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F. Chris Garcia - Biography

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F. CHRIS GARCIA

◆.....◆ **17th University President**

Served 2002 - 2003

Born Albuquerque, NM

April 15, 1940



For its first 113 years, UNM had not had a Hispanic president. In a move that some Hispanic leaders considered long overdue, and despite F. Chris Garcia's reluctance to take the job, on June 20, 2002, the regents announced they had unanimously approved his appointment as the UNM president for a period of one year. Garcia, a professor of political science, said he accepted the presidency reluctantly, emphasizing that he had no permanent interest in the job. Garcia said that encouragement from all walks of UNM life, including faculty, staff, and students, was what convinced him to accept the job.

Education

Graduate of Valley High School in Albuquerque, 1957

B.A. in Government from UNM, 1961

M.A. in Government and Education from UNM, 1964

PhD in Political Science from the University of California, Davis, 1972

Career

Beginning in 1976, Garcia served five years as associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at UNM. Then, after a national search, he was named dean, becoming the first Hispanic to hold the position and serving six and a half years until 1986. The next year, following another search, he was named vice president for academic affairs and served for three and a half years. In 1993, Garcia was asked to serve as interim provost and vice president for academic affairs. After seven months, he returned to the faculty. Then in 1998-99 he served as the top academic administrator with President Gordon.

University Activities

Garcia stated that New Mexico held a singular position among states in that no single ethnic group constituted a majority. He believed that UNM had to serve a unique mix of ethnic and socioeconomic groups as well as students who were minimally prepared for college. Garcia said, "We are not an ivory tower. We reflect the socioeconomic environment of our state. You have to be willing to deal with a great deal of diversity, a great deal of ambiguity."

One of the first bit of news accompanying Garcia's assumption of the presidency was that the 2002-freshman class would set new records with more than twenty-eight

hundred students, an increase of 18.5 percent over the previous year. Credit for the increase was assigned to recruitment visits UNM staff made at least once a month to high schools around New Mexico, an enhanced web site, and the widespread dissemination of scholarships and tuition options available to incoming students, specifically the lottery scholarship. In addition, it was anticipated that the number of entering freshmen from the fall of 2001 who returned as sophomores would increase. The student body became increasingly diverse, especially because of the greater number of Native American students.

In October 2002, U.S. News and World Report reported that UNM's College of Engineering ranked forty-sixth nationally, tied with Dartmouth College, the University of Massachusetts, and Vanderbilt University. A month later, the magazine *Hispanic Engineer & Information Technology* ranked the School of Engineering seventh best as a school for Hispanics.

In the fall of 2002, Community College Week had credited the UNM Gallup Branch with having awarded more college diplomas to Native Americans than any other public school in the country. Most degrees were in education. In its decade of existence, the Bachelor of Science in elementary education program had graduated 540 teachers in Gallup and 382 in Farmington, nearly half of them Native American and Hispanic.

UNM's Health Sciences Center received six research grants of more than \$1 million each in fiscal year 2001 and thirteen in 2002. Subjects included diabetes prevention, biomedical genomics, asthma, respiratory diseases in Native Americans, and many clinical studies. A major focus was "translational research" intended to carry scientific understanding promptly to patient care. A total of nineteen patents were issued to Health Sciences Center researchers in 2001 and 2002.

The Extended University, which delivered courses and degree programs by telecommunications, media, and computers, continued to spread. Enrollments increased to 5,618 students in the fall of 2002. Course offerings grew by 9 percent, and online courses increased 79 percent. To handle the administrative load, the combined positions of vice provost for extended education and dean of continuing education were separated.

In the spring of 2003, the UNM Opera Theatre celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a performance of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. The program had won three National Opera Association awards.

During the summer of 2002, final work was being done on the Frank C. Hibben Center for Archaeological Research. The late UNM professor had funded the project's \$4 million cost for a building to house a collection of artifacts. The center is located south of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology.

On the North Campus, the Outpatient Surgery and Imaging Building was constructed and opened on University Boulevard. The Magnetic Resonance Imaging Facility was being expanded to accommodate an enlarged mission in brain research and a new name: the Pete and Nancy Domenici MIND Institute. The Health Sciences Center opened its \$6.6 million Research Incubator Building in 2003, providing easily modified lab and office space for short-term research projects.

The new Lomas Chilled Water Plant, which supplied cooling for the entire campus, was dedicated. Its opening marked the completion of the first of three projects to upgrade and renew the University's utility infrastructure.

A 397-space parking structure across the mall from Popejoy Hall was approved. Construction began, and it was slated for completion in October 2003.

On November 5, 2002, New Mexico voters passed Bond Issue B, which enabled UNM to raise \$6 million to upgrade and remodel some of the campus's oldest and most heavily used buildings. The sale of the bonds would provide funds to upgrade utilities in Castetter Hall, Northrop Hall, the Physics and Astronomy Building, and Mesa Vista Hall. In addition, some of the money would be used to upgrade mechanical systems, which required a lot of traffic-snarling work in the utility tunnels.

The College of Education's administrative building was named for Chester Travelstead in 2003, and an endowed professorship was established in his name.

Garcia was an active participant on the board of directors of the newly formed Mountain West Conference.

On July 15, 2003, the regents approved a policy that stated UNM "may not engage in business with any firm or corporation in which a regent has a financial interest." It also barred UNM from doing business with an immediate family member of a regent. The policy further required regents to submit annual statements listing any potential conflicts of interest.

Being Hispanic, Garcia knew much was expected of him in reaching out to the Hispanic communities around the state. He attended numerous functions of the Hispano Chamber of Commerce. He addressed eight hundred Hispanic high school juniors and seniors from throughout New Mexico as the keynote speaker at Hispano Student Day at UNM. Garcia talked to Hispanic students all over the state about college life

and the processes of getting admitted to UNM. Governor Richardson also appointed him to the board of directors of the National Hispanic Center in Albuquerque.

By 2003, forty-three degrees and thirty-seven minors or concentrations were available during the evenings and weekends. More than eleven thousand students were taking some one thousand evening or weekend courses each semester. About half of all graduate courses were being offered at night.

Garcia was also pleased by the Graduation Project, which he had helped inaugurate in 1997 to lure students who had dropout back to complete their degrees. Like the evening and weekend program, it was headed by a man who dreamed it up, David Stuart, vice provost for academic affairs and the long-time champion of nontraditional students. Stuart tracked down students who had left after earning more than ninety-eight credit hours. He talked them into returning to finish their degrees and helped ease their way by, for example, getting them into filled classes. By 2003, the program had brought 1,684 students back, of whom 1,124 graduated.

Garcia was also active in many organizations promoting education and economic development. He worked with Sandia National Laboratory and New Mexico State University to form the New Mexico Consortium for Bioresearch, plus a joint Center for Policy, Security, and Technology bringing together Sandia, UNM, and Lockheed-Martin.

In government relations, Garcia sought a stronger liaison with the state's congressional delegation as well as with others in the national legislature and executive branch. UNM retained a lobbying firm in Washington, which was credited with being a major influence in increasing UNM's federal appropriation in 2002-03 by a factor of five.

University of New Mexico Presidents

The university's overall budget grew a robust 10.3 percent to about \$1.4 billion, equal to a third of the state's \$4.1 billion budget. The legislative appropriation to UNM also increased 5.8 percent. Government grants and contracts grew 11.5 percent.

Garcia was grateful to hand his office to Louis Caldera, whom the regents selected in May 2003 after a nine-month search. Garcia, like many university presidents, put in roughly seventy to eighty scheduled hours a week. Many of these hours involved being with pleasant people, doing interesting things, and eating delicious food, but the constant pressure to sit at head tables and make gracious and appropriate remarks at public functions leads to strain and stress. Among other things, the demands on a university president call for endurance and stamina.

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

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