



ISSUE 9 • MAY 2023

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL ANALYTICS

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Director's Column

HEATHER MECHLER, PHD

One of my favorite sitcoms is "The Good Place." Without sharing any spoilers, it was a show about how we make moral sense of our complicated world and how it affects other people. Ted Danson played the "Architect" of the Good Place, which emulates a type of heavenly afterlife. Perhaps one of his funniest lines is directed at a colleague: "In the words of one of my actual friends...Ya basic. It's a human insult. It's devastating. You're devastated right now." For those not savvy to the term, calling someone 'basic' means that they are bland, unremarkable, or even (gasp!) average.

As humans, we generally do not like being labelled as average. Yet when we are trying to understand a metric or some phenomenon in our world, we gravitate to the average. What's the average household income in the U.S.? What is the average life expectancy in Country A versus Country B? These can be useful to know, especially if you want to know how your income compares to the average American's or whether improvements in sanitation and healthcare have resulted in an improvement in life expectancy for citizens of Country A.

In statistics, there are measures of central tendency, which can be the mean, median, or mode. Each of them indicate something different about a group's middle and its overall distribution. In his brilliant essay, "The Median Isn't The Message," Stephen Jay Gould described his quest for knowledge after a cancer diagnosis and learning that the median life expectancy for people with his type of cancer was 8 months after diagnosis. He said, "When I learned about the eight-month median, my first intellectual reaction was: Fine, half the people will live longer; now what are my chances of being in that half?" He learned that the mortality distribution was indeed right-skewed, meaning that many people live for years after diagnosis. He fortunately lived another 20 years, putting him pretty far on the tail of the curve. The mean or median can tell us some useful information, but we need far more than that for true understanding. When you see a measure of central tendency, be curious about the outliers and the ways in which the mean or median isn't the reality for many.

THIS ISSUE

Director's Column
BY HEATHER MECHLER

What's new in the UNM Data Community
BY CHARLA OROZCO

Featured Staff:
Sayarika Baral
BY ZACHARIA KIBUTA

Featured branch: Valencia

Using data to inform policy
BY MONTE-ANGEL RICHARDSON

FAQ About OIA Dashboards
BY JING FENG



What's new in the UNM data community

BY CHARLA OROZCO

Art & Science of Data Event Recap

Our office, along with the Office of Assessment & Academic Program Review, co-hosted another successful (albeit snowy) Art & Science of Data event on Wednesday, February 15th. We welcomed **161 participants, 29 presenters, and learned from 15 sessions** for our largest event yet! We had a 28% response rate on our event survey, where respondents noted the most popular sessions came from the Data Visualization Track. Average responses indicated participants found sessions to be between **informative** and **very informative** (4.4 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5-very informative, 1-not at all informative). Respondents agreed that the Art & Science of Data sessions **increased their awareness of available data resources**. And 95% (43 of 45) respondents said they **would recommend** the event to a colleague. So if you missed out this year, be sure to check it out next year. A visual recap of the survey findings is available [here](#). We received several requests to bring the event back in-person, so we hope to at least make the event hybrid next year, and offer some in-person or hybrid data meet-ups between now and then. Our first **Data Discussion & Networking** event will take place **June 9**, and information will be posted on our website in mid-May.

Art & Science of Data Event Materials Have Moved!

We recently migrated all Art & Science of Data event-related information, including recordings and materials from previous events, to a new website - dataday.unm.edu. If you are looking for recordings and materials from past events, please visit our new website and click on the **Material Library tab**.

Featured branch: Valencia

The UNM-Valencia Campus, located in Los Lunas, NM, near Tome Hill and the historic Tome land grant, serves Valencia county, as well as parts of Socorro and Torrance counties. While there are Albuquerque bedroom communities in the northern end of our service area, the US Census describes the remainder as "rural fringe". In Fall 2022, we served 1,960 students, 684 of whom were dual credit high school students.



Featured Staff: Sayarika Baral

BY ZACHARIA KIBUTA

Sayarika joined the Office of Institutional Analytics (OIA) as a project assistant on January 17th, 2023. She is from Nepal. She came to the U.S. in 2016. She holds a BBA in Accounting and Information Systems and is currently pursuing her master's degree in Cybersecurity and Business Analytics (MSCBA).

One of her future professional goals is to combine and apply her technical and accounting expertise as a Certified Public Accountant to promote the growth of financial technology (fintech) in Nepal.

In her free time, she enjoys watching movies and documentaries, traveling, and exploring different cultures, usually through food.



USING DATA TO INFORM POLICY

BY MONTE-ANGEL RICHARDSON, MSW

Every day, professionals in the public sector make policy decisions that affect university students and staff, such as how to improve safety, allocate budgets, and respond to crises. Often, they use insights gleaned from university data to make strategic decisions. University leaders are in a unique position to use data to create policies that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the UNM system to drive broad-reaching transformation.

For example, by collecting and analyzing student data from multiple sources, including admissions forms, behavioral health, public health, medical and housing data, UNM can better understand the characteristics and areas for change for students with high needs and costs, for whom the current procedures are falling short. Such insights gleaned from data can help transform how services are provided to students, dramatically improving their educational outcomes while significantly reducing costs.

A recent [Pew Charitable Trust](#) study identified five key actions for using data to make decisions. They include:

- Planning ahead by setting up guiding goals and structures.
- Building the audience's capacity to effectively use data.
- Ensuring that quality data can be accessed and used by stakeholders.
- Analyzing data to create meaningful information, and;
- Sustaining support for continued data efforts.

The impact of data on policy is evidenced from the recent New Mexico legislative session, conducted January through March of this year. One policy change prioritized by UNM was a fully funded compensation increase of at least 10%. The advocacy for this priority was supported by data related to retention and recruitment of faculty, staff, and health professionals. Included were comparative data from neighboring states, also highlighting disparities in pay for women and people of color. Based on the data provided, legislators approved a 6% salary increase for UNM faculty and staff.

UNM recognizes the need to invest resources toward planning, building capacity, sharing data, and analyzing data to create meaningful information. As universities continue to share and integrate data, leveraging the insights held within university data will only become easier.

FAQ ABOUT OIA DASHBOARDS

BY JING FENG, PHD

Q: What grades are considered passing vs. failing?

A: Passing grades include A, A+, A-, B, B+, B-, C, C+, CR, and RCR. Anything else is a failing grade.

Q: In the Official Faculty Counts dashboard, why do the numbers by rank at the bottom of the page total to be more than the top graph?

A: The numbers by rank are the total counts of five years. Click on a year in the top graph to see the counts by rank in that year.

Q: Is there a way to discern course section from the course fail dashboard?

A: No. Courses are grouped by Course ID (e.g., "ACCT2110") on the "Fail Rates and Enrollments by Course ID" tab, and by Course ID and subject on the "Course Sections by Instructor Status" tab.

Q: How can we tell individual courses apart from each other when they have the same course number?

A: This is not possible, in part to protect student privacy with small enrollment courses.