

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

# OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL ANALYTICS NEWSLETTER



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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The last 6 months have challenged us. We grapple with uncertainty in our working lives, at home, and when we dare to venture out for necessities. The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racial injustice have exposed many flaws in our social fabric that we seek to address with urgency and care.

One of the critical components of societal change is data that is reliable and factual. Good information is a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful transformation. We need people who understand how to collect data that inspires trust. We also need understanding of the ethical implications of data, to avoid perpetuating inequalities that often come to light. How we describe people by putting them into categories is meaningful, and must be done with care.

Cathy O'Neil's "Weapons of Math Destruction" (2016) is an examination of how algorithms rely on data that originated from biased systems. Algorithms promised to take out human biases. However, these algorithms ended up making the same decisions as biased humans. Understanding data in context is critical for making decisions that improve the state of the world rather than perpetuate injustices they are trying to rectify.



PHOTO BY SHAYLA CRISTINE PHOTOGRAPHY

As you go about your daily work, read the news, or engage in (physically distant) conversations, question the provenance of the information you consume. Engage with the uncomfortable questions of how people, places, and events are represented, and whether these representations are just or truthful. We cannot move forward when we rely on old assumptions. Instead, we must use the power of data and understanding to bring something better into the world.

Dr. Heather Mechler

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## FEATURED STAFF: DR. ANGELA BALTES

Angela is an Institutional Researcher with OIA where she develops data-driven solutions that supports university operations. Some of her projects include automation of reports, a transfer student dashboard, and a student retention supervised machine learning project. Angela began her career in health environments, where she leveraged data to improve patient outcomes. She is a recent graduate from Rutgers University, and her doctoral research involved using machine learning algorithms to analyze cardiac medical device failures. In her free time she loves to learn about data science and visualization, play board games, watch 90's cartoons and explore the nature of New Mexico.



## OIA DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT

The University of New Mexico Office of Institutional Analytics (OIA) is proud to release its new statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion:

"The Office of Institutional Analytics is committed to the responsible, inclusive, and ethical use of data and analysis. We recognize that data plays a significant role in representation and access, and we strive to provide accurate and timely information that can enhance the lives of our diverse university community."

