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Wednesday Communiqué, 3/7/2012

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WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

March 7, 2012

Honors College: You can find the proposal for the UNM Honors College at <http://provost.unm.edu/documents/honors-college-proposal.pdf>. The proposal makes the case for a residential honors college, and presents the associated implementation plan and costs. It is important to note that this is not a Provost's initiative (it was actually started by President Schmidly & Provost Ortega) and that many members of the UNM community have contributed to the first report and to the current one. The Honors College plan has received favorable press of late but the road remains long and difficult. The next step in the process is to design the curriculum (a task conducted by the faculty), to get the necessary approvals, and to fund the multiple stages of the College.

How to Cultivate Genius? "Why are some periods and places so astonishingly more productive than the rest?" was the question asked by David Banks in the article: The Problem of Excess Genius found at: <http://www.monad.com/sdg/Journal/genius.html>. In a recent article in Wired magazine titled "Cultivating Genius" by Jonah Lehrer, one possible cause is immigration and open society: A 1% increase in immigrants with college degrees lead to 9-18% rise in patent production. Another is articulated by T.S. Eliot, "The great ages did not contain more talent. They wasted less." This points to the need for education and to provide access for all, since we cannot afford to waste the contributions of a potential Albert Einstein, I. M. Pei, or Maya Lin (or Madeleine Albright)!

Unintended Consequences: In many cases, the original application of a new invention may not end up being the most effective (e.g. the Internet). In others, unintended (or more accurately unpredicted) consequences are much more important than the intended ones (see for example <http://aei.org/speech/politics-and-public-opinion/elections/how-congress-evolves/>). Nelson Polsby was a University of California professor and a scholar of Congress. In trying to study how Congress evolved, he came across the work of Willis Haviland Carrier, "the father of cool." "In 1902, freshly graduated from Cornell University, Carrier was in a fog-cloaked station, waiting for a train. The gloom spurred him to contemplate the properties of temperature and moisture. By the time his train arrived, the young engineer had invented air conditioning. The physics of cooling had been understood since ancient Romans piped water through their villa walls, but it was Carrier's 1906 patent for an "Apparatus for Treating Air" that led to today's near-ubiquitous climate-control systems." "Air conditioning caused the population of the Southern states to change," wrote Polsby in his 2002 essay, *How Congress Evolves*. So according to Polsby, by simply making the climate in the south more bearable in the summer, an inventor caused a massive political change!

Cost of Education at UNM: How does UNM compare to other universities in the cost of providing education to its students? I keep discussing this topic as we near a decision on our 2012-2013 budget. While it is shortsighted to measure the cost/benefit of higher education by focusing on short-term metrics (such as the cost of a degree by graduation date), it is nevertheless important to know how UNM stacks up. A detailed comparison prepared by our division of enrollment management is found at: <http://provost.unm.edu/keeping-college-affordable.pdf>.

What Scientific Concept Would Improve Everybody's Cognitive Toolkit? This was the 2011 edge.org question and has resulted in the book "This Will Make You Smarter: New Scientific Concepts to Improve Your Thinking." As usual, answers to the question are provided by economists, scientists, artists, authors, thinkers, etc. It makes for a very interesting and easy read, since one can read each contribution separately.

A PDF version of this communiqué is available at: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>. Your feedback and input are welcome at: provost@unm.edu or at the electronic town hall: <http://connectu.unm.edu/>.

Sincerely, Chaouki Abdallah, Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs