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William Eugene Davis - Biography

William E. Davis

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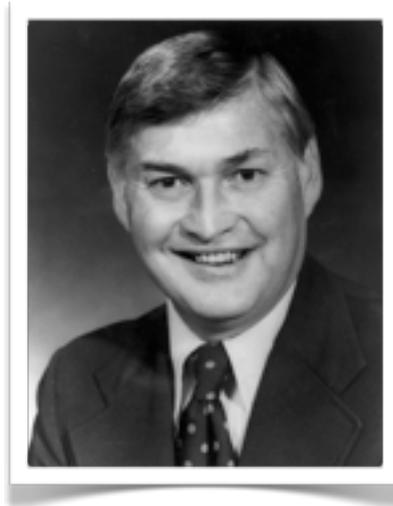
WILLIAM EUGENE DAVIS

11th University President

Served 1975 - 1982

University Activities

When William Davis took office in July 1975, he was seen by some as a transitional figure who would take UNM to a new era of calm seas and respectability, and by others as a hopelessly bad choice, someone inclined by experience to be an advocate for athletics rather than academics.



The catastrophe that weakened UNM's public image was called Lobogate. It attacked the university's biggest and most secure anchor in the community at large, the beloved basketball team on whose fortunes, it seemed, the mental health of the state collapsed in depression or rose in manic jubilation. Lobogate – with its accounting frauds, its faked grades and transcripts, and alleged incentives like cars and apartments doled out to prime players – also exposed a vast network of sports gambling that involved so many people and deals that gamblers illicitly used the high-powered office computers at Sandia Labs to keep track of it. The scandal defined the Davis presidency in the public eye. The Alumni Association argued about supporting or calling for the firing of Davis, and the national media got the story and made mince-meat of him, the regents, and the university for Lobogate. And the Albuquerque

Journal called for the resignations of Davis and the entire Board of Regents, even though they had nothing to do with it.

Davis focused on what he called centers of excellence and tried to counterbalance the avalanche of bad press UNM had received since the late 1960s. He compiled a list of twenty-five of UNM's national-caliber departments and talked about them at virtually every venue in which he spoke. Davis always tried to highlight the diversity of UNM's academic achievement, pointing to the university's flagship status in the state.

Davis continued the presidential sponsorship of the Annual Research Lecture, spotlighting a curious debate among the faculty concerning whether research contributed to strong teaching or undermined it.

Upon Davis's resignation to become chancellor of the University of Oregon system, the Board of Regents launched a series of disastrous presidential searches that spanned the better part of twenty-five years.

UNM allowed itself to be defined by outside opinion, most of it hostile, instead of investing resources in a sustained program of media management and public relations, explaining to the public the university's intellectual and social missions and its admirable fiscal and academic successes.

Davis's career as a university president or chancellor spanned thirty-one years – ten as president at Idaho State University, seven at UNM, seven as the chancellor of the Oregon system, and seven as the chancellor of Louisiana State University, where he retired from his leadership position in 1997 and as a professor of higher education in 2000.

University of New Mexico Presidents

Since 1975, Davis had increased the faculty by 217 positions, and had overseen a 65 percent raise in faculty salaries in seven years. He created an outstanding teacher award and moved the regents to create a Regents' Meritorious Service Medal.

Medical School funding jumped from \$4.9 million to nearly \$21 million.

North Campus increased in size under the direction of University Architect Van Dorn Hooker, which included the Bratton Hall expansion, the Children's Psychiatric Hospital, the Family Practice Center and North Campus Bookstore, the Dental Hygiene Building, and the Health Sciences Learning Center.

The Davis years also saw the construction of the Art Building, the UNM Stadium Press Box, and the Biomedical Research Facility, as well as renovation of the Student Union Building.

Programs that were created during Davis's tenure included the Presidential Scholarship Program, the Office of Student Financial Aid and Career Services, the Latin American Institute, the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, and the UNM Foundation. He was also instrumental in creating the Los Alamos and Valencia County branch campuses.

In 1979, Davis's administration created the General College to offer associate degrees and basic skills education, which created an entry process for unprepared high school graduates.

It was also under his tenure that UNM took over the management of the Bernalillo County Medical Center, the former Bernalillo County-Indian Hospital.

Davis tried to segregate the dorms by gender when he was president at Idaho State. When he did the same thing at UNM in 1976, in the heyday of the counterculture, he met with intense student resistance.

A week before the opening of the State legislative session in Davis's first year in office, the world-famous Pilodolus Dance Company had scheduled a show at Popejoy Hall, with the last dance to be performed in the nude. He ordered the nude scenes removed without consulting the cultural committee or any student group. Professors, students, and dancers were angry over the blatant censorship.

Davis served on the NCAA Committee on Governance, Organization, and Services from 1979 to 1982.

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

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