

February 2026

FROM THE DESK OF THE Vice President for Research

Lobos,

Tomorrow, we will travel north to Santa Fe as a Pack for UNM Day at the State Capitol for the 2026 State Legislature. Research is at the heart of what we do here at The University of New Mexico. Our commitment to the highest level of research activity defines us as Lobos and sets us apart from others. Every legislative session is an opportunity and chance to do just that – highlight the research and scholarship that happen each day here that impact all New Mexicans.

I can't wait to see UNM students, faculty, and staff members in Santa Fe – let's "Pack" the Round House and show our New Mexico legislators the impact of our research.

This month also marks the beginning of my reappointment as vice president for research at The University of New Mexico. It's difficult to express through words how honored I am to be here with all of you during all our successes and the challenges as well. I have succumbed to the land of enchantment!

When I first became a Lobo, it was during one of the most challenging times in recent history – the height of the pandemic. In the face of uncertainty, we built a strong, dedicated team committed to supporting our faculty in every way possible. We invested in our people – faculty, staff, and students – and created transparent systems that strengthened and expanded UNM's research enterprise. Today, that investment is paying off and it has been an incredible privilege to be part of this journey and part of a team that empowers researchers to achieve excellence, while making an impact that truly matters.

I have had the pleasure of working with so many of you over the last five years, but I also know there is more work to do and so many more Lobos to meet. Let's get to it!



Ellen Fisher, Ph.D.
Vice President for Research
Professor of Chemistry

Safety Spotlight & Compliance Corner

In January, we focused on slips, trips, and falls, and I noted that it's important to report all incidents. This month, I am focusing on an area that is often under-reported and that's "near-miss" incidents. A near-miss incident is essentially just what it sounds like – an unplanned event that almost caused harm but didn't. Some examples include dropping a tool that narrowly misses someone, a machine malfunction that could have caught clothing, but didn't, or just slipping on a wet floor but regaining balance. Whew!

We often think we don't need to report near misses – nothing happened, right? Sure, that's one way to look at it. A better way to approach this, however, is to think about near misses as a crucial warning sign for potential hazards and reporting them as highlighting unsafe conditions or behaviors that can be fixed before a serious accident occurs. Perhaps more importantly, reporting close calls provides valuable data for identifying root causes, improving safety protocols, and addressing risks like improper procedures, equipment malfunctions, or tripping hazards. Our [EHS team](#) has an easy mechanism for reporting near misses along with other types of incidents. EHS highly [encourages reporting near misses](#) and are truly interested in understanding systems or training weaknesses as opposed to placing blame.

In essence, a near miss is a gift of foresight, allowing Lobos and UNM to learn from "what almost happened" to prevent "what could happen".

Research News

UNM Grand Challenges: Level 2 Request for Proposals

[Grand Challenges](#) is pleased to announce a request for proposals for Level 2 of the multilevel program. A cohort of approximately 2 to 5 teams with diverse disciplinary expertise will be competitively selected for the two-year Level 2 program. You do not need to be part of a Level 1 team to apply. Each team will receive up to \$200,000 to promote program development and will receive facilitation, mentoring, and other program support and training provided by the OVPR and other UNM units.

Key Dates:

- Letter of interest due Feb. 27
- Full applications due May 1
- Announcement of awards expected by mid-July

Informational Sessions:

- In-person | Thursday, Feb. 12, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m. | PAIS 1010
- [Zoom Link](#) | Wednesday, Feb. 18, 12-1 p.m.

UNM BBER and Arts & Culture study

Over the past 18 months, UNM's Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER), commissioned by and working in partnership with the City of Albuquerque's Department of Arts & Culture, has completed a comprehensive study of Albuquerque's creative economy.

This report marks the first major examination of the local creative economy since 2012-2014 and reflects the City's commitment to understanding how creativity drives economic activity, opportunity, and community vibrancy. The findings are intended to guide policy, investment, and program decisions that will strengthen Albuquerque's creative sector.

UNM Associate Professor to Receive National Award

UNM Associate Professor Shawn Secatero will receive a national teaching award known as the [Best Practice Award in Support of Multicultural Education and Diversity](#) by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), one of the highest honors AACTE bestows.

Secatero works within the College of Education and Human Sciences and doubles as the coordinator of the Promoting our Leadership, Learning, and Empowering our Nations (POLLEN) Program. He also participated in the OVPR 2025 Leadership Innovation for Faculty Transformation (LIFT) Program.

Secatero will receive the national award in New Orleans this month. Congratulations on this extraordinary feat, Prof. Secatero!

Research Events

2026 State of Research

This year's UNM State of Research is scheduled for Thursday, March 26 at 4 p.m., in SUB Ballroom A. This year's event will follow a Q&A townhall format with the opportunity for researchers across campus to attend and engage with EVP Mike Richards, HSC VPR Hengameh Raissy, Interim Provost Barbara Rodriguez, and me.

Leading up to the townhall, we are urging Lobos to submit, in advance, any questions they'd like for us to answer regarding UNM's research enterprise at the 2026 State of Research.

Research Safety Week

UNM's Environmental Health and Safety is hosting the University's inaugural Research Safety Week – a three-day event, Feb. 10-12, dedicated to embedding safety into the heart of research and innovation across all disciplines.

Throughout the week, attendees can participate in a range of educational and interactive events focused on research safety, risk management and compliance. Programming includes expert-led keynote sessions and panel discussions, along with hands-on workshops and training covering topics such as cryogenic safety, laser safety, field safety, personal protective equipment uses and respirator fit testing.

Research Technology

Huron Suite Update

Implementation of the Huron Research Suite continues to move forward across all modules, with Effort Certification (ECC) hitting major milestones. ECC data validation and system testing are nearly complete, and our proposed data go-live is Feb 13.

Contract & Grant Accounting Central Administrator training begins Feb 9., and after conducting user training in late February, we are targeting a March ECC go-live for everyone.

In parallel, the COI Research team has completed its design phase, the Non-Research COI team is aligning configuration settings, and work continues defining Grants & Agreements requirements across all campuses. The IRB scope of work development is in its final stages with project work expected to begin soon. Keep an eye out for information on the ECC user training coming later this month!

Research Resources

UIDP is a global forum bringing together faculty, universities, and industries to promote and enable better industry-university collaboration. UNM has an institutional membership in UIDP, and our Office of Research Translation, Innovation, and Partnerships (ORTIP) actively engage in UDIP activities.

UIDP helps both individual scholars and institutions identify, and connect with, industry partners. UIDP sponsors conferences and holds webinars on technology, resources, projects, and topics of interest. Sign up for the UIDP newsletter [here](#); register with UIDP [here](#).

Research Radiates

This month's highlight is UNM Law professor Sonia Gipson Rankin, who is a long time Lobo and strong advocate for the safe use of technology, in our everyday lives, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI). She is also one of the conveners of the Grand Challenges Level 1 team, Trustworthy AI, and a former LIFT participant. Sonia is an expert in her field and a resource for our community which she takes immense pride in. I am extremely proud to take the time to share her love for research with all of you.

My name is Sonia Gipson Rankin and I'm a law professor, having been at UNM for 18 years. I study how technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI), shapes real people's lives through our courts, classrooms, and communities.

The goal is to uncover when these tools help and when they reinforce unfairness, and how we must evolve legal education to ensure justice keeps up with innovation. I was inspired by seeing how rules and technologies that claim to be neutral often produce very unequal outcomes, especially for Black communities and other historically marginalized groups. That gap between intention and impact pushed me to use my background as both a computer scientist and a lawyer to ensure our laws guide technology toward fairness.

In New Mexico, I integrate this research into my Torts and Family Law courses; I also serve as a resource for the legislature and courts. Nationally, I use my scholarship in legal and scientific journals to advise judges, medical practitioners, and private industry. Ultimately, my goal is to make this information plain to everyone, from elected officials to the local barbershop, empowering people to understand their agency in this digital age.