UNM: How to Survive and Thrive

Spring 2015
(Updated January 2015)

Tuesdays, 4:30-5:30

Wednesdays, 4:30-5:30

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction
   A. Welcome to UNM.................................................................3
   B. Important Links and Contacts........................................5
   C. Questionnaire.................................................................6

II. Examples of what can happen.................................................7

III. What keeps students from being successful at UNM?.........................9

IV. Rules of the Road
   A. Classes.................................................................11
   B. Mentors.................................................................13
   C. Health and Money.....................................................14
   D. Extracurricular Activities and Resources.............................15
   E. Changing your Thinking..............................................16

V. Principles to survive and thrive by
   A. Principle 1: Know your Heart.......................................17
   B. Principle 2: Look for the Blessings................................18
   C. Principle 3: Bring it to the Table..................................19
   D. Principle 4: Finish Well...............................................20
Welcome to UNM

As an incoming freshman or transfer student, we welcome you to campus. The goal of this book is to help you manage your first year or two at UNM so that you are getting a diploma in a few years. This is a time when the bureaucracy is not transparent and small errors can magnify into much larger programs. We want to see you put your energy into academics and figuring out what you want to do in the long run and not dealing with bursar’s holds, withdrawals from classes, suffering in classes with high failure rates, and other issues.

Each week you will be given the next section for discussion. You will need a 3 ring binder to add the sections of this guidebook as we cover them. You are required to record the answers to the assignments either on pages in this binder or in a journal. This journal will be checked for completeness but should be for your personal benefit and therefore will be kept private as much as you request. After each assignment, you should be prepared to share a portion of your responses with the class. Additionally, you are required to set up a Gmail account to have access to Google Drive, an online document sharing tool that will be utilized to make changes to this document.
Assignment:

1. Make a Gmail account and send an email to maggieww@unm.edu from the address you created.

2. If you are a new student to UNM, familiarize yourself with campus and the map. A more detailed map can be found at http://iss.unm.edu/PCD/campus-map.html

3. Find times to go to study sessions for your classes at the Center for Academic Program Support (CAPS) located on the 3rd floor of Zimmerman Library. Visit caps.unm.edu

4. Visit the Student Activities Center (SAC) website and look into the types of clubs with interests similar to yours. Make a list of clubs you would consider joining. Visit sac.unm.edu

5. Write a letter to yourself that describes why you are here and what you want to get out of this semester and this class and UNM in general. What goals do you have for yourself? (The purpose of this letter is to encourage you in the middle to the end of the semester when stress will make motivation challenging.)
Important links and contacts

University Advisement
advisement.unm.edu

Colleges Advisement
Business
http://www.mgt.unm.edu/advisement/
Arts and Sciences
http://www.unm.edu/~artsci/advisement/index.html
Education
coeac@unm.edu
Fine Arts
http://finearts.unm.edu/advisement.htm
finearts@unm.edu
Engineering
http://soe.unm.edu/ess/advisement.html
speralta@unm.edu

Other Helpful Links
Health Center
https://shac.unm.edu/
CAPS Tutoring
http://caps.unm.edu/
UNM Libraries
http://www.unm.edu/libraries/
UNM All Access
http://allaccess.unm.edu/

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Semester__________  Date __________

Questionnaire

Name:

Year at UNM:

Intended major:

Are you a transfer student (if so, from where?):

Do you live on or off campus?

What is your hometown?

What do you plan to do after graduation?

Are you currently working? If so where and how many hours/week?

What is your GPA now?

What classes are you taking?

What are your expectations for this class and your semester?

What challenges do you think you'll face?
Introduction to this guide:

Life at the University of New Mexico can be full of challenges, opportunities, and new experiences that can, at times, be overwhelming, confusing, and sometimes completely alien. In addition to numerous opportunities to make friends, see and experience new things, and expand your horizons, you’ll be responsible for maintaining your grades, attending classes, studying, visiting your professors during their office hours, and any number of other academic activities that are important for your success. You’ll also need to learn how to navigate the UNM administration, how to deal with financial aide, the bursar’s office, the registrar, and any number of other departments that you are likely to come into contact with during your career here. On top of this you’ll also likely want to find time to spend with your family, friends, and yourself. All of these things can make life at UNM seem completely overwhelming but, fortunately, you don’t have to go it alone.

This guide, written mostly by students for students like you, contains not only links and information regarding resources to help you navigate the university and survive life as a student, but ideas exercises that encourage you to think deeply about who you are, what your values are, what you want from life. You will find that, despite how it might feel, you are truly not alone and that others just like you have overcome many of the same obstacles you will face and met with success. You’ll read and be encouraged to think of ways to change how you approach problems in life, and how you can appreciate all that life here, and elsewhere, offer you.

We encourage you to read through this guidebook, take time to look through the resources that UNM provides, and really dig deeply into who you are and what you want from your time here. Once you’ve done that, nothing can stop you.

You Are Not Alone: Examples of Trials Other Students Have Faced

Below are a few stories from other students discussing their worst week at UNM and how they coped.

My First F

“My worst week at UNM was probably at the end of the first semester of my sophomore year. Finals week was an extremely hard and stressful time for me. I was taking two Biology courses (Anatomy and Physiology and Microbiology). These were required courses for my then-major, nursing. Along with these two courses, I was taking 3 other courses. After taking my finals, I was extremely nervous knowing I hadn't done as well as I should have. Once I found out my final grades, I nearly cried. I passed microbiology (barely) and I failed Anatomy and Physiology. I had never failed a course or subject ever before this so I was devastated, but I kinda knew it was coming. I was very disappointed in myself because I know I could have used resources such as tutoring, but I was afraid of needing help. I had figured I lost my scholarship after doing so poorly.

I have changed my major because of this, and I feel good about the change. I am doing something I love to do rather than doing something others may want me to do. I did get A's in the other 3 courses I was taking, so that actually made my semester GPA higher. Even though it was still low, it could have been a lot lower. I now know if I am struggling with a course, I can
and need to get help as soon as possible to prevent this from happening. I also was able to keep my scholarship. I had a great cumulative GPA before that semester so the semester GPA brought down my cumulative GPA only slightly. I was able to move past this experience and instead of dwelling on the situation I learned from it."

I’m not married to my roommates

“For my freshman year, I lived in Redondo Village Apartments and participated in the Biology Living and Learning Community. Since I live in Redondo, we occasionally have health and safety checks in the dorms. The RA occasionally posts little notices on our door the weekend before the week the checks are supposed to take place. They do not give a specific date, but rather a set of days that they could do the Health and Safety checks at random. My roommate L had the bad habit of washing clothes and liked to let them dry in the apartment on the couch, stools, any available area basically (leaving her underwear and bras for all to see). My other roommate S tended to leave her shoes all over the apartment. My other roommate H also decided to have a breakfast night and invited a lot of people; I remember because I was studying for an exam or test the next day and the living room had music blasting. I asked my roommate nicely if they could lower the music because I was trying to study. She said that they would turn off the music after they were done cooking and everyone left, which she promised would be in the next 10 minutes or so. But in the meanwhile I tried to cope with all the noise by listening to music with my headphones. The breakfast night continued past midnight and my headphones were not of much help to block out the noise. The next morning I woke to a dirty kitchen. The sink was stacked with dirty dishes, there were crumbs all over the stove and countertops, and the trash was spilling over with an additional bag of trash placed right next to it. It just so happened that later the next day, when I returned to the apartment, we had a report placed in our apartment stating that we had failed the Health and Safety check and if we failed the next check we would be charged $150 each (or something equally outrageous). I cleaned the countertops and took out the trash and later my roommate H cleaned the dishes, S put her shoes back in the apartment and L put all her clothes in a laundry basket and put her basket in her room.

From that point, the apartment never got to that point again. Often times I felt like I was the odd ball out, because I was not like those girls. I wasn’t into shopping like S. I didn’t love the color pink like H. I didn’t get a $1000/month allowance from my parents. I felt like the three of them got along so well since they were all from the city. I was not fine with the situation of cleanliness in the apartment in the weeks before failing the health and safety check. Life was so different coming from a small community. I had roommates before, but not like this, not for a long period of time or in an apartment setting. It took some time to learn to find a balance, a sort of transition from a small town to a city. This moment had me develop into a person with a stronger voice, to not be shy or afraid, especially when something was bothering me. I had to find the courage to be able to ask for help. But looking back on that moment, I realize that it was a moment that taught me to be comfortable with who I am and appreciate where I come from."

Accidents Happen

“A couple weeks into my sophomore year at UNM, I was on my way to study for a math test at CAPS when I got in a bike accident with a car. I had to go to the ER in an ambulance and my parents drove to Albuquerque to see me. They also called my then-boyfriend but didn’t tell him
any details other than that I had been taken to the ER in an ambulance (so, he drove here, too, in a panic, and we later had a pretty serious argument about potential in-laws). I had many x-rays and stayed in the hospital for several hours, leaving unable to use my right arm (the one I write with) and on heavy painkillers. Later that week, I still had to take the math test, and I also had a physics test. I got a 36 on the math test and a 45 on the physics test and neither professor would let me retake the tests once I was better. The 36 got curved up to a 48 but that grade would go into calculating my final grade. I knew I wouldn't be able to pass both physics and math that semester, so I dropped into the physics parachute class and focused on math. That week, I thought my school career was over. I thought I was going to lose all my scholarships, not to mention I had no idea what the diagnosis of my arm was AND my boyfriend was mad at me.

I ended up barely maintaining the GPA needed for my scholarships by taking a class during Intersession. Despite the added stress that semester, a lot of really positive things came from it: I can now write with both hands, I didn’t have to retake any classes, and my math professor saw my determination and later wrote me a letter of recommendation for a research program.”

Below are some suggestions that you can use as discussion points with people in your community, your family, and your friends:

1. What steps should you take when things are going terribly?
2. What are some of the hardest things you have had to face at UNM?
3. What are some of the problems you expect to face at UNM and how do you plan on dealing with them?

Assignment:

1. Write the story of your own worst week. It can be in high school if an example from UNM doesn’t come to mind.
2. How did your “worst week” make you a stronger person?

**What keeps students from being successful at UNM?**

Academic success may seem to be relatively straightforward but going to class, taking notes, reading the textbook, and studying for exams are all not the only important factors to achieving success at UNM. Time management, budgeting wisely, housing, and even eating well and exercising are also important aspects of a strong college experience. Understanding the obstacles that other students have faced, and how they overcame them, is an important part of having a good strategy for navigating your college career.

Surveys of UNM students have identified five of the most difficult challenges faced by undergraduate students during their careers.
1. Knowing when and who to ask for help.
2. Finding a good adviser or mentor.
3. Being self-motivated to accomplish assignments on time and study for tests in advance.
4. Figuring out how college professors teach and what they expect from students.
5. Setting up a degree plan that leads to success and that prepares you for life after graduation.

Some of the other issues students mentioned facing are:
- Family matters that call you away from school; starting a family of your own.
- Adjusting from the high school/community college environment where class is required and teachers know you.
- Missing family/hometown/how things used to be.
- Having trouble making new friends and study partners.
- Not being taken seriously because of bad grades or mistakes in the past.
- Not being prepared for class.
- Being afraid to try something new- a new class, club, friend, etc.
- Making time for family, studying, work (time management)

Assignment:
1. Make a list of the challenges you have already faced at UNM and challenges you anticipate facing.
2. Make a list of possible ways to overcome these challenges
Rules of the Road

Recognizing the challenges you will face is the first step to overcoming them. The following sections will cover how to face the obstacles you'll inevitably face and prevent unnecessary problems from occurring. UNM students were asked to give advice to new students and this is what they considered most important for new students to know:

1. Don’t procrastinate. Give yourself plenty of time to study for or tests and complete assignments.
2. Go to class every day, even if attendance isn’t taken, and read the book before you go, even if you don’t understand it.
3. Go to office hours for all your professors at the beginning of the semester so you can get to know them.
4. Try to look for the positive in any situation and use failures as learning experiences. Studies have shown that optimism is a key trait in successful people and can be learned through experience.
5. Utilize the tutoring centers and ask for help from your Teaching Assistants (TA’s) or Supplementary Instruction (SI) leaders.

Other advice from students is listed and elaborated on below, separated by topic:

Classes

- Go to class.
- Always bring a pen/pencil and your notebook or paper to class
- Pay attention.
- Take notes. Writing helps you learn because you are involving more senses. Sometimes the professor will say valuable information rather than write it on the board. Highlight things the professor does write on the board.
- Complete the required/suggested readings. This will expose you to the material before class so it isn’t completely foreign to you when you’re sitting in lecture.
- Don’t procrastinate- set some early deadlines for yourself.
- Form study groups so you hear your own voice saying things.
- Realize that the syllabus is subject to change.
- Go to office hours to get a better idea of how the instructor sees the subject.
- Don’t be afraid of asking your professor anything you don’t understand but do not interrupt them excessively in the middle of a lecture- talk after class.
- Ask questions often and keep asking until you get an answer.
- If a professor asks you to come to office hours for help, make it a point to show up on time and when you say you will.
- When you go to office hours, make sure you are prepared to ask questions and do not expect to be spoon-fed answers. Also talk about things other than class.
• Use a planner or dry erase calendar to organize what tests and assignments are coming up and to schedule in times for study groups, visiting office hours, and other important events.

• Get advice from older students by asking questions about what professors are good, what classes are good, and what their experiences with different majors has been.

• Don’t be afraid of math and science, they’re not the monster subjects they seem to be. With perseverance and hard work, anyone can master them.

Assignment:

1. Find out the office hours for all of your professors. Think about how to fit in office hour visits.
2. Make an outline of all your assignments and tests due this week. Then make a plan for the remainder of the semester. This should include how many hours/week you should spend on each subject.
Mentors

Who, in your life, have you felt was a good mentor to you? A mentor can be someone who, even for a moment, teaches you something about life. A mentor can be someone who inspires you to be better, to do better, or to have more faith and confidence in yourself. A mentor might be a friend, a professor, a family member, or someone you might not even know very well. Mentors help to guide us when we’re unsure, to help us consider the options we have available to us. Mentors may look out for us, encourage us when we’re feeling down, or check up on us when we’re hiding away. Mentors are people we trust, people who care about us, and people we know we can count on to give us support when he chips are down.

Students were asked to identify people they felt helped them the most during their career, some of their top answers were:

1. People that take a personal interest in you.
2. Parents.
3. Mentor classes (like this one).
4. Siblings, close family and friends.
5. Instructors or professors.

Finding a good mentor can be challenging but as you interact with your professors, peers, and others in your life, you’ll develop a feel for who is likely to serve as a good mentor.

The relationships you build, professionally as well as personally, will be some of the most important resources you will ever have.

- Answer emails from professors and staff promptly.
- Always be on time for meetings or inform the person you will miss the meeting well in advance.
- Remember that at the end of your degree you will need letters of recommendation, so seek these recommenders out by going to office hours and working hard in class.

Assignments:

1. Make a list of qualities in a good mentor.
2. Make a list of questions you want to ask a professor that are not related directly to the class material.
3. Go to office hours with a professor that is a potential mentor and ask the questions you wrote down. If you can’t visit during office hours, send an email to set up a meeting time.
Health

Your health is one of the most important things you can take control of and maintain. After all, where would you be if you didn’t have your health? Considering your health is not just about eating right and staying active, it also has a lot to do with taking advantages of the services that the University provides such as health clinics, counseling, and health education. There are many services to help you—visit shac.unm.edu regularly to see the services offered.

- Plan your schedule so that you can sleep enough. The Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) offers sleep hygiene workshops.
- Plan your meals well so that you don’t over or under eat. SHAC has a nutritionist that can help you make an eating plan. Also, drink enough water.
- One way to manage stress is to visit the gym a few times a week or sign up for exercise classes (for most students, they are covered under full time tuition).
- Manage stress! Take time every day to do something you enjoy.

Money

It can be challenging to manage your money in college but it is important to take advantage of the services offered to help students succeed.

- If you need or want a job, visit unm.edu/jobs.
- Investigate whether student employment, work study, or both are applicable to you.
- Apply to a lot of jobs. Usually you will only get one interview out of five or six job applications.
- Investigate scholarship opportunities on the UNM Scholarships website, scholarship.unm.edu and inquire with your specific department.
- Visit the financial aid website, finaid.unm.edu and chat with someone if you have questions about your financial aid, FAFSA, etc.
- Student loans and Pell grants are options to look into if you find that you need more money for college. Information on this can be found on the UNM Financial Aid website as well and the location is marked on the map at the beginning of this guide. [have a guest speaker from Financial Aid come in to talk to students about this?]

Assignment:

1. What are some areas of your life that could be healthier?
2. What can you do to improve your health?
3. Do you have a budget? If yes, ask a financial coach to help you revise it. If no, find a resource to help make a budget. [include resources here or ask student to brainstorm them]
**Extracurricular Activities**

Joining at student organization was one of the most top things that students reported being useful in the survey. In fact, developing a strong sense of community within your university has been demonstrated to have a strong effect on overall success in college. Student organizations may provide more than just a chance to meet new friends, they may also offer services such as financial aide counseling as well as opportunities to volunteer in your community. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your extracurricular activities.

- Don’t limit yourself to the things you already like when looking for new clubs. Be social!
- Go to club meetings but don’t feel like you have to commit to them all.
- Limit yourself to one or two activities that are really important to you. Too many extracurricular activities can cause you to lose focus on your school work.
- Apply for research programs, work study, etc. to meet other students with similar interests that are working hard to accomplish a goal.
- Above all, make sure you do not spread yourself too thin. Getting involved is a wonderful opportunity to make friends and discover new things, but it can also become too much of an obstacle to your academic career. Remember, balance is key.

**Utilizing Resources**

The multitude of resources available to students is often overlooked. This is not a comprehensive list but will get you started on being more grounded at UNM.

- Attend a campus orientation if you didn’t already.
- Use maps to know where things are on campus.
- Ask other students about professors before you sign up for classes.
  ratemyprofessor.com is a tool that should be used carefully - it is often unreliable and you might miss out on a great teacher because of a bad review.
- Utilize CAPS, especially for math, chemistry, and physics.
- Contact professors and students in the department if you don’t find someone at CAPS that you can understand or relate to. Keep letters of recommendation in mind.

**Assignment**

1. If you are not already in a club, find on that fits your preferences and attend the meetings.
2. Spend time getting to know either a professor or a graduate student in your department. Write about how you began this relationship. [how to make this assignment less intimidating?]
3. Spend some time finding additional resources that UNM offers that were not discussed and bring a list to the next class.
Changing Your Thinking

The following are a list of ideas that we will elaborate on in the coming weeks through the use of the Principles.

• Understand how teams work and make your teams work! There are three characteristics of a great team: communication, watch each other’s backs and no unnecessary emergencies.
• Do not fear failure- it is a teacher if you can look at it that way. When you fail, be honest with yourself and your professors. Do not hide failure.
• Don’t expect to fail- do not tell yourself bad things about yourself.
• There will be classes that, no matter how hard you try, you will be terrible with, and you might even fail a class in your own major.
• Always take initiative to get things done. Take responsibility for what you have the power to control.
• Feeling uncomfortable is a beautiful thing. It means you’re pushing yourself past your comfort zone.
• Make time for yourself so that you can find your passion, and once you do, go for it!
• Understand the difference between studying to memorize and studying to understand and strive for the latter.
• Don’t be afraid to switch your major to something you find more interesting.
• Remember that all of classes you take, even if you drop them past a certain date, still show up on your transcript and will need to be explained later.

Assignment:

1. Recall and record a time when you have felt really uncomfortable in a situation and try to remember the good that came from it.
2. Why are you pursuing your current major? Are you passionate about the topic? How do you know?
Principles to survive and thrive by!

The previous section was primarily practical advice, but the last category talked about how to change your way of thinking about things. This section on the Principles and examples of how to use them will help you to get the most out of your time at UNM.

Principle 1: Know your heart

- Realize that knowing your heart takes time and patience.
- Never let anyone tell you “You Can’t...”
- Don’t let the little things bring you down.
- Keep in mind what you’re here to accomplish
- You cannot please everyone in your life. What your parents, or any others, may think you should study is not necessarily what you should concentrate on right away.
- Be open-minded to your classes and pick the major that you enjoy.
- When you find it, passionately dedicate yourself to doing the best you can.
- Remember, there will be times when you have to deny your passion to find it. [what does this mean to you?]
- It is ok to be undecided. Do not declare a major right away if you are not sure.

Assignment:

1. Think about your favorite things as a kid and make a list of them. What is it about those things that intrigued you?
2. Think about your favorite class so far and elaborate on why it was your favorite.
3. If you could do anything (money, time, education weren’t barriers), what would it be?
4. Timeline of your life.
   Early childhood_________________adulthood.
Principle 2: Look for the positive or blessing in everything.

Students were asked to give an example of when they were able to use Principle 2. Next to the experience is the positive that came from that experience.

1. Failing a class.
   Maybe that is not your passion; you can retake the class; you will try harder next time because you never want to have that feeling again.
2. Getting a bad grade on a project or assignment or test.
   It’s not the final grade in the class; you can study more for the next one; it is just one grade.
3. Death in your family.
   You loved that person enough for it to be so hard to say goodbye; that person had a huge positive impact on your life.
4. Not being able to understand/communicate with professors or T.A.s in hard classes.
   It is only one class; other people have taken the class before and you can get help.
5. Getting out of a relationship.
   Being able to focus on your own priorities and do well in school; you got to experience life with someone else.
6. UNM not offering something you want/need to succeed.
   UNM is just one part of your journey and there will be other opportunities; now you know what you want and need.
7. Not getting scholarships.
   Loans are an option and are temporary; there are always more scholarships.
8. Living with people that you don't get along with.
   You aren’t them; it teaches you to be more humble and tolerant of other peoples perspectives.
9. Interpersonal communication with offensive or rude people.
   You aren’t them and you aren’t married to them; you learn how to deal with them because there are always going to be mean people.
   You will heal; you will be able to empathize with other people.

Assignment:

1. How have you used Principle 2 in the last year?
2. How have you used Principle 2 in the last month?
3. Have you used Principle 2 today?
Principle 3: Embrace who you are and bring it to the table

If you come to the table (meaning you enter into a new situation or discussion) and you try to speak for yourself, it can be extremely intimidating. In situations where you feel insignificant, it is important to remember that you don’t just represent yourself- you represent many generations of your family.

- Think of all the stories you remember, you have these people in your DNA - you own their stories, their experiences, the laughter and pain, the great moments - and even the crazy ones!
- Bring that to the table and speak with the depth that comes from knowing that you bring great value and experience to the table - from many generations past.
- Do not get intimidated. Every other freshman is just as scared as you are and has insecurities, some people just hide it better.
- Remember that you have strong people’s DNA inside you. The fact that you are here today proves that you are here today proves that someone in your history was successful.

Assignment:

1. What is your parents story? Limit this to a paragraph, draw a timeline, or express with bullets.
2. What is your grandparents story? Limit this to a paragraph, draw a timeline, or express with bullets.
3. What is a family member or close friend to tell their stories? Limit this to a paragraph, draw a timeline, or express with bullets.
4. What are some of your weirdest family traditions?
5. Before the next class, come up with a question to ask a professor in one of your classes and ask it. Be prepared to report on this experience to the class.
Principle 4: Finish well

Life is like gymnastics, everyone remembers the landing. In fact, there is cognitive psychology work that shows that people’s memory of an interaction is based on one high or low experience and the last time they see a person. What does this look like?

- Look back where you have been and acknowledge the relationships, regardless of how brief they were, that helped you to where you are now.
- Make sure you are leaving a place better for your having been there. [like ‘leave no trace’]
- Show gratitude.

Assignment:

1. Give an example of a time you had a great finish.
2. Give an example of a time you had a terrible finish.
3. What do you think about Principle 4?
4. How can you apply this principle to classes and your semester?