

Higher Education in New Mexico: A Chicken in Every Pot, a Car in Every Garage, a College on Every Corner

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Introduction

Higher education is a hot topic in political circles these days. With “Occupiers” complaining about heavy student loan debt and politicians in Washington debating whether to raise interest rates on student loans, the issues of who pays for higher education and how much of our society’s resources are dedicated to it are ripe for discussion.

Higher Education in New Mexico

According to the Legislative Finance Committee, taxpayers will spend a total of \$2.9 billion on higher education in New Mexico in FY 2012.¹ That includes \$757 million in General Fund expenditures and \$663 million in federal funds, and \$1.4 billion in “other state funds” which are derived from sources as diverse as student tuition and the land grant permanent fund. These numbers are big and admittedly out-of-context. The fact is, however, that New Mexico spends a

¹ Legislative Finance Committee, “Post-Session Fiscal Review,” March 2012, <http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/lfc/lfcdocs/2012%20Post%20Session%20Review%20Final.pdf>

lot compared to other states on higher education. According to the Legislative Finance Committee, no other state dedicates more of its citizen’s personal income to higher education than New Mexico.²

In FY08, about \$17.39 per \$1,000 of personal income was dedicated to higher education in New Mexico, while the national average was about \$7.00.³

What are the taxpayers of New Mexico getting for their money? Not much according to the report CollegeMeasures.org.⁴ As the following chart from the New Mexico page detailing outcomes for public colleges, the state’s institutions underperform relative to other states.

According to the table below, New Mexico is ranked 46th when it comes to student graduation rates and its first-year retention rate is the worst in the nation. This points to issues both in student preparedness and whether we are spending too much on higher education relative to other priorities (possibly including improvements to our K-12 system that result in better-prepared students).

Table 1.

| Goal | Strategic Measure | Outcome | National Rank Among All States | Trend |
|--------------------------|---|----------|--------------------------------|---------|
| Completion & Progression | Graduation rate | 40.2 % | # 46 | ↓ |
| | First-year retention rate | 71.6 % | # 50 | ↑ |
| Efficiency | Cost per student (FTE) | \$11,954 | # 35 | ↓ |
| Productivity | Cost per degree | \$56,379 | # 28 | ↑ |
| | Cost of attrition * | \$6.0m | N/A | ↑ |
| Gainful Employment | Student loan default rate | 6.2 % | # 11 | ↑ |
| | Ratio of student loan payments to earnings per recent graduates *** | No Data | No Data | No Data |

Amount spent by the colleges to educate first-year undergraduate students (first-time, full-time) who did not begin a second year.
 * Median starting pay data presently available for 946 of the 1,575 colleges featured on this website.

Another report, this one from the National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking, shows that taxpayers fund a disproportionate share of higher education expenses in New Mexico.⁵

As the chart below shows, New Mexico taxpayers disproportionately foot the bill for higher education in New Mexico (our state is 2nd-highest in terms of state and local support per \$1,000

² Legislative Finance Committee, “Higher Education New Mexico State University & University of New Mexico,” August 11, 2010, <http://www.unm.edu/president/documents/lfc-report-unm-and-nmsu-2010-08-11.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ CollegeMeasures.org, “New Mexico Public Colleges,” http://collegemeasures.org/4-year_colleges/reporting/state/scorecard/NM.aspx.

⁵ National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking, “New Mexico State Profile 2011,” <http://www.higheredinfo.org/stateprofile/index.php?years=DEFAULT&measures=DEFAULT&columns=DEFAULT&state=35>.

of personal income. On the flip-side, students in New Mexico institutes of higher education face the 49th-highest burden when it comes to tuition and fees. This statistic raises the question of whether unprepared/undecided students decide to go to college for the simple fact that they don't know what else to do and someone else is (largely) paying the bills.

Table 2.

New Mexico State Profile Download as:
 Year: 2011

| Measure | Rank | State Value | U.S. Avg. | Lowest Value | Highest Value |
|--|------|-------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| Higher Education Finance > Revenues and Support | | | | | |
| Net Tuition and Fees per Full-Time Student | 49 | 2182 | 4774 | 1794 | 13402 |
| Total Educational Revenues Per Full-Time Equivalent Student | 37 | 9973 | 11016 | 8149 | 20348 |
| State and Local Support for Higher Education Operating Expenses Per \$1,000 of Personal Income | 2 | 11.60 | 5.82 | 2.28 | 12.81 |
| State and Local Public Higher Education Support Per Full-Time Equivalent Student | 7 | 7791 | 6290 | 3025 | 14837 |
| State and Local Support for Higher Education Operating Expenses Per Capita | 5 | 401.18 | 242.45 | 104.35 | 605.97 |
| Workforce Conditions > Labor Demand | | | | | |
| Unemployment Rates | 39 | 7.4 | 8.9 | 3.5 | 13.5 |
| Economic Conditions > Income | | | | | |
| Per Capita Personal Income | 43 | 34575 | 41663 | 32176 | 56889 |

Tackling the problems in New Mexico's higher education system must entail a comprehensive effort, but clearly, a lot of taxpayer money is being spent in this state to limited effect. Clearly, there is room for improvement. What can be done? In the wake of the financial crisis and belt-tightening, tuition is on the rise while taxpayer support is on the wane.⁶ While these policies were responses to short-term political needs, they are needed and must be continued and expanded upon for the long-term.

Unfortunately, merely reducing budgets is not the same as reforming a system. Higher education in New Mexico needs dramatic reforms. The rest of this paper makes the argument that New Mexico's higher education system is too sprawling and that is trying to be everything to everyone in all places. Addressing the many shortcomings in New Mexico's higher education system requires a realization that resources are limited and that specialization and standards can lead to excellence in ways that a "one-size-fits-all" approach cannot.

Right-Sizing Higher Education in New Mexico

According to New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee, Arizona's post-secondary enrollment is nearly five times that of New Mexico's and has fewer state supported institutions.⁷ Addressing the size and scope of New Mexico's institutes of higher education is a challenge.

⁶ Sabrina Hartley and Kathleen del Monte, "Other States' Higher Education Reduction Strategies," Florida Legislature, January 25, 2012, <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/monitordocs/Presentations/P12-02.pdf>.

⁷ Legislative Finance Committee, "Higher Education New Mexico State University & University of New Mexico," August 11, 2010, <http://www.unm.edu/president/documents/lfc-report-unm-and-nmsu-2010-08-11.pdf>

First and foremost, six of these institutes are enshrined in the State Constitution.⁸ Even if that were not the case, there is limited political support for and willingness to take a serious look at the number of higher education institutions in New Mexico. It would undoubtedly create a firestorm – particularly in rural areas dependent on those high-paying jobs and free-spending students – if any one of these institutions were targeted for elimination.

However, New Mexico's Constitution says nothing about the state's plethora of branch campuses, their numbers, and the role they play. How many of those does New Mexico have? How are their locations determined? Are they all essential to the proper education of our citizens or might some of them close or be re-purposed (to focus on specific fields as opposed to general education, for example)? To rephrase the title of this report, "Does New Mexico really need a college on every corner?"

This paper includes a comprehensive listing of New Mexico's public universities and their branch campuses and education centers in Appendix 1.

It would be hard, even for the staunchest supporters of higher education, to argue that each and every one of these myriad campuses is absolutely necessary. There are a total of 12 campuses to choose from in the Albuquerque Metropolitan area alone. There are 9 campuses in or within a one hour drive of Las Cruces.

It is worth studying Appendices 1 and 2 at this point in order to better understand both the number of campuses throughout New Mexico and where they are in relation to each other. Campus locations are listed in Appendix 1 while the campuses are mapped in Appendix 2.

Some critics will say, "So, New Mexico has a lot of college campuses, who is to say if we have the right amount or need any more? After all, fast food restaurants, gas stations, and supermarkets proliferate in my neighborhood."

This would be a valid argument if, like fast food outlets or shopping centers, these various institutions were competing against each other in a marketplace for students, but the reality is that there is no "marketplace" and no true competition when it comes to public higher education in New Mexico. There are a handful of expensive, private options and a large number of government-run options, but it is difficult to see how these institutes compete against each other in any significant way that defies geography. After all, the funding largely comes from the same place (taxpayers).

Another argument in favor of our multitude of non-specialized campuses is that New Mexico is indeed a rural state with population centers spread throughout the state. These centers must exist for the sake of convenience.

It may be convenient for students in even the most isolated areas of the state to have a campus nearby, but how much convenience should we ask taxpayers to financially support? Shouldn't taxpayers demand a certain amount of commitment from our potential college students in terms

⁸ New Mexico Constitution, "Article XII, Section 11: State Educational Institutions," http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/Article_XII,_New_Mexico_Constitution.

of moving/commuting/sacrificing their time and resources to get their educations? As was discussed earlier in this paper in relation to Tables 1 and 2, relatively little is expected financially from students of higher education in New Mexico. Perhaps in lieu of raising tuition, policymakers could require greater investments by students in terms of time and space.

At the very least, the Legislature and New Mexico's higher education leaders should consider eliminating or combining some buildings and resources. Do New Mexico Highlands, UNM, and CNM all need campuses in Rio Rancho? Does New Mexico State need a campus in Albuquerque (home of the state's flagship university)? Where buildings are shared (Kirtland AFB being one example), are staff combined as well or are the institutes completely separate?

Each branch and center has its own array of stakeholders whose preferences may not necessarily coincide with current and projected fiscal realities. In order to drive New Mexico's higher education reform efforts down to the individual institutes themselves, we suggest the following questions be asked about each branch and center.

1. Stripped of its subsidies, has the unit at least broken even in each of the last three years?
2. What entities provide operating subsidies and in what amount?
3. How many full-time positions are charged to the unit?
4. Who are the incumbents, what are their job descriptions, salaries and benefits?
5. Aside from instructors who are the continuing part-time employees by name, job descriptions, annual salaries and benefits?
6. What is the unit's mission statement?
7. How does each instructional program or service offered fulfill the mission statement?
8. By name, what is purpose, descriptions and cost, instructor salaries, and all other costs charged to the program of delivering?
9. If a transfer program to the main campus or another university, how many students have completed the program and actually transferred the last three years?
10. If a recreational or a vocational program why can't be provided by another entity within or near the host community?

The answers will help taxpayers, legislators and higher education leaders separate myth from reality. They must be asked if New Mexico is to move beyond simply reducing higher education budgets towards a more streamlined system driven to achieve excellence rather than attempting to "serve all comers."

Notably, New Mexico Tech is only four year public university that that is both limited to one campus and is limited in its scope of curricular offerings, is also the most widely-respected institute of higher learning. The New Mexico Military Institute (a junior college) follows a limited model that is definitely not "one-size-fits-all" and, it should be noted, has an illustrious reputation as well.

Higher education in New Mexico is destined to struggle as long as its K-12 system is failing. However, it can't be all things to all people. Funding sources are limited and must be allocated towards making higher education the best it can be. Reforming the system requires asking some

tough questions and a narrowed institutional focus with more demanded of students. The days of “spreading the money around” must be over.

About the Authors:

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Appendix 1. New Mexico’s Four Year College Campuses



- Albuquerque (Main)
- Gallup
- Los Alamos
- Taos
- Valencia
- Rio Rancho
- Stand-Alone Statewide Education Centers**
- Clovis
- Farmington
- Tucumcari
- Hobbs
- Kirtland AFB
- Santa Fe



- Las Cruces (Main)
- Alamogordo
- Carlsbad
- Grants
- Albuquerque

Kirtland AFB
Farmington



Portales (Main)
Ruidoso
Roswell



Las Vegas (Main)
Rio Rancho
Santa Fe
Farmington
Taos
Raton
Española
Roswell



Socorro (Only)



Espanola (Main)

El Rito



Silver City (Main)
Gallup
Deming
Truth or Consequences
Lordsburg

New Mexico's Community College Campuses



Main Campus
Montoya Campus (NE Heights of Albuquerque)
CNM Westside (Albuquerque)
South Valley Campus
Rio Rancho Campus
Work Force Training Center (Albuquerque)



Clovis Only



Tucumcari Only



Hobbs Only



Roswell Only



Farmington
Aztec
Kirtland



Santa Fe (Main)



Las Cruces (Main)
East Mesa (Las Cruces)
Gadsden (Anthony)
Sunland Park
White Sands
Mesquite Learning Center (Las Cruces)
Workforce Center (Las Cruces)
Chaparral
Mimbres (Deming)



| |
|------------------|
| Las Vegas (Main) |
| Mora |
| Santa Rosa |
| Springer |

Appendix 2: Mapping New Mexico's Many Campuses

Map Symbols

Four Year Institutions:

| | | |
|---|------------------|------------|
| Eastern New Mexico University | green circle | 3 campuses |
| New Mexico Highlands University | purple circle | 8 campuses |
| New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology | blue circle | 1 campus |
| New Mexico State University | dark blue circle | 7 campuses |
| Northern New Mexico College | black circle | 2 campuses |
| Stand-Alone Statewide Education Centers | yellow circle | 6 campuses |
| University of New Mexico | red circle | 6 campuses |
| Western New Mexico University | maroon circle | 5 campuses |

38 Total

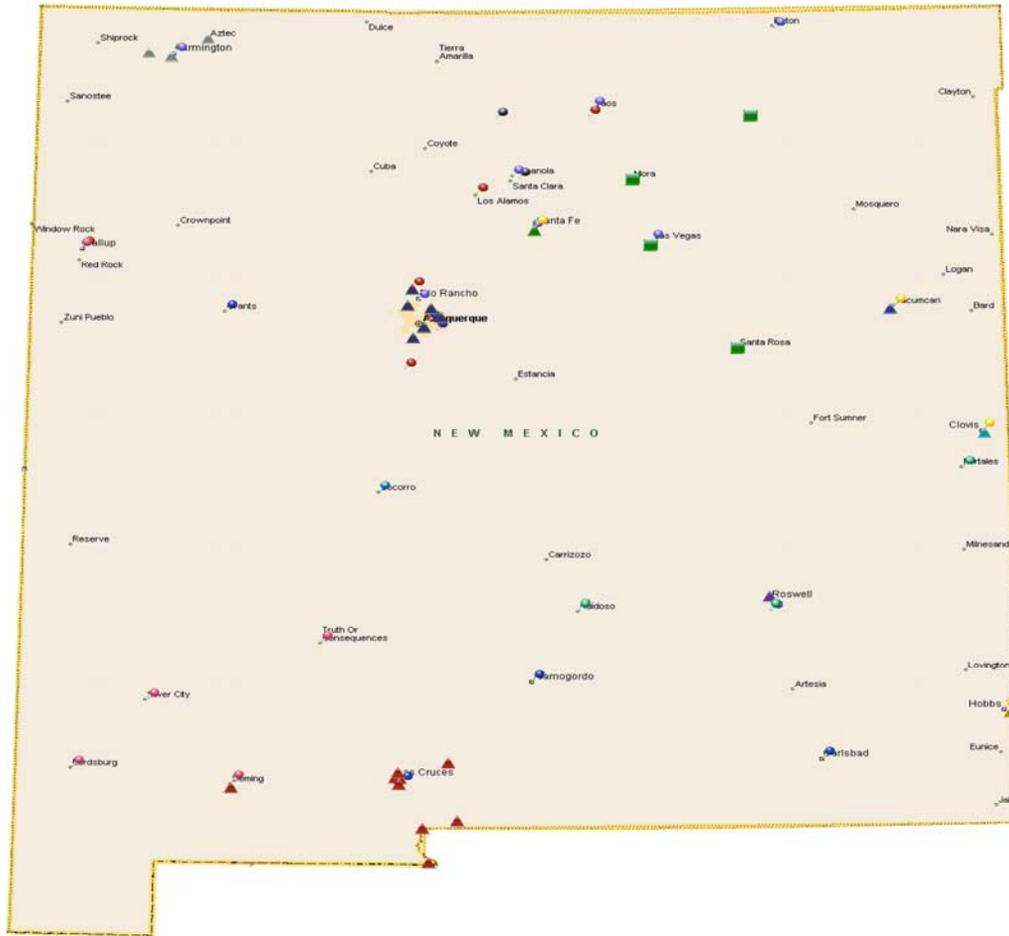
Community & Junior Colleges:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Central New Mexico College | black triangle | 6 campuses |
| Clovis Community College | turquoise triangle | 1 campus |
| Dona Ana Community College | red triangle | 9 campuses |
| Luna Community College | green square | 4 campuses |
| Mesalands Community College | blue triangle | 1 campus |
| New Mexico Junior College | yellow triangle | 1 campus |
| New Mexico Military Institute | purple triangle | 1 campus |
| San Juan College | gray triangle | 3 campuses |
| Santa Fe Community College | green triangle | 1 campus |

27 Total

65 Combined Total

New Mexico Statewide View



Albuquerque/Rio Rancho Detail View



Las Cruces Detail View

