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Wednesday Communiqué, 6/20/2012

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WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUE

June 20, 2012

“Let us in education dream of an aristocracy of achievement arising out of a democracy of opportunity.” Thomas Jefferson

NRC Research Report: On October 17, 2011, Dr. James Duderstadt, President Emeritus of the University of Michigan, gave a keynote speech titled, “Reinventing the Research University to Serve a Changing World” for the 2011 UNM Symposium on Scholarly Communication hosted by University Libraries. Dr. Duderstadt was a member of the National Academies panel that recently completed the report on American research universities that may be found at: <http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/bhew/researchuniversities/index.htm>.

Student Success Talk: Dr. George Kuh, renowned scholar and researcher on retention and student success has been invited to consult with UNM on ways to increase our students’ success. An open presentation and discussion will be held on Wednesday, June 27 from 8:30 am - 9:45 am in the Science and Math Learning Center, Room 102. For information, please contact Jennifer Gomez-Chavez, Director of Student Academic Success at jengomez@unm.edu.

What’s in a Title? While mentoring graduate students, faculty advisors spend much of their time correcting the content and structure of their students’ scholarly papers. In my case, I spent much less time critiquing the title. As pointed out in this article, http://chronicle.com/blogs/percolator/getting-on-top-through-mass-murder/29497?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en, we may want to give titles more respect as they may actually entice one to read the papers. In a twist on this item, I am a big believer in good abstracts. My absolute favorite is that of a 1978 paper by John Doyle titled, “Guaranteed Margins for LQG Regulators.” The abstract reads: “There are none.” Without even reading the paper, you know immediately how it will end!

Approaching a State Shift in Earth’s Biosphere: On April 18, 2012, UNM Distinguished Professor of Biology Dr. James H. Brown gave a talk at UNM titled, “Human Macroecology: The Malthusian-Darwinian Dynamic and the Rise of Human Civilization.” Dr. Brown and his co-authors expand upon the theme of that talk in their June 7, 2012 *Nature* paper titled “Approaching a state shift in Earth’s biosphere.” The paper may be downloaded from the UNM Libraries site.

Why Don’t Students Borrow More? Presenting a different perspective on many recent studies and my own posts, the attached article makes the point that students who borrow more may actually have better completion rates. In our own analysis, we find that students’ who maintain their lottery scholarship and their federal financial aid awards, persist and graduate at a much higher rate than those who lose their lottery scholarship. In fact, the main reason that our students fail to return to UNM for a third semester is financial need.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/06/more-student-debt-please-why-college-students-dont-borrow-enough/258205/>.

The Whitehall Study: I have always maintained that power and control must be exercised together. In fact, power without a control is dangerous, while control without power is ineffective. A UNM colleague recently pointed me to a study on the stress of high-ranking baboons. Led by University of Notre Dame biologist Beth Archie, the study found that, despite more stress, “high-ranking male baboons recover more quickly from injuries and are less likely to become ill than other males.” The results, while initially surprising because high stress positions and situations, suppress the response of immune systems, actually support the findings of the first Whitehall study that “compared mortality of people in the highly stratified environment of the British Civil Service. It showed that among British civil servants, mortality was higher among those in the lower grade when compared to the higher grade. The more senior one was in the employment hierarchy, the longer one might expect to live compared to people in lower employment grades.” The Whitehall studies on health and stress may be found at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/whitehallIII/>.

Sincerely,

Chaouki Abdallah, Provost & Executive Vice-President for Academic Affairs

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