexico Public Education Department regarding its fall K-12 educational plans. We know many of our staff, faculty and students are parents of school-age children, and [this survey](#) will assess how many people might be impacted by the new K-12 fall class schedules, as well as providing feedback on strategies to mitigate the impact on students and employees.

Lobo Athlete Organized Fundraiser, Seeks School Supplies

Even in this time of hardship, Lobos continue to step forward to look out for their community. Lobo athlete Nehemiah Cionelo, who will be a redshirt sophomore for UNM's cross country team this fall, recently organized a charity run, called [Footsteps for Families](#), benefitting New Mexico families adversely affected by COVID-19. As part of this effort, Footsteps for Families is also collecting school supplies for families in need; donations may be dropped off at the Native Health Initiative Office in the UNM School of Law Building on Thursday, July 23 and July 30, from 3-5 p.m.

(Virtual) Lobo Living Room Welcomes Coach Danny Gonzales

With the currently scheduled Lobo football home opener just around the corner, the UNM Alumni Association is hosting a virtual Lobo Living Room, featuring Lobo Head Football Coach Danny Gonzales, on Thursday, July 23, at 6:30 p.m. Coach Gonzales will be joined by the Voice of the Lobos, Robert Portnoy, and former Lobo Football player Preston Dennard for a conversation with UNM Alumni Association President Chad Cooper, with the latest on the upcoming season, players, coaches and more—including some UNM-related prizes for attendees. Space is limited to 500 guests, so [RSVP for the event today](#) to receive an email with the Zoom Meeting link and password to join this Virtual Lobo Living Room.

Remembering John Lewis

Finally, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the passing of a genuine and towering American icon, Congressman John Lewis, who passed away last Friday at the age of 80. John Lewis embodied America's struggle for equality, civil rights, and empowerment of the disenfranchised. One of the original Freedom Riders, he led the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma in the name of voting rights, marched on Washington, D.C. with Dr. Martin Luther King, and stood on the front line of the war on Jim Crow laws, paying for his passion and principles with his own blood. Rightly called the "conscience of the Congress" since his election to the House of Representatives in 1986, John Lewis has always stood up—and at times taken a knee—for freedom, equality, and dignity. "Be on the right side of history," he said recently—and John Lewis was our history. May he rest in *power*.

As always, stay safe, stay healthy, and let's go, Lobos!

Garnett S. Stokes
President