



SMALL SCHOOL. BIG VALUE. REAL NEW MEXICAN PERKS.

Dear Graduates and Friends,

Despite the crazy challenges of 2020, we were pleased to welcome an amazing new group of students to our law school on August 12. This talented group of 105 Juris Doctor and 5 Master of Studies in Law (MSL) students comes to us from diverse backgrounds. Nearly half of the entering class identify as students of color. While the vast majority of our entering class comes from New Mexico, over one-fifth of them come from other states throughout the country. We are also proud to report that our 1Ls have the highest combined median LSAT scores (155) and undergraduate GPAs (3.5) that we have seen in years. It should not surprise anybody to learn that the feedback that I am getting from faculty and staff about these students is extremely positive.

In addition to new students, we also welcome three "new" full-time tenure-track faculty members to our law school this year, Professor Steven Homer, Professor Lysette Romero Córdova, and Professor Sam Winder. I use the word "new" loosely here because all three are familiar faces at our law school. Professors Romero Córdova and Winder are both graduates of our law school, and they taught here as visiting faculty members last year. Professor Homer, a graduate of Harvard Law School, taught here as a non-tenure track lecturer for over 15 years before applying for a tenure-track position last year. I welcome all three of them on board as tenure-track professors. They will continue to help us achieve our goal of educating and training students to become excellent lawyers who will enrich and serve local, state, tribal, national, and international communities following graduation.

In addition to our tenure-track hires, we have two visiting professors this year. First, we welcome back Professor Joseph Gallardo to UNM for his second year as a visitor. Professor Gallardo is a graduate of Harvard Law School. He is currently teaching Criminal Law and Elements of Legal Argumentation. In addition, we welcome a new visitor, Professor Alejandro Rettig y Martinez, to our law school. Professor Rettig y Martinez is a graduate of the University of Chicago School of Law, where he served as a member of the University of Chicago Law Review. After law school, he clerked on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit and then practiced law at the law firm of Ballard Spahr in Philadelphia. Professor Rettig y Martinez is currently teaching Elements of Legal Argumentation. Welcome to Professor Gallardo and Professor Rettig y Martinez!

As we all know, 2020 has been a particularly challenging year. When COVID-19 hit in the spring, our faculty quickly pivoted and shifted to all online teaching. Considering that the vast majority had never taught an online class before, it was quite the change. I am very pleased with how well they pulled it off. In addition, our faculty really stepped up to hire students as research assistants over the summer, many of whom had lost anticipated summer employment. Student-focused teaching and support are what we are all about.

The other great challenge we faced was a ransomware attack that hit us shortly before the start of the fall semester. This malicious, criminal attack was debilitating, and it left us with a completely

encrypted, unusable IT system. Given that we had gone to all online classes, the attackers struck in a way that they knew would hurt. While I am unable to go into detail at this time, you should know that our computer team continues to work with outside experts as they attempt to recover our data. While they have made significant progress, recovery efforts are ongoing, and I am told that it could take months. In the meantime, our team has built a shadow system that now allows us to send and receive email and to save documents. It is a very slow process, but we are moving forward, and I am optimistic that we will ultimately be successful.

Despite these challenges, we have managed to pull off many great things here at UNM School of Law. Knowing that most people would not be in the building, I decided to focus on ways to build community. I saw that as especially crucial for our incoming students because they did not yet know each other. Over the summer, we started hosting virtual events, including a storytelling event, hosted by Professor Paul Figueroa, and a musical "virtual coffeehouse," which I hosted. I also created a new committee for the year called the "Virtual Community-Building Committee." It is also known as the "FUN Committee," and its faculty, staff, and student members are charged with creating a calendar of fun events to keep people engaged at the law school. The committee is chaired by Professor Joe Schremmer, who is the perfect person to put in charge of fun. Events so far have included a virtual welcome-back barbecue, a poetry reading, and a student-led cooking and recipe-sharing event. I have attended all of them, and I can honestly say that they are a blast.

I am sure that people are wondering what the law school looks like these days. While the building is closed to the general public, it is open to students, faculty, and staff, all of whom have keycard access. That said, foot traffic is intentionally limited, and there is a much lighter presence of people at the law school. All seats, including in classrooms, have been spaced to ensure that people sit at least six feet from each other. Furthermore, masks are required at all times in the building.

In deciding which classes to offer in-person, we decided to prioritize 1L classes this semester. We also gave any student and faculty member the right to have their classes be exclusively online this fall if they have serious COVID-related concerns, including care of a child or family member. As it has played out, 17 of our 1Ls have elected to have all of their classes exclusively online. The rest come in for in-person classes one day a week – 18 of them on Mondays, another 35 on Tuesdays, and the final 35 on Thursdays.

When it became clear that 1Ls would be coming in for some classes, I reached out to faculty, staff, and alums to see if they would volunteer to pay for lunch for them on the day when they come to in-person classes. The response was overwhelming, and we quickly had all lunches for the fall semester covered. Now, 1Ls come in for two classes in the morning, and then they generally sit outside, nicely spaced, for lunch, after which they return to another in-person class. I have personally visited with the 1Ls during these lunches, as have other faculty members. In addition, 1Ls have had lunchtime conversations with representatives of the Young Lawyers Division of the New Mexico State Bar, and they have been visited by 2L and 3L student leaders. The response to these lunches and these visits has been extremely positive, and 1Ls tell me that they are moved by the generosity of the donors and that they are extremely pleased to get to

know their classmates in this personal way. Despite all the obstacles, I see a community being built and maintained here at UNM School of Law!

In addition to 1L classes, a handful of upper division "simulation classes," such as Evidence & Trial Practice and Pre-Trial Practice, are being taught in-person. This gives 2Ls and 3Ls the chance to see each other in person while honing their skills as future lawyers. While their other classes are being held virtually, I have been getting a lot of positive feedback about the quality of online teaching that is happening. In addition, student organizations continue to operate, and even thrive, in this online environment.

We continue to have distinctive initiatives at the law school that may interest you. Through donations from the Jacqueline Marie Leaffer Foundation, a charitable foundation created by my good friends, Karen and Steve Leaffer, we have launched the Leaffer Border Justice Initiative. Their generosity has allowed us to expand our work in support of immigrants, with a particular focus on the challenges faced by immigrant women and children. While travel is currently restricted, students, faculty, and staff have been able to continue and even expand their work in this area in a virtual setting. While the generosity of the Leauffers has been amazing, the needs in this area are immense, and we always welcome additional financial support. If you would like to contribute to this important cause, please go to <https://www.unmfund.org/fund/other/>. In the box at the bottom of the page for comments & instructions, please indicate "This gift is for the Leaffer Border Justice Fund (fund 203313)." Feel free to contact our Director of Development, Nickie Vigil, at Nickie.Vigil@unmfund.org, with any questions.

Similarly, we continue to work on expanding and diversifying the pool of public interest attorneys who are specially trained to serve children through enhanced legal representation and policy advocacy. This effort, which can be seen across our student body, throughout our curriculum, and with our external partners, was funded with a multi-million dollar Children's Law & Racial Equity Planning Grant that we received from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

As my tenure as dean will end in the summer of 2022, we will embark on a dean search this upcoming spring, in the hope of identifying our next dean by December of 2021. In anticipation of the search, we have brought in outside facilitators, and the law faculty has begun the process of developing a written strategic plan. I believe that this plan will position us to attract the strongest dean candidates, and it will help the candidates to understand the direction in which the faculty would like to see our law school go. Our next dean will be charged with implementing that plan.

While we all long for the day when life returns to normal, I am pleased to report that we continue to thrive at UNM School of Law. Overall, our law school continues to foster a supportive learning and teaching environment, and we enjoy healthy employment outcomes and a strong relationship with members of the New Mexico Bar. Our faculty, staff, students, graduates, donors, and friends continue to enjoy the benefits of this close and productive relationship with each other.

The first major renovation in years is currently underway at our law school, thanks to a direct legislative appropriation: we are constructing a Wellness Center! We are envisioning this as an

area where students, faculty, and staff will be able to go to relieve some of the stress of law school. It will include an area for weight lifting and exercising on machines, another area for yoga and stretching, and a separate area for quiet meditation. Construction is currently taking place on the lower floor of the law school off of the Forum. Assuming no COVID-induced building closures, we are anticipating that the work should be completed by early December. People will be able to use the new facilities once it is determined that it is safe to do so.

I would be remiss if I were to fail to mention that this is a milestone year for our law school. Last month marked the fiftieth anniversary of the start of our law school's amazing Clinic! The first group of clinical students began their clinical experience under the supervision of Professor Bill MacPherson in August of 1970. We had been planning to celebrate the Clinic's anniversary, as well as last year's 25th anniversary of the founding of the Southwest Indian Law Clinic, with an event last month until we learned that large in-person gatherings would not be possible. Regardless, we should all take a moment to think about and celebrate these milestone achievements.

Please consider this letter to be my invitation to you to participate and support our law school in any and all ways that you are interested. Often, very kind graduates and friends of the law school will say to me, "Let me know if there is ever anything I can do to help the law school." Of course, I always welcome anything you can give to help support us financially. We are good shepherds of your donations, and I can assure you that your gifts really make a difference in students' lives. Particular areas of need include the unrestricted Dean's Fund, additional donations in support of our emergency fund for law students, as well as funding to keep a mental health counselor for students on-site at the law school. To make a contribution to the unrestricted fund, go to <https://www.unmfund.org/fund/sol-unrestricted/>. To make a contribution to the student emergency fund, go to <https://www.unmfund.org/fund/brad-and-jan-tepper/>. To make a contribution to support our mental health counselor, go to <https://www.unmfund.org/fund/sol-unrestricted/> and indicate "mental health counselor" in the special instructions box at the bottom of the form. As mentioned above, Nickie Vigil (Nickie.Vigil@unmfund.org) would be the person to contact with questions regarding support of any of these important causes. Apart from that, however, let us know what interests you have and what you might offer in terms of time and expertise shared with students. That is always much appreciated.

I would like to close by expressing how fortunate I think we are to be members of this dynamic and diverse academic and professional community. I think many of us appreciate our community even more during challenging times like this. In fact, I think that many of our students, faculty, staff, and alums will find that this challenging experience has not only made us stronger, but it also is bringing us closer in some special ways. Shared adversity certainly can have that effect, and I can see that happening here already.

Sincerely,

Sergio Pareja
Dean and Professor of Law
University of New Mexico School of Law
pareja@law.unm.edu