Faculty Climate Report: Spring 2025

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

ABOUT THE SURVEY

In April 2025, Advance at UNM invited all full-time faculty at UNM Central Campus to participate in a brief online survey about faculty well-being and job attitudes. The survey was designed and administered using UNM Qualtrics, and participants could skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. N = 982 faculty received e-mail invitations to the survey. N = 371 faculty participated in the survey, for a 37.8% response rate. This report summarizes the quantitative and qualitative faculty responses.
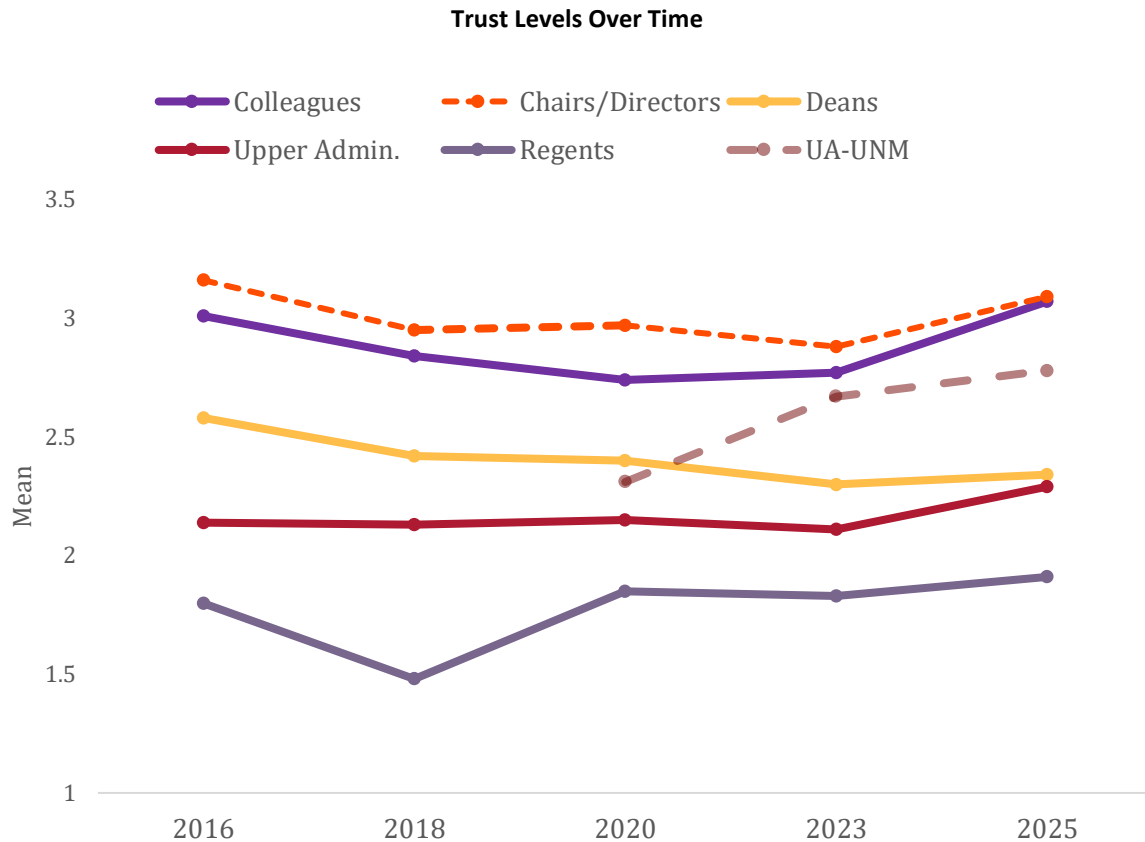
TRUST

Respondents indicated the extent to which they trusted each of the following parties: colleagues in their departments, department chairs/directors, college/school deans, UNM upper administration, UNM board of regents, and the collective bargaining unit (UA-UNM). Response anchors were 1 (*hardly ever*), 2 (*some of the time*), 3 (*most of the time*), and 4 (*just about always*).
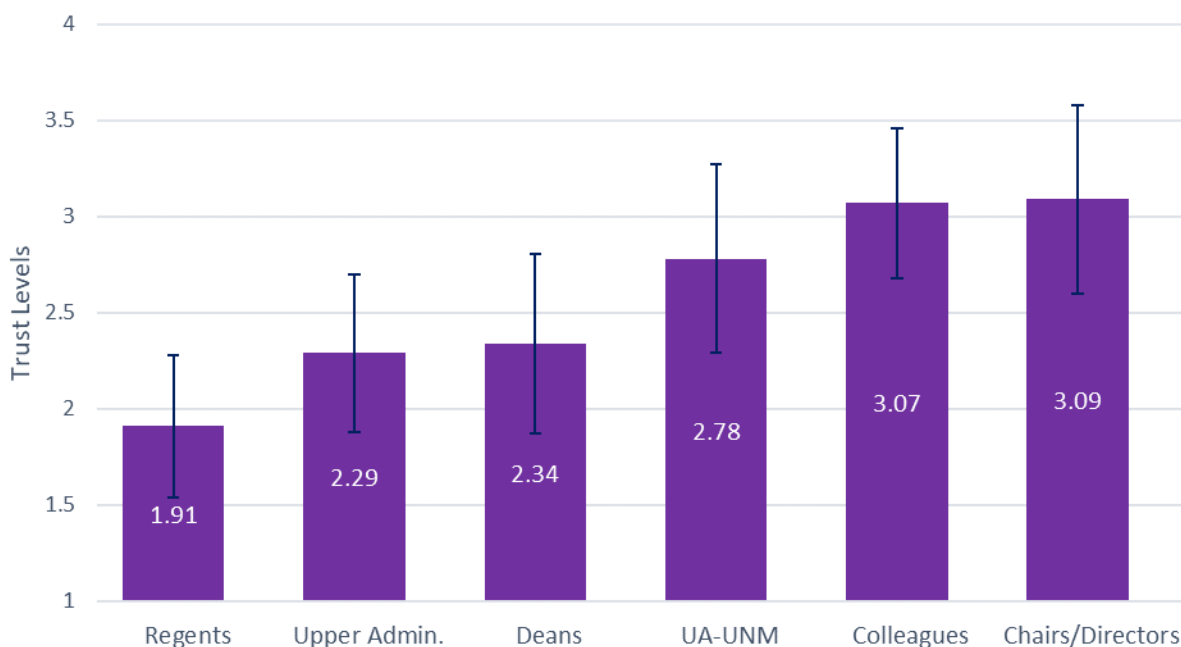
Note: Error bars represent standard deviations.

Men, compared to women, reported significantly higher trust in chairs, colleagues, and the board of regents. Average trust in UA-UNM was higher for women than men, a difference that approached significance (.05 < *p* > .10).

Consistent with past surveys, faculty tended to trust colleagues and their chairs/directors more than other leaders. Lecturers trusted UA-UNM significantly more, compared to other groups (i.e., assistant, associate, and full professors). Full professors trusted the upper administration significantly more than did the other groups.

Trust Levels Over Time

Compared to 2023, trust levels significantly rose ($p < .05$) for chairs, departmental colleagues, and the upper administration. Trust in deans was the only domain that remained notably lower than its average in 2016.
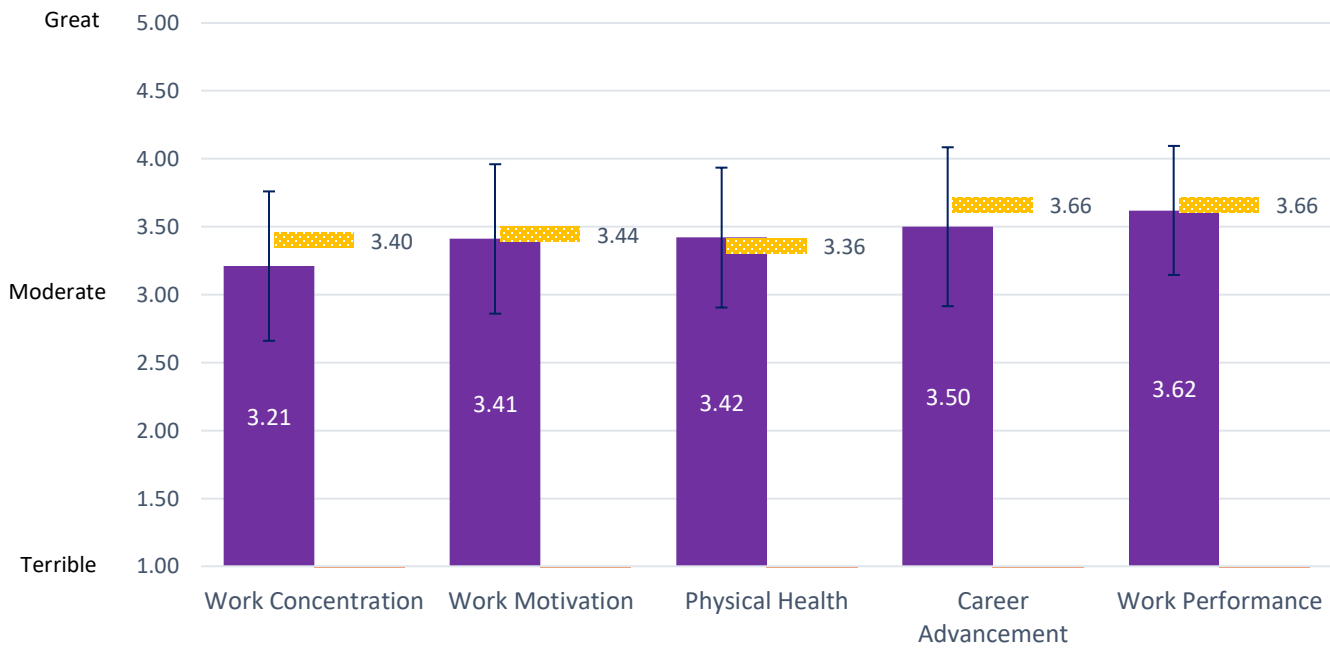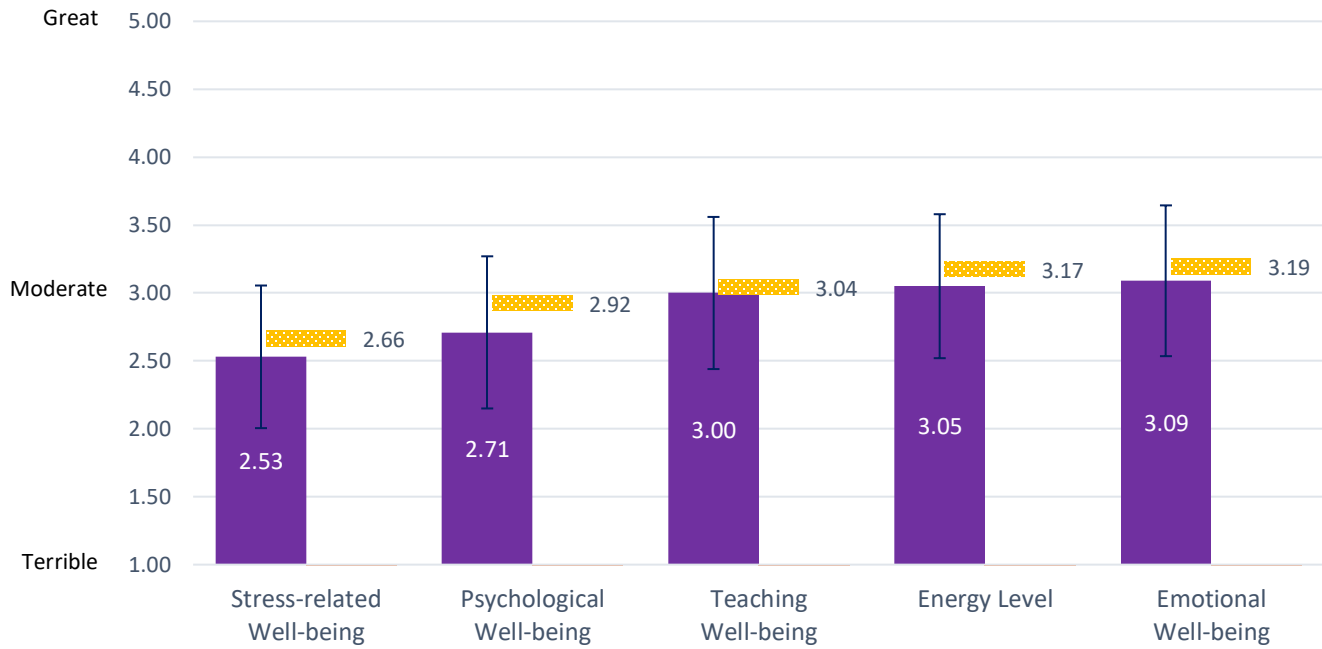
It is important to note that faculty well-being, discussed below, and trust in chairs are correlated; faculty who have higher levels of trust in their chairs tend to also report higher levels of well-being in many dimensions. On-going initiatives to support department chairs thus provide numerous benefits to both chairs and their departments.

WELL-BEING

The *facets of well-being* section contained the instructional stem, "How would you rate your overall well-being in the following areas?" Fourteen areas of personal and professional well-being were assessed. Response options were 1 (*terrible*), 2 (*poor*), 3 (*moderate – neither good nor poor*), 4 (*good*), and 5 (*great*).

Averages from the 2023 faculty climate survey are in yellow.

Psychological well-being and concentration at work were significantly lower in 2025, compared to 2023. Faculty felt more negatively about progress toward promotion/advancement than in 2023, which approached significance. Encouragingly, the mean for relationships with colleagues was higher in 2025, compared to 2023, which also approached significance.

Great 5.00
4.50
4.00
3.50
Moderate 3.00
2.50
2.00
1.50
Terrible 1.00

Stress-related Well-being: 2.53, 2.66
Psychological Well-being: 2.71, 2.92
Teaching Well-being: 3.00, 3.04
Energy Level: 3.05, 3.17
Emotional Well-being: 3.09, 3.19

Great 5.00
4.50
4.00
3.50
Moderate 3.00
2.50
2.00
1.50
Terrible 1.00

Work Concentration: 3.21, 3.40
Work Motivation: 3.41, 3.44
Physical Health: 3.42, 3.36
Career Advancement: 3.50, 3.66
Work Performance: 3.62, 3.66

Men, compared to women, reported significantly better well-being in eight domains: stress, psychological well-being, teaching stress, energy level, emotional well-being, concertation at work, work motivation, and (approaching significance) physical health.

Associate professors reported significantly worse well-being in the following areas, compared to other positions: stress, psychological well-being, performance/productivity, and relationships with colleagues.
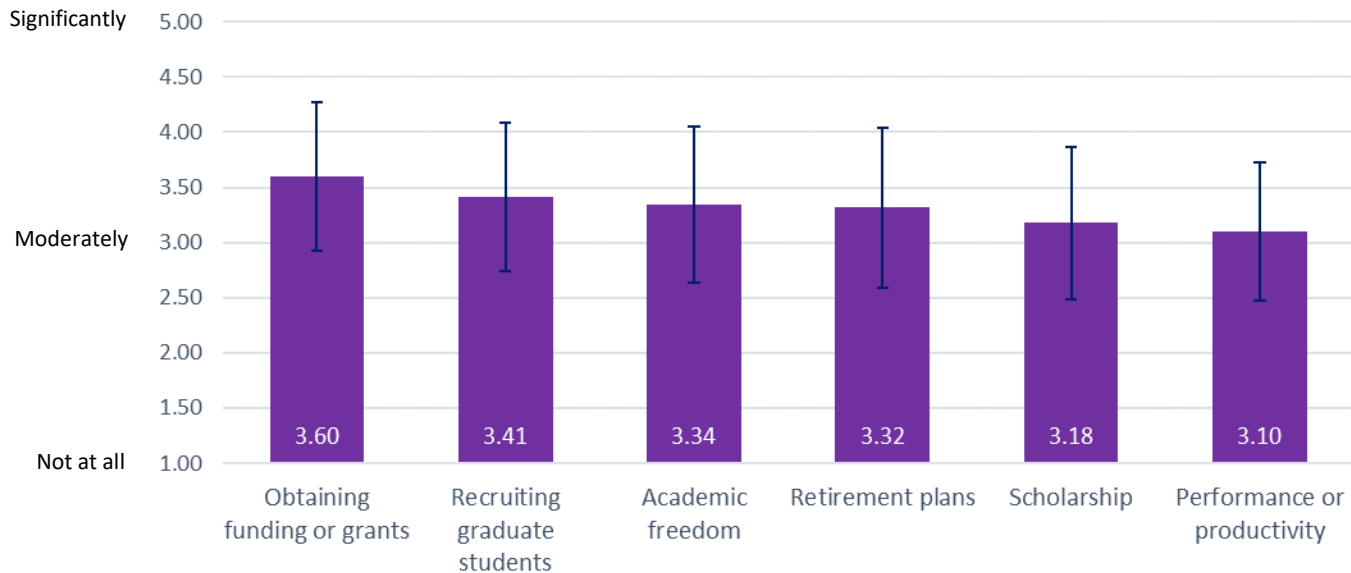
Commitment to teaching and relationships with students remained high, with some variation by title and discipline. Tenured/tenure-track faculty outside STEM fields and lecturers reported higher commitment to teaching than other groups. Self-reported relationships with students and performance/productivity were higher for non-STEM faculty too, and these differences approached significance.

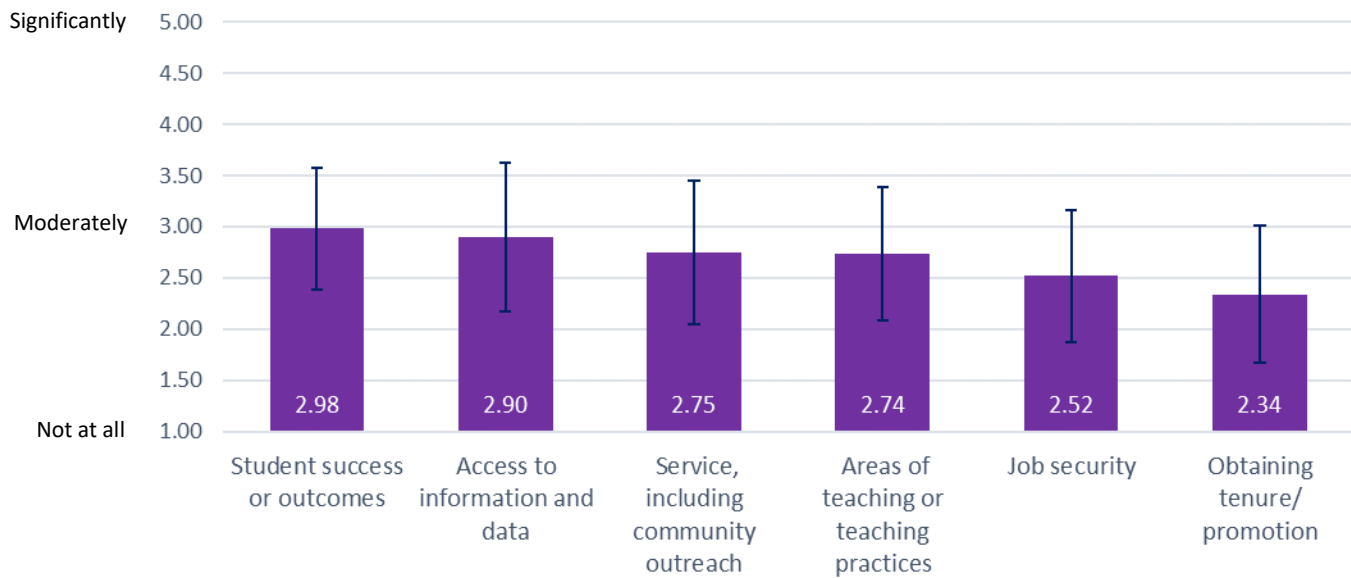---

EFFECTS OF RECENT EVENTS

The *effects of recent events* section assessed the extent to which recent national or international events negatively affected faculty in the areas provided. We did not specify particular events to provide faculty the opportunity to identify the event(s) that most resonated with them. Response options were 1 (*not at all*), 2 (*slightly*), 3 (*moderately*), 4 (*quite a bit*), and 5 (*significantly*). Faculty were then given the opportunity to write about which events most affected them.

In 2023, faculty were provided one item that gauged the overarching effect of recent (inter)national events on items from the "well-being" section of the current survey. The mean value for this item was 3.26.

Negative Effect On...

Obtaining funding or grants	Recruiting graduate students	Academic freedom	Retirement plans	Scholarship	Performance or productivity
3.60	3.41	3.34	3.32	3.18	3.10

Negative Effect On...

Student success or outcomes	Access to information and data	Service, including community outreach	Areas of teaching or teaching practices	Job security	Obtaining tenure/ promotion
2.98	2.90	2.75	2.74	2.52	2.34

Women, compared to men, reported a greater negative impact of recent events on their scholarship, performance/productivity, teaching areas/practices, and service. For academic freedom, women reported a greater negative impact than men, which approached significance.

Faculty reported the largest negative effects of recent events on obtaining funding, as well as related issues, including graduate student recruitment, scholarship, and performance/productivity. Academic freedom concerns were also significant, as were concerns about retirement by senior faculty. Many of these issues have become more complex since the April 2025 survey.

Lecturers reported significantly lower impact of recent events on their performance/productivity at work. As might be expected, assistant professors were more concerned about job security than other groups, and full professors reported more concern about the impact on their retirement plans.

STEM, compared to non-STEM, faculty reported greater negative impact of recent events on obtaining funding. Faculty outside STEM reported greater negative impact of events on their retirement plans and teaching areas/practices.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

The survey contained an open-ended question that allowed faculty to describe their experiences and ideas for improvement. N = 121 faculty provided in-depth responses. Of these responses, more than half were mainly negative (i.e., reflected frustration and stress), more than a quarter were neutral or positive, and less than a handful of responses were both positive and negative. Issues identified in faculty responses included academic leadership, administrative or bureaucratic processes (e.g., problems, inefficiencies), communication within campus, research (e.g., funding, proposal support, grant writing, research topics), academic freedom/freedom of speech, public facing comments, teaching, and workload. Notably, these issues commonly overlapped and were frequently intertwined with other concerns regarding research and teaching foci, economic uncertainty (e.g., retirement, salary, benefits), staffing issues (e.g., decreased support staff and tenured faculty), international (i.e., non-citizen, immigrant, undocumented) faculty and students (e.g., visa issues, travel concerns), and tenure and/or promotion.

Our assessment of the qualitative data revealed five overarching themes:
    (1) Threats to institutions of higher education
    (2) Navigating new barriers to scholarship
    (3) Increasing workload
    (4) Expectations of leadership in the face of uncertainty
    (5) (Mis/Missed) communication

Themes 1 through 4 are discussed below, and theme 5 is included in the first recommendation.

The following three Sankey diagrams visualize the intersections between sentiment (i.e., the emotional valence of respondents' comments) and major thematic domains derived from the qualitative responses.

The first diagram illustrates how the major thematic domains map onto sentiment categories. The left side represents sentiment categories—positive/neutral tone, positive and negative tone, and purely negative tone—while the right side depicts a range of themes (e.g., *Academic Freedom, Teaching, Workload*).

The width of each band reflects the proportion of responses linking a given sentiment to a specific topic, with wider flows indicating higher frequencies. For example, flows from *Negative* to the themes of *Academic Freedom*, *Administrative/Bureaucratic Processes*, and *Research* are thicker, indicating that many respondents discussed these areas in negative terms. In contrast, the flows from *Negative* to the themes of *Staffing* and *International Faculty* are less thick, indicating that a smaller proportion of negative comments were directed towards these areas.
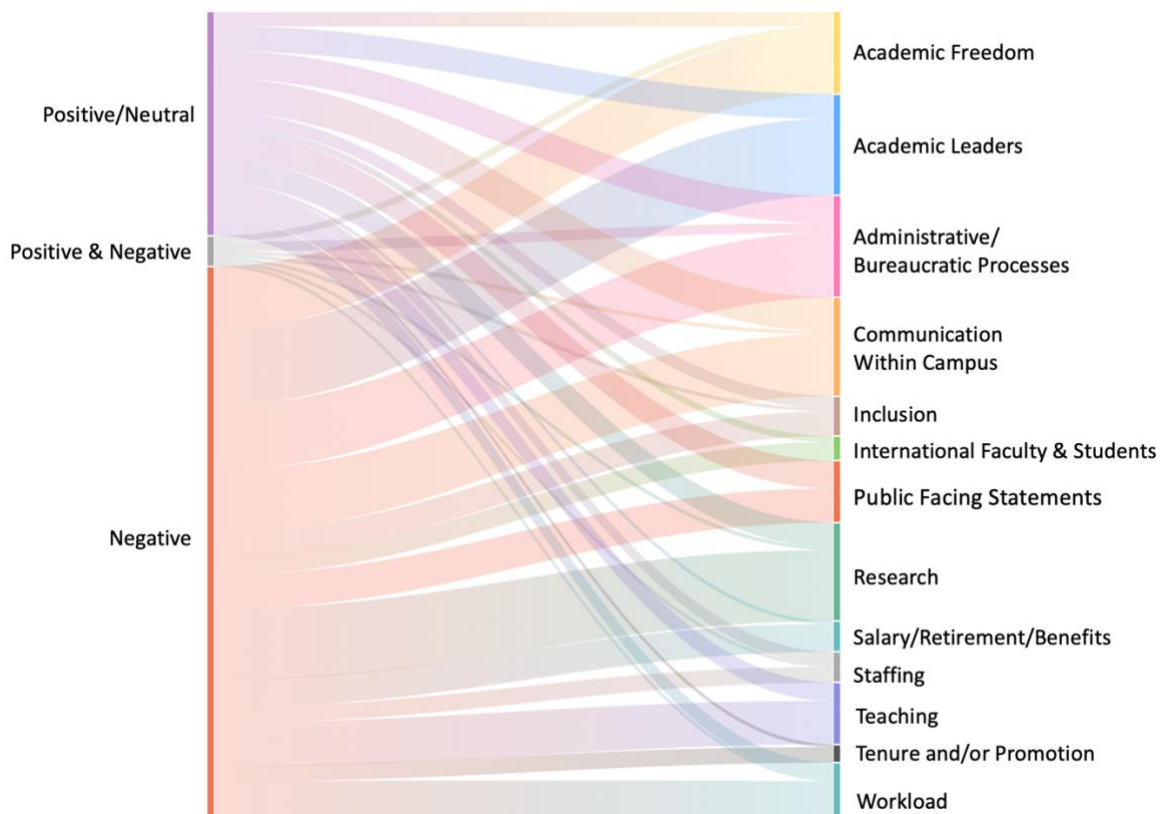
The second diagram isolates negative sentiment to illustrate how negatively valenced comments about the five overarching topics (on the left side: academic leaders, administrative/bureaucratic processes, communication within campus, and public facing statements) related to the other thematic domains (right side).

This diagram addresses the question, "When respondents voiced negative comments about the broader topics on the left side of the diagram, what were their concerns in this domain, more specifically?" For example, broad flows connect *Negative x Communication within Campus* to the themes of *Academic Freedom* and *Research,* meaning that respondents' critical feedback about internal messaging often pertained to issues of scholarship autonomy and new barriers to research.
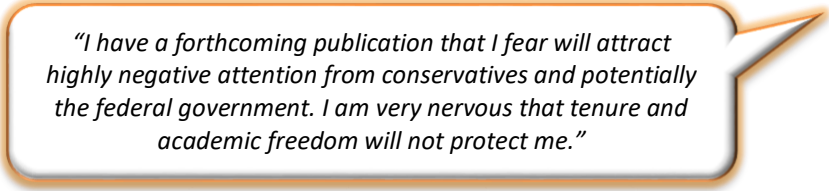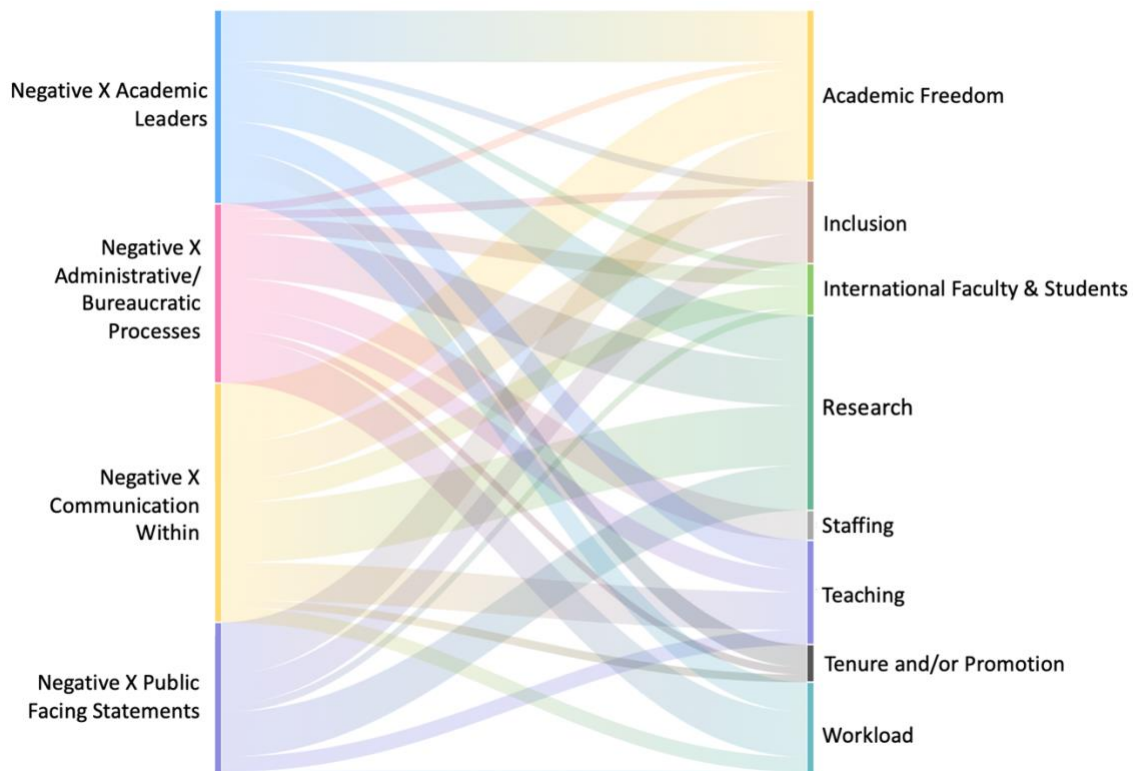
The third diagram isolates positive/neutral sentiment to illustrate how positive or neutral comments within the five overarching topics (on the left side: academic leaders, administrative/bureaucratic processes, communication within campus, and public facing statements) connected to other themes (right side). For example, the flows from *Positive/Neutral x Academic Leaders* to the themes of *Inclusion*, *International Faculty & Students*, *Research*, *Teaching*, and *Workload* indicate that favorable or balanced comments about leadership practices were clustered around these five topics, with a larger proportion of responses focusing on research productivity.
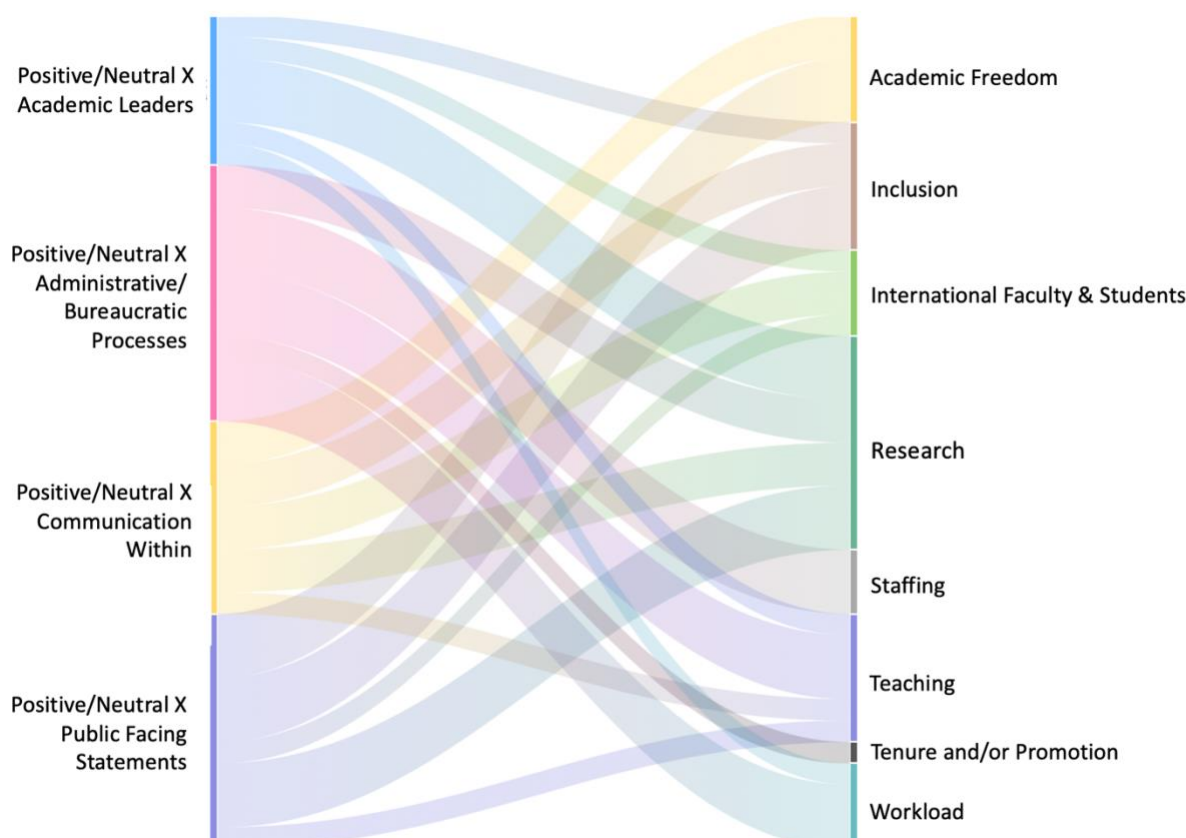
Examples of these relationships between the valence of overarching themes and the specific topics discussed in relation to them can be found below.
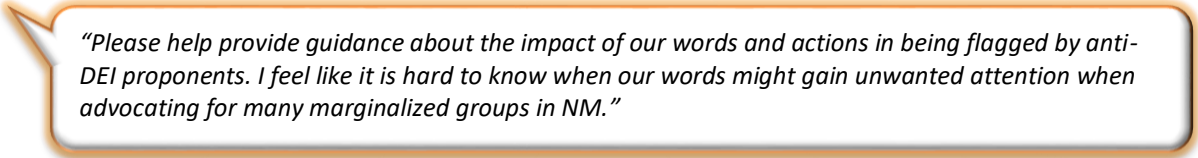
THREATS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

UNM faculty described heightened stress and concerns regarding the implications of the current political climate on the academic environment at UNM and institutions of higher education more broadly. Responses highlighted how government policies endangered defining freedoms of higher education, with faculty perceiving free speech and academic freedom as being under attack. Some researchers described increased pressure to self-censor and/or expressed concerns about potential retaliation for their scholarship or views concerning race or diversity, equity, and inclusion. Others expressed concerns that coercive federal funding practices would erode autonomous institutional governance and free intellectual inquiry.

> *"I have a forthcoming publication that I fear will attract highly negative attention from conservatives and potentially the federal government. I am very nervous that tenure and academic freedom will not protect me."*

Faculty comments regarding academic freedom and political interference in institutional governance were frequently coupled with concerns regarding government reform of DEI initiatives and immigration policy. Regarding the former, faculty highlighted how implicit and explicit changes in federal policies undermined the integrity of UNM and other academic institutions serving as engines of inclusivity, innovation, and opportunity.

> *"Please help provide guidance about the impact of our words and actions in being flagged by anti-DEI proponents. I feel like it is hard to know when our words might gain unwanted attention when advocating for many marginalized groups in NM."*

Regarding immigration, faculty commented on how recent changes to federal immigration policies created a nationally hostile environment for international (i.e., non-citizen, immigrant, undocumented) faculty and students, highlighting the link between self-censorship and fear of deportation. Faculty voiced a range of concerns regarding the impact of immigration laws and practices on international scholars, including proper procedures for traveling abroad and threats to students' safety and security on campus. Faculty also expressed apprehension regarding UNM's commitment and/or propensity to protect the job security and visa status of international faculty and students, with some respondents describing how prior negative experiences with UNM's administrative support services (e.g., IT, HR) contributed to their unease and weakened their confidence in UNM's ability to safeguard their future.

> *"I am really worried about the status of non-citizens on our campus and the lack of concerted efforts by the administration to address threats to their safety."*

> *"I wish the university admin were being more proactive at protecting international students and faculty. As of right now, there's no clear pathway for job security and it feels like we're on our own."*

NAVIGATING NEW BARRIERS TO SCHOLARSHIP

Faculty highlighted barriers to scholarship productivity due to changes in the distribution of federal research funding. While some faculty reported losing their grants because of these changes, others noted that the changes had severely compromised their ability to secure grants in the future. Faculty whose research was affected by the changing funding environment commonly expressed concerns regarding the potential impact on obtaining tenure or on their promotion progress. Given the (potentially prolonged) impact of funding changes on research production, faculty highlighted the need to reevaluate current metrics of "success" used to evaluate scholarship productivity in annual reviews or tenure/promotion cases. In addition, faculty emphasized the need for UNM

leadership to formally acknowledge the impact of funding changes on scholarship productivity by developing guidelines for modifying the milestone evaluation process.

> *"Certain areas of research, mine included, will no longer be eligible for federal funding. For example, my colleagues and I received word that grant we had submitted will not even be reviewed. This has serious implications on my ability to secure grants to fund my research that I need to conduct to obtain tenure. The administration needs to consider how folks can account for this in their tenure and promotion application."*

> *"The university played a very helpful role in the pandemic in providing language and guidance on the ways in which the pandemic might disrupt research and teaching. Is there room for similar actions for anyone who has been affected that people can use to guide P&T/annual review conversations and/or for candidates compiling materials and statements?"*

INCREASING WORKLOAD

Faculty expressed concerns over heightened service and teaching workloads, noting that these additional duties exacerbated existing stress and potential burnout. Many faculty attributed increases in their workloads to poor staff or faculty retention, highlighting the need for more human resources support. Some faculty suggested that proper training for support staff and better onboarding mechanisms for faculty transitioning into new roles could ameliorate the burdens of heavy workloads.

> *"Please start hiring more faculty and staff within departments. The post-pandemic reduction in personnel means that everyone left has a huge workload trying to keep our programs running smoothly. My service workload in particular has been through the roof for the last year and a half. All the competent people are getting burned out and angry (while some others seem to wield incompetence like a defense against doing more)..."*

> *"We are already *extremely* overworked, and my fear is that the university is going to cut back on staff support, which means that we will have to work even more. Over the years, the university has shifted departments/programs to become a top-management organization structure with very little staff support or staff who do not have appropriate training. This is absolutely exhausting for the faculty to manage."*

Notably, faculty administering federal grants reported heightened workloads due to constantly evolving guidelines/requirements for managing and reporting grants. Faculty described spending extra time attending funding agency meetings and learning how to successfully respond to policy changes, noting that this new level of work complicated other aspects of their professional performance (e.g., pressure to publish).

> *"I have spent many, many extra hours meeting with my federal grant program officers at conferences and working to understanding and respond to the changes in terms of how to administer and implement my grant program and how to write the grant reports and review proposals."*

> *"National events have significantly increased my workload. I devote significantly greater time to learning about current, and often changing, requirements for managing and reporting about an [Federal] grant of which I am the PI. It takes significant time to learn about and understand current information, figure out how best to respond, and guide the team to respond."*

EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

Faculty comments underscored the role of strong leadership in providing direction, navigating uncertainty, and upholding UNM's goals, values, and priorities in the wake of external challenges. Some faculty viewed UNM's upper administration as already fulfilling this role, noting that leaders were acting in the best interest of the university and expressing appreciation for their ongoing communication efforts. Others felt that UNM leaders were either indifferent to faculty concerns or acquiescing to political pressure, with some respondents expressing disappointment in UNM's tepid leadership strategies. Of these faculty, many expressed the need for greater transparency regarding changes in university policies, noting that previous communication efforts had eroded trust and confidence.

> *"[I] have been very reassured and heartened by the response of the Provost/upper university administration and the OVPR to current political events and uncertainty. Have heard a lot from colleagues at other institutions and feel very fortunate to work at UNM and live in NM right now."*

> *"Upper level administration's response has been predictively extremely conservative. And predictively uninspiring. We could all use some real hope and inspiration and significantly more transparency."*

Importantly, faculty commonly expressed the need for strategic, proactive leadership. Such leadership was characterized by: (1) explicit acknowledgment of faculty and student concerns, (2) the development and communication of policies and strategies that meaningfully address these concerns, and (3) clear communication of the university's plans to resist escalating attacks on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

> *"Faculty who work in areas of diversity and with marginalized communities need a lot more support now, and clear indication that UNM will stand up for them and to the oppression of social and behavioral research. They must take a stand and turn to other than federal funding to be able to do so. Please do not discard us."*

"I think it would be helpful if the administration took a more proactive approach, rather than a reactive approach to faculty and student concerns. I understand there may be the impulse to not draw attention to issues for which we are not being singled out, but I think strategically and perhaps quietly putting measures in place, or plans, to address what we know we can anticipate as attacks on academic freedom, faculty and student rights, and issues of campus safety, and consulting with faculty to disseminate that information, constitutes what I call strategic community engagement that all concerned would greatly appreciate."

"I hope our dean, provost, and president fight hard for us and push back against the Trump administration's pushback against academic institutions. We have to endure this situation together and not collapse under the ridiculous pressure."

"If there emerges a coalition of universities willing to create a joint resistance to the overreaches from Washington, UNM needs to be a part of that voice."

RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey documents faculty experiences and concerns. These recommendations will generally benefit the university community, although our focus is on supporting faculty. The Resources section includes existing and planned efforts that are responsive to these recommendations.

1. Communicate Frequently

Some faculty responses revealed critical misconceptions and confusion regarding UNM's policies and procedures, highlighting areas where clarity and communication can be improved. Some comments indicated that faculty were unaware of UNM's communications and provisional guidelines regarding international students and scholars, as well as the programs and initiatives developed in response to presidential executive orders and outlined on the UNM President's Guidance page. Other comments suggested that faculty were unaware that UNM had implemented a program to bridge funding during Spring 2025 or had missed information regarding other resources and opportunities.

Leaders who "over" communicate tend to be viewed as more effective than leaders who communicate infrequently or inconsistently. Ongoing changes in federal policies, processes, and opportunities provide stress and uncertainty. People are less able to retain and process information effectively when they are stressed. The survey showed that some respondents were unaware of actions taken to support faculty while others were understandably confused and frustrated by executive orders, changes in federal guidance and enforcement, and the resulting uncertainty. It is imperative that academic leaders communicate clearly and frequently, preferably using multiple approaches. Effective communication can improve trust between faculty and academic leaders, notably between deans and faculty in their schools/colleges.

- Information shared in department or school/college faculty meetings should also be available in follow-up emails or on websites.
- Faculty will benefit from multiple reminders about new federal requirements and new or existing resources and opportunities.

- Deans, chairs, and directors may benefit from workshops on effective communication, in addition to guidance on what and how to communicate with their constituencies as new information becomes available. Deans' Council and Chairs' Colloquium are opportunities for providing strategies and support.
- When possible, the how/why of decision-making should be shared.

2. Increase Assistance for Faculty Navigating Career Progress Challenges

Several ongoing initiatives can support faculty in evaluating their research (scholarship, creative works) programs and finding funding. These are listed in the Resources section of this report. Additional actions for consideration:

- Examine administrative processes to identify opportunities to improve efficiency and positively impact faculty and staff workloads. The current effort to streamline faculty hiring processes is a current example.
- A new WeR1 Faculty Success initiative to support faculty who need to pivot from areas for which funding opportunities have significantly decreased.
- A "GROWL-lite" series to provide insights and advice based on the more extensive GROWL (Grant Revision for Outstanding Wins to Level-up) program currently underway.
- Support for associate professors, including those who were recently promoted and those feeling stuck in their positions. Potential opportunities include a WeR1 Faculty Success program, workshops by ADVANCE, FRDO, or CTL, and a FRDO cohort program focused on associate professors.
- Expand writing support for faculty. Develop opportunities to help faculty struggling to concentrate on or make time for writing projects.
- Increase support for principal investigators managing increased federal research administration and compliance requirements, including hiring support staff.

3. Address RPT Implications of Changes in Funding Opportunities

Opportunities for research funding, scholarship support, exhibits, and performances have dramatically decreased and remain unpredictable. Although there are some areas with new funding opportunities, including quantum information and AI, other previously well-funded areas have lost substantive funding. Many faculty are also addressing challenges in managing classroom discussions and controversial course material.

Faculty workload policies and tenure and promotion expectations are specified on department or college/school levels. Changes in tenure and promotion policies must go through an approval process and be consistent with the faculty handbook while workload policies are linked to the UA UNM Unit 1 CBA. Nonetheless, the first actions need to occur at the local level.

- Deans and Academic Affairs leadership should encourage, and potentially organize, discussions of RPT expectations. Departments will benefit from knowing what other colleagues are discussing and considering.
- Departments should begin discussions about what "excellence" in research and teaching mean in this uncertain time. Traditional (frequently quantitative) metrics, particularly in fields relying on substantive federal funding, need to be revisited.

4. Support Vulnerable Faculty, Staff, and Students

Faculty were eloquent in expressing concerns about academic freedom in the classroom, in their scholarship, and for non-U.S. citizens in the campus community. These issues have become more complex since our April survey.

- Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, deans, Faculty Senate, UA-UNM, UE-UNM, and other units on campus should collaborate on identifying ways to support the community. The recent "Know Your Rights" session is a good example.

- Consistent with the recommendations about communication, the provost and other leaders should collaborate with chairs and directors about these issues.