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Richard Peck - Biography

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RICHARD PECK

◆-----◆ **15th University President**

Served 1990 - 1998

Born Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 3, 1936



After a conscientious committee composed of UNM students, faculty, administrators, and regents completed an intensive search, Peck turned out to be everybody's All-American, the first choice of almost anybody who had anything to say about the selection of UNM's fifteenth president. When Peck assumed the job on July 1, 1990, he became the fifth president in eight years.

While appointed in January 1990, Peck did not actually sign a contract until April 16. Robert Sanchez, president of the Board of Regents, signed it April 25. The board's final approval came on May 8. The contract stipulated that Peck was also to be a full professor with tenure in the English Department.

The university held its first formal inauguration of a president since 1968, when Ferrel Heady took office. On November 8, 1990, nearly four thousand people attended the celebration in University Arena. It was an academic ceremony with distinctly New Mexico touches. Eagle dancers from Laguna Pueblo led representatives from

more than a hundred colleges and universities dressed in full academic regalia, and a mariachi band provided the recessional music.

Education

Peck earned a bachelor's degree at Carroll College in Wisconsin and master's and PhD degrees in English from the University of Wisconsin.

Career

Peck served in the Marine Corps as a helicopter pilot from 1954 to 1959. Early in his academic career, he taught at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Virginia, and Temple University. In 1984, Peck was dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama, moving on to Arizona State University as provost and vice president for academic affairs in 1988. In June 1989, he became the interim president at that institution, but he was not a candidate for the permanent post.

University Activities

Inclusion of provisions to repair and renovate the President's House was a key item in Peck's contract. He and his wife, Donna, had decided that they would resume the tradition of living on campus, but the house needed work inside and out. Renovations were completed in time for the Peck's to move in by Thanksgiving. Although the total area was more than fifty-seven hundred square feet, the family living area on the second floor was modest at about nine hundred square feet. The Peck's requested that the house be renamed University House with the intent that it be used to bring together university and community members from Albuquerque and throughout the state, as well as serve as a meeting place for national and international visitors. It was to become a major entertainment center for guests and a showcase for the university.

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The Honors College was created, which was enhanced by the announcement of the Carruthers Chair in Honors, with a \$1 million endowment from Burlington Resources Foundation and named for Governor Garrey Carruthers.

The University Archive, which the regents established in 1985 when they approved a proposal from Paul Vassallo, dean of the libraries, acquired a new archivist, Terry Gugliotta, in 1987. In addition to photographs, minutes, building plans, and countless reports and official publications, the archive houses every book ever published by UNM Press, original drawings of the university seal, and oral histories of important figures in university history.

In November 1994, New Mexico voters approved a constitutional amendment mandating that a position on the board of regents of each state university be reserved for a student.

In 1992, the departments of Journalism and Communications merged. It was hoped the effort would cut the costs of teaching, scholarship, and research.

A long-term historical translation and editing undertaking, the Vargas Project, continued in 1993. The purpose of the multi-volume project was to make available in English the papers of don Diego de Vargas, whose governorship of colonial New Mexico had begun in 1692. According to Professor Jonathan Porter, History Department chair, UNM could boast that it had the leading program in the world on the American West.

The UNM Bureau of Business and Economic Research was fifty years old in 1997. The program provided research and analysis on economics and demographics, including the census, and published a monthly statistical report. The Bureau's FOR-UNM

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Economic Forecasting Service developed short-term projections of employment and personal income in New Mexico.

In 1981, the tuition for a full-time New Mexico resident undergraduate student was \$666 per year. By 1991, it had more than doubled to \$1,453. The rationale was salary increases for faculty and staff, the need to hire more faculty members, increased emphasis on research and graduate study, and higher costs for almost everything, especially library materials. Peck fought to keep expenditures at an appropriate level that reflected the national and state fiscal recession of the early 1990s. An increase in administrative salaries in 1992 created some concern among faculty and staff whose pay lagged far behind that of peer institutions. The following year, the legislature approved a 6 percent increase in the university's appropriations and the regents enacted an 8 percent increase in tuition.

Governor Johnson vetoed a \$2.5 million of expenditures for UNM programs in his 1995 budget. Johnson stuck with his pledge to force all state agencies, including higher education, to cut funding by 3 percent. This led to the UNM regents imposing another 6 percent tuition raise, which provoked noisy protests from student groups.

In 1998, the four-year court battle between UNM and its employees ended when the New Mexico State Supreme Court ruled that UNM faculty and staff had the right to collective bargaining.

In 1994, the New Mexico Legislature approved \$700,000 for the Graduate Student Association, \$200,000 for computer hardware and software, and \$500,000 to fund research, travel, and seminars.

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Even better news for New Mexico scholars came with the legislature's establishment of the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship in February 1997. The first awards were to be distributed that fall, and it was estimated that twenty-eight hundred 1997 high school graduates would be eligible. The New Mexico Commission on Higher Education was to administer the program, and the money would come from a surcharge on sales of lottery tickets. Peck told the regents: "This is potentially the most dramatic thing for higher education that's been done in New Mexico in years."

There was a slight decline in UNM enrollment between 1993 and 1996, when the fall total was 30,534, down 665. Many attributed the decline to more rigorous admission standards and the elimination of the General College. Peck sought to reverse this trend by personally visiting the state's high schools to recruit students. The results were good, as in the fall of 1997 the UNM freshman class was 2,050 students, the first time since 1988 that UNM had an entering class topping 2,000. In all, the total enrollment on the UNM Albuquerque campus in August 1997 was 22,361 students. Many were attending because of the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship program.

Aside from the almost yearly rallies and protests against increases in tuition, most of the student demonstrations during the Peck era revolved around the 1991 Persian Gulf War in the Middle East.

Peck established three major goals: to see UNM offer the best undergraduate education in the Southwest; to become a model in diversity of student, faculty, and staff populations; and to seek intellectual and educational partnerships in Latin America to make UNM the university for the Americas.

In 1992, a U.S. Department of Education survey showed that New Mexico ranked third nationally in percentage of minority students. Only Hawaii and Washington

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D.C. had more. Further, enrollment of African Americans had increased by 8.33 percent for the 1991-92 school year, and they accounted for 481 of the Albuquerque campus's total of 24,199 students.

A milestone in the history of UNM was reached in March 1994 when the university changed its employee benefits to add same-sex partners to health, dental, and vision coverage as well as basic life insurance policies. The transition was smooth, and within a year 125 domestic partners were receiving benefits.

A five-year study on the number of Hispanic and Native American faculty at UNM, which Peck had ordered as soon after he took office, was released in October 1995. The number of full-time Hispanic faculty at UNM was four times greater than the national average, and the number of Native American teachers five times greater. As of March 1995, Hispanics made up 8.9 percent of UNM's full-time faculty, while full-time Native American teachers represented 1.7 percent. The report also showed that 43.7 percent of UNM's full-time faculty were women, 2.9 percent better than the national average.

On the national scene, the UNM School of Medicine began receiving well-deserved recognition in 1994 when U.S. News and World Report rated it thirteenth in the nation.

In 1993, the legislature funded a locum tenens program, assigning UNM medical faculty, staff, and residents to fill in for sole practitioners, many in small communities, so they could attend conferences or take vacations. In 1997, the first class of physician assistant students began studying to serve in rural areas of New Mexico.

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UNM's General Library was ranked among the nation's top fifty for the second straight year by the Association of Research Libraries. The library also received a generous gift from Regent Larry Willard and named the reading room for his parents.

One of the greatest treasures of UNM was the University of New Mexico Press. In 1991, the paperback edition of *The Education of Little Tree* was number one on the New York Times paperback bestseller list.

The mid-1990s saw the completion of the UNM long-range master plan, which projected a maximum enrollment of thirty-five thousand and an additional 4.9 million square feet of facilities. It also provided a design framework and guidelines for long-term development of Central and North Campus. The plan had its origin in the "UNM 2000" vision statement.

In 1993, land adjacent to Winrock shopping center was sold for \$2.3 million, with the proceeds going to a scholarship endowment.

The easternmost part of what had been Yale Park was intended as the site for the new University Bookstore. In addition, a high-rise parking structure complex was to be built just south of Johnson Center. In October 1993, the regents voted to cancel the parking garage and focus on the bookstore. One of the major contentions was wiping out what had been considered a greenbelt on the south side of the main campus. In July 1995, Mayor Martin Chavez offered the city water reservoir at the northeast corner of Yale and Redondo as an alternative site for the bookstore. A city public works official said plans to give UNM the reservoir site had been in the works since 1987. Peck declined the offer, saying that paperwork and site preparations would take too much time. He added that the final decision lay with the regents. Finally, after more than two years and \$5 million, the 48,500-square-foot bookstore opened on July 22,

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1996. On the corner of Central Avenue and Cornell Drive, it was about one-third bigger than the old bookstore, which was to be divided between the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Fine Arts.

The university was also working to bring added research dollars to the state, which in turn would create new private-sector jobs and attract venture capital. Much of that effort was concentrated in the hundred-acre Research Park on its hill overlooking downtown Albuquerque and close to the airport, Sandia National Labs, and Kirtland Air Force Base. By 1992, an additional one hundred thousand square feet of office and laboratory space had been built. By the summer of 1993 the Research Park's tenants included the Social Security Administration and several university programs. The park's success showed business and industry that the university was ready and able to form strong partnerships. Soon there were contracts for research and development in materials fabrication, an optoelectronics program, the Business and Assistance and Research Center, and the UNM Technology Ventures Division. In March 1993, the Board of Regents approved a lease with the Sandia Foundation for the building of a microelectronic research center and parking structure near the Pit. Once completed, it joined such high-tech facilities as the Advanced Materials Laboratory and New Mexico Research Institute buildings at the Research Park.

The university formed a nonprofit corporation, the Science and Technology Corporation in 1995. Its goals were to market faculty inventions, support increases in corporate-sponsored research, and participate in New Mexico's economic development. The STC licenses technology developed at UNM, including optics, high-performance materials, medical devices, and drug-discovery tools.

The Center for High Technology Materials was dedicated in 1997. It was one of five Centers of Technical Excellence the New Mexico Legislature created to strengthen collaboration among UNM, private industry, and national laboratories with the goal of providing more jobs. Research would be conducted into fiber optics, computer components, fabrication technologies, and manufacturing techniques for products to create, store, or transfer information.

By 1997, the Anderson School of Management's weekend MBA program had produced four hundred graduates since 1971, the Small Business Institute was training students to work in terms for start-ups, and UNM had one of the nation's few master's degree program in manufacturing.

The most massive construction project during Peck's administration was the \$11 million Dane Smith Hall, the first new classroom building on the UNM campus since Mitchell Hall in 1951. Dane Smith Hall houses forty-two classrooms, including four instructional television classrooms, and computing facilities, a copy center, and a snack bar.

Other new construction included an electrical distribution substation for the North Campus and an athletic training facility on the South Campus.

The Board of Regents in June 1990 voted to approve \$2 million for a facelift for Zimmerman Library. The project entailed remodeling the original west wing of the library into the Center for Southwest Research, renovating the lobby, circulation desks, and catalog areas, adding an entry on the north side, and improving services with an additional \$5 million from federal funds.

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Other changes on the main campus included the addition to Hokona Hall in 1994 of a new access ramp for the handicapped, new ceilings in the corridors of the Zuni wing, and new windows and heating and air conditioning for all rooms.

Other renovation projects included Popejoy Hall, where acoustics were improved, and the foyer of the Fine Arts Center, Riebsomer Wing of Clark Hall, Johnson Center, and the University Hospital's outpatient clinic. The Continuing Education complex received an addition, and the Cancer Center was expanded.

In March 1991, construction had begun on the first phase of the Yale Mall between Redondo Drive and the Center of the Universe sculpture west of Ortega Hall. The Cornell Mall linking the Fine Arts Center, the Student Union, and the College of Education Complex also was renovated.

Constructed in 1916 as the Chemistry Building and now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, one of UNM's oldest buildings had housed art studios and classrooms before being transformed into the Engineering and Science Computer Pod.

In the fall of 1996, the School of Architecture and Planning took over a remodeled office building south of the Central Campus. It would have classroom and studio space and house the Design and Planning Assistance Center.

The University also became a local leader in recycling, when a pilot project to recycle as many paper products as possible began in March 1991.

The American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta recognized UNM's six hundred acres as an arboretum in 1994. Three tours were developed to showcase more than two hundred plant varieties.

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During Peck's administration, enrollment at UNM's Gallup Branch had passed twenty-six hundred. An adult basic education facility and a classroom/computer lab had been built and a bond issue approved to fund a building for the Zuni Campus and expand the Gallup Campus.

At the Los Alamos Branch, a learning resource center was added, and the student services building was renovated. Training partnerships were in place with Los Alamos National Laboratory and Northern New Mexico Community College.

The third phase of the UNM Valencia Branch learning resource center was completed. Voters approved funding for a new community/student center at the branch, which was one of many educational institutions developing new programs to help welfare recipients transition into careers.

Enrollment at the Taos Education Center reached 887 in the fall of 1997, and more than two hundred classes were offered in the eighty-acre site with its \$2.1 million building. The Klower family of Iowa had donated land for the campus to the town of Taos in 1993 shortly after UNM took over the Taos Education Center from Northern New Mexico Community College.

Also in Taos, the Harwood Museum of Art reopened after a \$1.2 million renovation project. Called perhaps the best-kept secret in Taos, the museum displays works by members of the early 1900s Taos Society of Artists as well as American Modernist works.

In March 1994, the UNM men's basketball team won the Western Athletic Conference championship, with a final conference win over Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

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On August 8, 1997, Peck announced that he was stepping down as president at the end of the spring semester of 1998. Then, after a year-long sabbatical, he planned to return to UNM as a professor of English.

Excerpt from William E. Davis' Miracle on the Mesa.

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