

3-6-2013

Wednesday Communiqué, 3/6/2013

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Recommended Citation

Abdallah, Chaouki. "Wednesday Communiqué, 3/6/2013." (2013). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/provost_publications/51

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WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

March 6, 2013

Dear Faculty, Students, and Staff of the University of New Mexico,

As much as I love highlighting the good work being conducted at UNM, it pains me to call attention to the ugliness of racism and bigotry on our campus. Recent incidents at some of our dormitories and colleges directed towards African American students, faculty, and staff demand that we focus our attention on our remaining challenges as an institution, and as citizens of our wonderfully diverse state and nation. As a naturalized citizen, as an educator, and as the chief academic officer of UNM, I am saddened and angered that any of us is made to feel unwelcome or unsafe. UNM is no place for such activities and the full resources of the University will be brought to bear on making certain that such incidents are completely eliminated.

What is our Mission? Companies, businesses, and organizations stumble, and even die, if they lose sight of their mission. It has been said that railroad companies declined because they thought they were in the railroad business rather than the transportation business. Our main business as a university, education, is composed of research and instruction. As the tools of our trade change, so must we. From new equipment and research tools, to new delivery media and teaching techniques, we have adapted to incremental change, but now must consider more radical approaches. Many who would not think twice about using communication tools, e.g. Skype, to collaborate with colleagues a world away still object to delivering learning material online, or to the use of flipped classrooms. Ultimately, we must decide whether we should continue with business as usual, or whether debates, critical thinking, and information transfer may be more efficiently conducted using a blended approach to education.

Gravity light: As we know, energy can never be created nor destroyed, only transformed. This is the basic idea behind the [Gravity Light](#). One simply lifts a bag of dirt, in effect transforming human mechanical energy (due to calories found in food) into the potential energy of a weight suspended from the ceiling. As the weight drops due to gravity, the potential energy is transformed into electrical energy—simple, elegant, and green—right at the tip of your fingers (or toes).

Student Loans: Last week I pointed to the various studies showing the negative impact and large increase in college students' debt. The recent *Chronicle* [article](#) makes the opposite case, in effect arguing that the student-loan crisis is not necessarily a national one. The main points are that college education remains a good investment and that "each of the 6.7 million Americans age 16 to 24 who are neither employed nor in school costs the country \$37,450 a year in lost wages, lost tax revenue, and higher public spending."

Sequestration: On March 1, the federal budget sequestration went into effect. The impact on universities will be felt primarily in two areas, namely student financial aid and federal research. While the Pell Grant program is exempt from cuts for the first year of sequestration, funding for programs like the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant and Federal Work-Study will be cut. Our Enrollment Management division has been monitoring the situation and provided the following information: the overall 5.1% financial aid cuts will likely not reduce UNM financial aid for this year since it is anticipated that the cuts would come from "fair share" increases in federal work-study and opportunity grants and UNM was not due to receive increases in those programs.

The following [information](#) was communicated by the Vice President for Research, Maria Zuber, Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

— NIH has issued a statement as to what is likely to happen in the event of sequestration. They indicate that they expect to fund non-competing awards at lower levels (e.g. 90%), and make fewer competing awards to meet the budget

cuts. Each Institute within the NIH may choose different strategies for applying the cuts. The full statement can be found at: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-13-043.html>

— NSF expects to make nearly 1,000 fewer awards should the sequester take effect. NSF further states that it expects to continue current awards at the current levels, with no impact to existing standard grants, at least for FY 2013. The full notice can be found at <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2013/in133/in133.pdf>

— DOD senior research officials have estimated that DOD university research for FY13 will be cut by some \$300M.

2013 Outstanding Staff and Workgroup Awards: Each Spring Semester at UNM, the Provost's Committee for Staff presents two awards, one for an outstanding individual staff member, the other to a workgroup of UNM that has provided extraordinary service. We are still accepting nominations for this year's awards. To nominate someone, please visit the [Provost's Committee for Staff webpage](#). Nominations must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 8, 2013.

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

A PDF version of this communiqué is available at: <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>. Your feedback and input are welcome at: provost@unm.edu or at the electronic town hall: <http://connectu.unm.edu/>. Please also see the Provost's Blog at <http://provost.unm.edu/communique/index.html>.