



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE



October 04, 2021

Good afternoon, Lobos –

What a thrill it is to look to the horizon on these clear autumn mornings and see the Albuquerque skies filled with colorful hot air balloons as the city celebrates the return of the [International Balloon Fiesta](#) after the 2020 COVID-related cancellation. After two years away, we're glad to have the Fiesta, and the balloons, back.

I'm even more thrilled, however, to celebrate another long-delayed major event that's just around the corner—one that we, too, had to cancel in 2020 because of the pandemic. Get ready to [mark your calendars and save the date](#), because this December we're going to celebrate commencement in person for the Class of 2021 and the Class of 2020.

We'll be doing things a bit differently this year to ensure we adequately recognize and celebrate our Lobo graduates. For starters, we'll be holding two commencement ceremonies, one for our graduate students and the other for our undergraduate students. For graduate students, commencement will be held **Thursday, December 16**; for undergraduates, we'll be celebrating on **Friday, December 17**. Both events will take place at 6 p.m. in University Arena, bringing commencement back to The Pit for the first time since 2019.

You'll be able to sign up for commencement beginning on Monday, October 18; more information, with plenty of details -- including the availability of regalia and announcements -- will be arriving in your inboxes soon.

I can't begin to tell you how happy I am that we're able to celebrate events together again. You helped make this happen by doing your part—by getting vaccinated and looking out for your health and well-being and that of our pack. My thanks for all you've done, Lobos, and please keep wearing your mask indoors at all UNM facilities. Please also follow all other health-related protocols in our community; you may have seen, for instance, that [Popejoy Hall is now requiring proof of vaccination to attend this season's performances](#). As we continue to organize public events for the fall and winter, it is more critical than ever that we remain vigilant about public health, as even a small outbreak could jeopardize our plans for any in-person celebrations.

Congratulations to our UNM Class of 2021, and a special thanks to our Class of 2020, who will, at last, have the opportunity to cross the stage in person and celebrate their achievements with their fellow '20 and '21 graduates in The Pit. We're proud of all of you, and we're glad our pack is finally back.

U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo to Speak Tomorrow Night

Critically-acclaimed poet and former UNM student and faculty member, and first Native American U.S. Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo, will be the [featured speaker at the 10th annual Rudolfo and Patricia Anaya Lecture on the Literature of the Southwest](#), sponsored by the UNM English Department. Harjo will be speaking at the

National Hispanic Cultural Center starting at 7 p.m. tomorrow, with a book signing afterward. The lecture is free and open to the public, but please [reserve a ticket](#). Tuesday's lecture is a special one, as it's the first Anaya Lecture since the passing of Rudolfo Anaya in 2020. I can't think of a more appropriate way to celebrate his memory than by hearing from another of our distinguished literary Lobos.

Biden Nominates Lobo for Assistant Secretary Post

I am delighted to announce that [Robert Otto Valdez](#), Professor Emeritus of Family and Community Medicine and Economics, has been [nominated by President Biden to serve as Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation \(ASPE\)](#). In this role, Valdez will advise the Secretary of Health and Human Services on policy development in health, disability, human services, data, and science; and will provide advice and analysis on economic policy. Professor Valdez was a founding director of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and presently serves as Associate Director of UNM Health Sciences Office of Community Health. My warmest congratulations to Professor Valdez on this exciting nomination; you do the entire Lobo community proud.

Registration Open for Annual Mobile App Contest

As Lobos, innovation isn't a novelty; it's an inherent part of who we are and how we view the world around us. Every year since 2012, the UNM Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and [Central New Mexico Community College \(CNM\)](#) have been hosting an app creation contest, challenging Lobo students to develop an inventive and creative app—and maybe even win a cash prize for doing it. [The 2021 Mobile App Contest](#) provides support to UNM students with an interest in the coding and commercialization of apps, pairing them with expert mentors and community coding meetups. [Registration is open until October 31, 2021.](#)

Maximum Annual Leave Accrual Extended Through June 2022

Life under COVID has meant 18 months of altered plans, cancelled vacations, missed visits with family and friends, and delayed wedding, anniversary, and birthday celebrations. As a result, many of our faculty and staff have seen their annual leave go unused, with additional hours accruing monthly. Under our existing policy, once employees have accrued 308 hours of leave, any hours beyond that are forfeited on December 31, 2021. However, I understand and appreciate that over the last year, our employees simply haven't had the ability to use annual leave -- and that some of you might now be scrambling to use those additional hours before the end of the year. We want to give you the time you need to take a well-deserved break, without needing to rush. Therefore, I am pleased the leadership team has approved an extension that will permit employees to [use additional accrued leave by June 30, 2022](#). We appreciate the sacrifices you've made since the first case of COVID-19 appeared in New Mexico, and we want to give you the time you need to take that long-planned vacation you had to cancel. Enjoy it and thank you.

Have a good week, and let's go, Lobos!

Regards,

Garnett S. Stokes
President

