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Wednesday Communiqué, 2/6/2013

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WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUE

February 6, 2013

How Much Does a University Cost? It is that time of the year when the conversation about college costs and expenses is back on the front burner. At UNM, I found it always instructive to compare ourselves to similar institutions—generally, public universities that share our demographics and research mission. The Wall Street Journal has created a useful tool to do so, at <http://graphics.wsj.com/documents/NONCLASS1212/>. Note that you can compare the cost of tuition, financial aid, administrative services, etc. While we have many areas to improve upon, I encourage you to look over the site in order to move the conversation forward based on national and unbiased data.

State Funding for Higher Education: As we learn about the cost of college education, it is important to keep in mind that state support for higher education has been declining for the last few years. In fact, under the button *National Tables* at <http://grapevine.illinoisstate.edu/>, you may notice that New Mexico has experienced a drop of more than 21% in support for higher education in the last 5 years. On the other hand, at \$10.93 per \$1,000 of personal income, and \$383 per capita, New Mexico is one of the highest states in support for higher education.

The Cost of Books: The cost of books for college students has steadily risen. In a recent conversation, I was informed that the average cost of books per semester is more than \$500 for each student. Despite the best efforts of our UNM Bookstore and others to provide affordable textbook pricing, I am now convinced that this hidden college cost needs to be brought under control. Similar to the expanded use of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs), there is a movement to use open-access and inexpensive course materials and textbooks. A couple of years ago, UNM bought a collection from Morgan & Claypool Publishers (available to you from your UNM computer at www.morganclaypool.com). OpenStax College is another effort being led by Rice University. It “offers students free textbooks that meet scope and sequence requirements for most courses. These are peer-reviewed texts written by professional content developers.” You can find more information at <http://openstaxcollege.org/>.

Credit Hours: In an earlier posting, I noted that the credit hour might no longer be valid as the currency of student learning. It turns out that the original intent of creating the student credit hour was not even intended for the benefit of students, but rather to measure faculty workload thresholds to qualify for pension systems, as described in the *Chronicle* article <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Curious-BirthHarmful/136717/>. “Unfortunately, it has also become the primary proxy for learning. The Carnegie Foundation did not intend for this to happen. It made that quite clear in its 1906 annual report, when it specified that in the counting of units, ‘the fundamental criterion was the amount of time spent on a subject, not the results attained.’”

Speed Networking for New Faculty: Please join me, Dean Kymberly Pinder, and new faculty at an interdisciplinary “speed networking” event, sponsored by the College of Fine Arts and The Provost’s Office. Come meet other new faculty, and discover how your research and teaching interests intersect, at the event which will be held on Wednesday, February 13, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the UNM Interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media facility at the Aperture Center. Please RSVP to Glinda Wyndorf, gwyndorf@unm.edu, by February 8.

In Praise of Teachers: It seems like everywhere we turn these days we are bombarded by stories about the failure of teachers and schools to prepare students for college or careers. I would like to take a little time now to speak about the good things that teachers are doing. There are the recent examples of extraordinary devotion of teachers to their students. At Sandy Hook Elementary, teachers died trying to save children. At Taft Union High School in California, less than a week later, a teacher persuaded a gunman to put his gun down. Every day, most teachers are thinking of ways to reach the mind and soul of a particular student, raising the bar for some, lending a helping hand to others. A good teacher is the single most important factor in achieving student success. Good teachers, like my middle school Mathematics teacher, are changing lives and careers.

At UNM, some of our student teachers are being trained through the Bandelier Elementary student-teaching program to utilize collaboration, co-teaching, and other research-based practices. Only in its second year, the program has shown its effectiveness. It was singled out in the recent New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee report as a model for teacher training and placement. Like every profession, there are teachers who do not perform and who should be given honest feedback and counseling, and, if they do not improve, should not be allowed to teach. But those who are in the arena, fighting the most important fight, deserve our support, admiration, and respect!

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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