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## Wednesday Communiqué, 10/24/2012

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## WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUE

October 24, 2012

*"It's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that makes our hearts sing."*-Steve Jobs

**Optimization with Constraints:** In navigating complex situations, humans are constantly trying to improve their approach and solutions. In other words, they are trying to optimize. In all cases however, such optimization is conducted under constraints. Last Friday, President Frank went before a faculty town hall in order to answer questions and to engage in a conversation about new budget models. During some of the exchanges, I was struck by how much the principle of optimization of constraints was displayed: from questions about budgeting to comments about the mission of UNM and how resources should be allocated, it was obvious that while all attendees shared the same objective, their information and constraints varied greatly. In the case of a University, the hard constraints should be our common values as a public research university. Softer, but still important constraints are imposed by our geography and our dependence on the State of New Mexico and student tuition for funding. It is not, for example, realistic to expect that we can reduce the number of our incoming students by one third in order to improve our graduation rates, since that will run against our mission as well as reduce our funding. It is also not realistic to admit more students who may not be academically prepared, as that will jeopardize both our funding (at the output end) as well as our research mission (more efforts and resources going to remediation versus supporting research).

**The Yale Report:** was written in 1828 by the faculty of Yale College to defend the classical curriculum. "The report maintained that because of Yale's primary object of graduating well-educated and well-rounded men (sic), it should continue to require all of its students to follow a single, thorough curriculum, with Latin and Greek literature at its core. Before the release of the report, there was a gradual movement toward a more open, elective course of study at colleges around the United States. The highly-influential report, which is said to have set back curricular reforms by decades, tipped the balance at universities across the United States, including at Princeton and Harvard, toward a conservative approach to higher education." Today, we are again at a time where curriculum and the purpose of college education are being debated. While the Yale report erred in one direction, let us make sure we do not err in the opposite direction. To read the report, check out: <http://collegiateway.org/reading/yale-report-1828/> and <http://collegiateway.org/reading/yale-report-1828/curriculum>.

**No Limits to Learning:** "The Club of Rome (<http://www.clubofrome.org/>) was founded in 1968 as an informal association of independent leading personalities from politics, business and science, men and women (see how things changed over 140 years?) who are long-term thinkers interested in contributing in a systemic interdisciplinary and holistic manner to a better world." One of their most influential reports was a 1979 (reissued in 1998) report titled "No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap." The report "reconsiders global problems such as energy, communications, cultural identity, and the arms race, focusing primarily on the human element rather than predominantly on the material constraints to growth. This is because learning and the individual human being - not material resources - are the key to the world's future."

**MOOCs (again):** Another week, and more stories about MOOCs. The latest comes from the State of Minnesota, which will not block out-of-state universities offering MOOCs in Minnesota after all.

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/facing-backlash-minnesota-decides-to-allow-free-online-courses-after-all/40588>. On the other hand, Texas is partnering with edX (the MIT-Harvard consortium) in order to "outsource online competency-based learning and the \$10,000 bachelor's degree."

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/10/16/u-texas-aims-use-moocs-reduce-costs-increase-completion>. Both of these items point to the potentially disruptive effect of MOOCs on the current business model of higher education.

**Faculty/Staff Survey.** The Foundations of Excellence self-study (described in my previous communiqués) is progressing nicely, and I'd like to thank all of you that are participating (more than 1000 so far!). An important component of this self-study is a faculty/staff survey that will elicit your opinions about the degree to which UNM implements an effective first-year experience both in and out of the classroom. The survey responses will be an important source of information for the Foundations of Excellence task force as it evaluates UNM's first-year effectiveness and recommends appropriate institutional improvements. The Foundations of Excellence Faculty/Staff Survey opened on Monday, October 22, is being administered via the Web (all faculty and staff should already have received an email with a link to the survey), and can be completed in no more than 10 to 20 minutes. Your participation is very important, whether or not you teach or interact directly with first-year students. I encourage you continue to support this effort that is aimed at strengthening the learning environment for first-year students, so please fill out the survey! ... and just to make it more worth your while, by completing the survey, you will automatically be entered into a drawing for two iPads, one for faculty participants, and the other for staff participants.

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