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Wednesday Communiqué, 8/1/2012

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THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO

Office of the Provost



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUE

August 1, 2012

On MOOCs again: I received many critical and supportive replies to my post on MOOCs last week. I also have 3 offers from UNM faculty to offer a MOOC for the Spring 2013 semester. A related and very timely report by the Pew Research Center just came out (<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Future-of-Higher-Education.aspx>). I believe the new models of online education need to be debated within our campus and beyond and, as such, will post it in a blog discussion at: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>.

The One Question We Should Ask: I read recently that each organization needs to have one question that can guide it through challenges and changes. I believe that UNM's question should be: Is it good for our students? While the question may be obvious, the challenge is to answer it in specific situations. Here I am reminded of a statement made by professor James Thorson who was the president of the AAUP chapter of UNM when dealing with a particularly thorny issue around 1969: The situation is clear: it's a gray area!

Why Top Young Managers Are in a Nonstop Job Hunt: A recent Harvard Business Review article <http://hbr.org/2012/07/why-top-young-managers-are-in-a-nonstop-job-hunt/ar/1> makes the case that the best workers are continuously looking for their next job. This is illustrated by the opening quote, "You might suspect that your best young managers are looking for a better gig—and you're probably right. Research shows that today's most-sought-after early-career professionals are constantly networking and thinking about the next step, even if they seem fully engaged." This, however, is not in my judgment the case for most UNM faculty. Many of you have, I hope, weathered the last four difficult years and are not simply looking for a "better gig." As I mentioned in an earlier posting, President Frank and the Board of Regents have tasked me to come up with a compensation plan going forward in order to retain and reward our best faculty.

President Roosevelt's "Citizenship in a Republic": (<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trsorbonnespeech.html>). As we approach a new academic year fraught with challenges and possibilities, I would like to remind our students, staff, and faculty that we all need to get in the arena as we tackle our problems of college affordability, student success, faculty compensation, and many more. As President Roosevelt stated in his speech referenced above and delivered at the Sorbonne, in Paris, France on 23 April, 1910, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Is Algebra Necessary? As I write this communiqué, I am at the receiving end of many of your comments about the Sunday NYT article: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/opinion/sunday/is-algebra-necessary.html?_r=1. In my opinion, the author's framing of the important issue of what must be taught and learned is misguided. The author makes some valid points about how to teach the subject, but in his attempt to be provocative, he invites logical criticism to his central thesis. Some of the comments to the article so far are: Is English literature necessary? I never ran into Moby Dick during my career. Is gym class necessary? I never had to do a pull up. And my favorite: Is Biology necessary? I think only French chefs have to dissect frogs in their careers.

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