



Legislative Finance Committee Hearing on Higher Education

Comments by Dr. Richard L. Wood

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senators, and Representatives. I deeply appreciate the chance to be here this morning, because I think we faculty members have been remiss by not being in better touch over the years with our legislators and with this Committee in particular. In fact, I think the last time I was in this room was 1977, as a junior in high school doing “Youth in Government.”

I know you have a full agenda this morning, so I will be brief. I do not want to repeat the information already presented by President Dan Lopez, President Barbara Couture, and Acting President Roth. Rather, I endorse their statements and that of my colleague Dr. Cedric Page from UNM-Los Alamos regarding the importance of revising the funding formula for higher education to better distinguish the missions of our various institutions, as well as the need to do away with the tuition credit. I have two main points to make today:

1. University faculty understand the fiscal challenges that New Mexico faces, your efforts to balance the state budget, and our shared responsibility to meet those challenges.
2. Emerging from recent conflicts, UNM is working hard to address budget cuts responsibly while protecting our core work – that is, to minimize damage now while laying the groundwork to advance our mission of research, teaching, and service in the future.

UNM faculty are working to meet the fiscal challenges we face. We understand that the Legislature must find savings or enhance revenues in order to balance the state budget. We are working very hard at our end to find savings and enhance our revenues. For example, faculty are teaching bigger classes in departments throughout the University. This is not ideal for our students, but is inevitable given that student credit hours have increased by 25% over the last ten years, while total tenure-track faculty have remained essentially stagnant. We have also redoubled our efforts in the other half of our unique mission: research. Faculty-led research at UNM’s main campus brought in more than \$170 million dollars in funded projects during FY2010, far and away an all-time high. For every dollar in faculty salaries on main campus (about \$80 million), those faculty members bring in *two* dollars in research funding. That is important for New Mexico’s economy *and* for our students: research experience opens professional doors for them in the future. Third, we have shifted tenure-track teaching loads to cover more courses in the core curriculum and teach fewer small, more specialized courses. Again, not ideal, but necessary right now.

Overall, we are working hard to absorb past cuts and plan for future cuts while protecting our core mission as a true research university serving New Mexico’s students. More accurately, we are working to *minimize damage* to our core mission as deeper cuts take effect.

At the same time, we face the additional challenge of bringing the UNM community together by addressing the *causes* of the public conflicts we have experienced in recent years. My message since becoming president of the Faculty Senate has not been and is not now that “everything is okay, let’s move forward.” Rather, my message has been and continues to be “let’s come together to move forward precisely by focusing every decision tightly on our core mission” of research, teaching, and service to New Mexicans.

We appear to be succeeding in that effort. That’s not easy: most decisions involve money, and it is a truly brutal budget reality we face. But with shared leadership from key sectors among the faculty, the administration and staff, the Regents, and the students, we are striving to approach every decision under the light of its impact on our academic mission – *not just for now* but for the long term. We are looking systematically at faculty workloads, to assure that they reflect smart use of resources to serve our mission as both a research and teaching institution. Importantly, in some departments that includes “differential workloads,” whereby faculty who want to focus on teaching or have not sustained strong research productivity nor significant service burdens carry higher teaching loads. In addition, the Faculty Senate has launched a long-term project of real collaboration with the finance and academic data authorities within the University. With their active support, this has already produced real fiscal transparency and begun to underpin mission-driven decision-making. We have worked together to really understand how tuition credits and formula funding shape higher education in New Mexico, and in some cases distort it. And through all this, we are not *just* looking at cuts. Rather, we are using this crisis – and it is a real crisis, exacting profound pain in many ways – to lay the groundwork for stronger research and teaching excellence.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, Senators, Representatives, and LFC staff: We know that further belt-tightening is coming. But how deep it goes, and how it is done, matters greatly for New Mexico. We fundamentally ask that those measures be:

*Fair:* Who’s been cut deepest already? Who has been held largely immune until now? As

Acting President Roth made clear this morning, the four year institutions have faced the lions share of recent cuts. New cuts should take this into account.

*Smart:* New cuts should reflect the unique mission of research universities *for New Mexico*, and the unique role of faculty, some kinds of staff, and some kinds of administrators in that mission.

*Reward responsibility:* When cuts are made, reward those who have responsibly handled recent cuts by giving them autonomy to implement the cuts in keeping with their own mission.

In closing, let me note that ‘politics’ has become a dirty word in America. But what you do as Senators, Representatives, and staff for state agencies is in fact public service. That service is especially crucial in our current hard times. For that, I want to thank you on behalf of faculty from around the state.