

What it Means to be “One University”  
by  
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*The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.*  
–Alfred North Whitehead

Like many universities that experienced rapid enrollment growth during the '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s, New Mexico State University responded by adding programs and units without fully integrating them. Over time, walls and barriers around units have become more rigid. Now, as we seek to be more effective, responsive, relevant, and efficient, it's essential that we move away from the “silo” model to a “One University” culture, because ultimately we have one mission – to best serve the state of New Mexico through our teaching, outreach, and service.

Being “One University” includes many things, but it starts with the realization that departments, colleges, institutes, and centers are means to the university's ends, not the ends themselves. Stated differently, these units are intended as means to meet the demands and expectations of a shared university mission(s). Their existence, the resources they command, and the funding they receive are justified to the extent they contribute to excellent mission-oriented programs of education, research, and service (outreach and extension).

It's important to note that to achieve and apply the power and innovation of “One University,” we must establish and continually foster open, transparent, respectful, and constructive shared governance. We must embrace a fully inclusive, ongoing dialogue about where we intend to go as a great university and how we intend to get there.

As a starting point for this dialogue, let me propose several “One University” steps and initiatives:

1. Focus unambiguously on outputs before inputs, substance before form. Too often we begin our conversations by debating distribution of inputs or matters of organizational structure. We should, however, start by defining or redefining our objectives with respect to goals and quality and then discuss how to achieve them, building our budgets and allocating resources accordingly. This is the most fundamental cultural shift that will make us “One University.”
2. Create crosscutting long-term research and outreach initiatives. As has already been discussed, we should specify a reasonable number of crosscutting research/outreach initiatives that (a) involve multiple units and scientists across our system, (b) solve real problems facing the state and the nation, (c) can be a magnet for external funding, and (d) provide a vehicle for achieving national and international recognition. This is not to suggest that we discourage or diminish successful intra-unit or scientist-specific research that is currently under way or that may present itself. Rather, it is to establish NMSU as a center of excellence in a few strategically significant areas of research. Under the leadership of our vice provost for research, the University Research Council, and the Council of Research Centers, we have made real progress in defining “research clusters” that will serve “One University.”

3. Establish a unified approach to Legislative, Congressional, and agency relations. This means that to every extent possible “One University” speaks in one voice to state and federal policymakers and funders. And, of course, this will require, through shared governance and active listening, a university systemwide agenda for our state and federal relations. The University Research Council, working with and through the vice provost for research, the vice provost for economic development, and the provost, should play a central role in identifying research priorities and clusters and setting our federal government relations agenda.
4. Maximize efficiency and effectiveness of all support and administrative functions and services. We will seek to inventory and assess the current structure, conduct, and performance of functions and units that support our academic mission and serve our students and faculty. In this regard, we will eliminate inefficient redundancy and pursue economies of size/scale/scope across support and administrative functions. We have established a task force, including faculty, administrators, staff, and business leaders, to begin this review and to make recommendations to free up resources for reallocation to better serve the goals and priorities of the university.
5. Fully utilize our statewide system and network. Without losing local responsiveness and relevance, we should harmonize common programs across our campus. Every campus should be seen as a “front door” to the larger “One University.”

Likewise, we should use our statewide network of research centers and county extension offices to deliver a wide bandwidth of relevant, responsive university programs that meet the emerging educational needs of all New Mexicans. Indeed, we should consistently reaffirm that the entire state is our campus.

A major means of serving our statewide educational mandate is through expansions in distance education via our crosscutting College of Extended Learning. And, we should continue to forge inter-institutional partnerships and collaborations so as to optimally leverage our capabilities against the capabilities of others.

6. Build adaptable scientific and educational platforms. To improve our nimbleness in program innovation, we should create more adaptable means for utilizing faculty talent and expertise. This may include new types of appointments and expanded use of faculty redevelopment leaves and assignments.
7. Undertake systemwide master planning. As we develop plans to build or renovate facilities, we should take a “One University” systemwide approach. Rather than college-by-college, campus-by-campus, or center-by-center pursuit of facility improvements, we should have a plan that optimizes facility sharing and promotes synergy. We should, of course, include athletic and ancillary service facilities in our master plan. And, we should do so, wherever possible, to better serve the needs of the region and in coordination and consultation with local agencies and government.

8. Adopt zero-based budgeting. The current university budget is not necessarily the budget we should have. Periodically, we should analyze and fully assess the budgets of major units to determine if they are aligned with university objectives, productivity measures, and cross-program growth differentials. Doing so will provide a basis for inter- and intra-unit reallocations in response to changing growth realities and statewide needs and priorities.
9. Implement a “compact” approach to incremental budget change. Consistent with a “zero-based” framework, incremental budget adjustments should be driven by agreed-upon objectives and goals as part of a “compact” between principal units (colleges, centers, institutes, etc.) and central administration. Thus, we establish zero-based core budgets and allocate new funds consistent with shared objectives, targets, and measurable outputs. Monies can be allocated or reallocated based on priorities and reallocated based on new needs or based on meeting agreed-upon targets. This approach is utilized by the University of Texas-Austin and the University of Minnesota-TC.

This is offered as a basis for further conversation and consideration. It is offered, however, from the conviction that NMSU can never be all it can and should be without a shared “One University” mindset.