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President's Weekly Perspective, 2008_06_02

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Monday Morning Message - June 2, 2008

Good morning. It hardly seems possible, but by the time you read this, it will be one full year since I officially began this job. It's been a great ride so far, both challenging and wonderfully rewarding. Although I had hoped to be able to further reflect on our progress together so far, as I did last week, it's become apparent that there's another issue that is foremost on many of your minds – the changes in university policies dealing with public records. One measure of your concern is that more than 300 people attended last week's Board of Regents meeting to hear what I believe was a healthy debate on the issue.

We must always be mindful that UNM owes the public a duty of transparency. Needless to say, we must also obey both the letter and the spirit of the law. For too long, UNM has lacked clear policies governing the disclosure of public records, and it is long overdue that we adopt clear, understandable and uniform rules so we can meet our obligations of openness on the one hand, while protecting the rights of our employees on the other – particularly in this era of identity theft and frequent harassment of individuals and their families.

Although we'll never adopt rules that are universally acceptable, it is vitally important that every member of the UNM community have the opportunity to raise issues, ask questions and make comments on how we proceed. It may very likely be that together we will identify aspects of the current law that should be changed, at which point we will ask the Legislature to further refine the law.

To bring you up to date on developments so far, on May 28 UNM Regents amended and approved proposed revisions to Regents' Policies 2.17, 6.7, 6.8 and 7.2 – all of which relate to disclosure of public records. These revised policies can be found at <http://www.unm.edu/~ubppm>, the far right column.

Pending further discussion, the Regents deferred decisions on university business policies and Section C70 of the Faculty Handbook, which implement these Regents' policies. We will follow regular, established procedures for these discussions. I've been talking to the leadership of the Faculty Senate and Academic Freedom & Tenure Committee, and it's clear that any proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook could not occur before the fall. A faculty working group will be dealing with this issue over the summer, with hopes for significant progress by the beginning of the fall semester.

Meanwhile, proposed revisions to University Business Policies 2300, 3210 and 3710 (which can also be found on the far right column of <http://www.unm.edu/~ubppm>) have gone out for the regular 30-day review. Your input is welcomed, and you will have until July 1 to submit your comments to UBPPM@unm.edu.

Each of your comments will be reviewed by a working committee that will include, among others, representatives from the Faculty Senate, AF&T, Staff Council, and Deans' Council. A second draft of revised policies, crafted with this committee's input, will then be circulated for an additional 15 days of campus-wide review. It is hoped we will have revised policies 15 working days before the August 12 meeting of the Regents.

This will not be an easy process, nor will it occur without further passionate debate. While I can't promise that the end product will satisfy everyone, I can assure you that the views of every member of our community will be taken into account, and that ultimately, we will have in place public records policies that are clear and consistent – and that comply with New Mexico law.

Next week: my reflections on my first full year in office.

Have a good week.

David J. Schmidly