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President's Weekly Perspective

Good Morning.

As many of you know, my education is in psychology, not classical history so I am not generally given to quoting Greek philosophers. However, I recently came across a quote from Aristotle that has been on my mind. I'd like to share with you because I think it's highly relevant to what we are trying to do here at UNM.

Aristotle said, "Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

I especially like the last line and it's caused me to ask myself how we can ensure that at UNM our focus on excellence is ingrained in everything we do; that it is a habit, and not just a periodic act.

Before the Labor Day break, I attended the ASUNM Senate meeting, where I had an opportunity to meet and speak with the student body leaders. Following my comments we had an opportunity for some Q & A. I was impressed by the thoughtfulness and insight of the questions posed to me. A couple of related questions in particular struck me. I was asked, what are we doing at UNM to ensure that we are attracting the best and the brightest students in New Mexico to UNM, and what are we doing to support those students who are exiting the university?

In our pursuit of excellence as a university, these are important questions to consider. We have begun the process of developing a culture that instinctively appeals to New Mexico's best and brightest students with the initiation of the Foundations of Excellence program which we are implementing in collaboration with the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education. The first year matters and it is vital to establish a solid academic framework in the freshman year. Under the leadership of Associate Provost Greg Heileman, we are evaluating and determining how to restructure the freshman year experience to instill the excellence that comes from training and habituation.

The next step is the development of the Honors College. Kate Krause has been named dean of the Honors College, in addition to her role as dean of University College. She will be leading the transition of the current UNM Honors program into a full Honors College that will be the fulcrum for academic excellence at UNM.

Finally, when these elements are in place, Associate Vice President Terry Babbitt will take the lead on a rigorous recruiting program that will identify and communicate with high performing students across the state, from every community, to inspire them to come to UNM. Bringing bright minds to UNM to be challenged, to be encouraged, is acting rightly, not only for UNM but for New Mexico and for the expansion of the knowledge economy that will be the keystone of New Mexico's economic development renaissance.

Excellence matters at UNM, and for those of you who were at our first football game against the Southern University Jaguars, you had a chance to see excellence in action. The Southern University Marching Band came to New Mexico to regale us with their high energy, dynamic performance during half time. The SU band has a legendary status and has played venues including Presidential inaugurations, Super Bowls and Radio City Music Hall. Although Hurricane Isaac posed a threat, the band persevered in spite of the challenges, in the process demonstrating what it means to have excellence ingrained as a habit. It was truly a treat to start our 2012 football season off by hosting the SU team and the band.

If you have not had a chance to see the gracious [letter](#) published in the Albuquerque Journal from Southern University Chancellor James L. Llorens, you can read it here. Thank you to all of you who helped make our guests feel welcome.

A special thank you also to Scott Carreathers, the executive director of the Office of African American Student Services, and Cathy McGill who helped make this event happen. Scott recognizes the need to build community among students, faculty and staff at UNM. Historically Black Colleges and Universities like Southern University are steeped in the traditions of African American culture and exemplify the type of community that we are working to build at UNM among our African American students, staff and faculty.

Finally, for those of you who noticed that I haven't yet answered part two of the question posed me at the ASUNM senate meeting, stay tuned. We are currently working on an economic development summit to be held later this month. At that point I will share with you what's been learned about preparing our graduates for a life after UNM.

In the meantime, have a great week, and Go Lobos!

Bob