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Gerald May - Biography

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GERALD MAY

◆-----◆ **14th University President**

Served 1986 - 1990

Born Son of Missionaries. Born in Kenya and grew up on a farm in Illinois.

It came as no surprise when on June 4, 1986, the Board of Regents President Jerry Apodaca announced that there had been an agreed-upon buy-out of Tom Farer's contract scheduled to expire December 31, 1986. Apodaca also announced that at the next board meeting, June 17, Gerald May would be appointed president for a term of two years.



Education

May received his undergraduate degree in civil engineering in 1962. In the same field, he received his master's and PhD from the University of Colorado in 1964 and 1967, respectively.

Career

From 1959 to 1963, May was an engineer technician and a civil engineer for the Illinois State Highway Department. From 1968-69, he had been an engineer for Sandia

Gerald May

National Laboratories. At the University of Colorado, May was a teaching associate and instructor from 1964-66 and 1966-67. When he came to UNM in 1967, he signed on as an assistant professor in civil engineering until 1972, when he became an associate professor, holding this title until 1977. As a professor from 1971 to 1975, May held the title of Director of New Mexico Study Program. From 1976 to 1979, he was the director of the Bureau of Engineering Research. May became the associate dean in UNM's College of Engineering from 1979 to 1980, and the following year, he became the interim dean. His contract was extended until he became president in 1986.

University Activities

In February 1986, the New Mexico House of Representatives had unanimously passed a funding bill that cut appropriations to all state agencies, including higher education. The university responded by increasing tuition and cutting its budget by 2 percent.

The following year, the financial situation worsened as the House voted to raise tuition at state institutions of higher learning by 24 percent. The Senate modified this by reducing the increase to 16 percent, and the two houses eventually compromised on 20 percent while limiting raises for faculty to just under 3 percent, which still left the pay for faculty at UNM some 10 percent below salaries at peer institutions. May and the Board of Regents came under criticism when it became known that the president had received a 10 percent salary increase, although he too earned less than his peers.

May proposed a tuition rate of \$120 more than the legislature had recommended. The board approved an increase of 16.5 percent. A year later, the board approved another tuition hike, this time \$100 per student.

During this time students began protesting against apartheid. Universities across the country began selling off their investments in companies that did business in South Africa as a part of their protest against the apartheid regime governing the nation. UNM followed suit when in 1986 it began divesting approximately \$1.23 million, a process completed by October of that year.

In 1989, the regents authorized “full-ride” scholarships per year. The Regents’ Scholarship provides for tuition and fees, room and board, and books, all renewable for four years for students who maintain a 3.5 grade average for fifteen credit hours per semester. By 2003, nearly three hundred students had been selected as Regents Scholars and 99 percent of them had gone on to graduate school. They had also won Rhodes and Truman Scholarships and many other prestigious academic awards.

One of the big issues of 1987 was the January announcement of the closing of the General College, which had served as a means of entrance for students whose high school academic record would not allow them to enter a regular college degree program. The Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute and community and branch campuses throughout the state stepped forward to offer the pre-college-level courses.

That year a new agreement with the National Park Service brought added responsibilities to the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology. The museum became co-owner of the archaeological collections from years of research at Chaco Canyon. The agreement denoted a landmark in collaboration between the federal government and a local institution on behalf of scholarly work and public education, and it represented an early example of a long-term cooperative plan for upkeep and use of a valuable collection.

The year 1987 saw the creation of a UNM Biology Department course called Bosque Biology, which taught undergraduates about the riparian areas joining the middle Rio Grande and introduced them to scientific processes. Expertise and information from these projects have been applied to important restoration efforts, especially after the drought and fires of the early twenty-first century.

Perhaps the greatest impact on the academic scene was the implementation of the evening and weekend degree programs in 1987. Administrators received many complaints from people in the community about their inability to earn a degree because they had to work or child-care obligations on weekdays. David Stuart, the head of this program, managed to develop it, not only persuading departments to offer more evening and weekend classes, but also arranging for extended hours in the libraries, student union, and student service offices. Vice President for Administration David McKinney came up with the start-up funds for the program.

In the fall of 1988, the Sevilleta Long-Term Ecological Research Project, one of only seventeen sites in a study network funded by the National Science Foundation, was dedicated. The Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, about fifty miles south of Albuquerque, is at the juncture of at least four major biological regions, offering unique combinations of land forms, climate, and great species diversity. Faculty and graduate students later researched the effects of El Nino winter storms on New Mexico, monitored pollution by observing bees, and measured water vapor with ultraviolet lasers, among other things.

The nation's first Center for Disaster Medicine was created at the School of Medicine in 1990. The center houses the Disaster Medical Assistance Team, which not only

responds to state and national disasters, but also provides consultation and training to individuals and teams.

Van Dorn Hooker, University Architect, who was appointed in 1963, retired in 1987. He had overseen major changes to the campus while upholding the special Pueblo Revival style of the buildings.

In 1989, the Women Studies Program on the campus celebrated its twentieth anniversary.

Construction on campus in the late 1980s included completion of a building housing social sciences, Parish Library, and the Graduate School of Management on the north end of the main campus. On February 1, 1988, the Electrical and Computer Engineering and Centennial Library building was opened. The Health Sciences and Services Building on the North Campus opened in 1989.

A fifth classroom building was added at the Los Alamos Branch in 1987. The branch had begun operations at an elementary school in 1980 and the following year had contracted with Los Alamos National Laboratory to take over operations of the Center for Graduate Studies. The branch facility had been remodeled and expanded in 1982-83.

Hispanics comprised roughly 25 percent of the total student body, and the more than 1,000 Native American students were the largest number attending an American university. The average age of the students was twenty-seven, and about 2,450 lived on campus.

University of New Mexico Presidents

In 1989-90, members of the university's faculty were awarded more than \$85 million for research, public service, and sponsored programs, placing UNM among the top fifty research universities in the nation.

UNM had the state's only schools of medicine, law, pharmacy, and architecture and the only divisions of public administration and dental programs. The university also oversaw two of the state's five Centers of Technical Excellence and a joint research program in semiconductor circuitry with Sandia National Laboratories.

UNM gained national and international acclaim for its University Press, which in 1989 had a record sales year of \$3 million and published more than fifty titles.

Citing lack of legislative support, May had announced the elimination of four varsity athletic programs: wrestling, baseball, women's basketball, and women's swimming. Through the support of private donors, all but wrestling was reinstated.

Staff and alumni spent more than two years preparing for a wide-ranging celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the university, which was intended to involve all members of the university community and build a base of support for its second century. A special supplement to New Mexico Magazine appeared under the title "A Century of Scholarship." UNM shared the coverage with New Mexico State University and New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, as all three were created in the same bill the Territorial Legislature passed on February 28, 1889. The hundredth birthday party featured the Centennial Ball on February 25 and a commemoration of the founding of the University of Santa Fe on February 28, 1989. The celebration also saw the naming of the building housing the Counseling and Family Studies Department for Elizabeth Simpson, who had served as dean of the predecessor department, home economics, for thirty-four years.

Gerald May

On June 30, 1989, the regents scheduled an emergency meeting to be followed by an open session. On that day, May stated that his job had exacted a heavy personal toll and he would step down. The regents approved a \$5,000 raise for the president's final year in office and set in motion the search for his replacement by voting to use a national consulting firm as well an internal search committee. For the third time in six years, UNM had a vacancy in its top administrative position.

Excerpts from *Miracle on the Mesa* by William Davis

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