

STATEMENT OF PROPOSED ACTIVITY WHILE SERVING AS PRESIDENTIAL TEACHING FELLOW

I propose an activity that I am calling “Academic Pipelines for Lobos with Disabilities.” In brief, through a series of gatherings that combine informal networking and formal education, this activity will provide space for Lobos with disabilities to share their stories, support them in navigating the University, and lay the foundation for a future in which folks with disabilities know that they belong in academia. Recent changes in federal support for diversity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives make my proposed activity more significant and urgent than ever.

“Academic Pipelines for Lobos with Disabilities” is inspired by my experiences as an advocate and educator at UNM. The roots of ableism in higher education run deep, as I know from working remotely with chronic illness. During my two-year Academic Faculty Leadership Fellowship with UNM’s Division for Equity and Inclusion, I laid the groundwork for addressing bias and harassment against faculty with disabilities. As Faculty Mentor for the Disabled Students Union, I am also keenly aware of the infrastructural and cultural barriers that students with disabilities encounter on a regular basis. These barriers prevent some students from completing their degrees and put off others from pursuing careers in academia. To support students with disabilities, we must begin by supporting educators with disabilities.

During my Presidential Teaching Fellowship, I propose organizing and facilitating a series of virtual gatherings for instructors who identify as disabled or who care for someone with a disability (e.g., a spouse or child). These gatherings will make it possible for disabled and disability affiliated instructors to connect, tell their stories, and swap affirmation and advice. They will also provide actionable information from expert staff at ARC, CTL, DEI, and VRC, such as: resources for teaching and learning with disability, meeting disabled veteran and military-affiliate students where they are, and best practices for interrupting ableism inside and outside the classroom. Many of the relationships necessary to engage these staff experts I cultivated during my DEI Fellowship. Others I am building now through New Mexico Partners in Policymaking (NMPP), a by-application year-long program that combines a national curriculum in disability law, history, and advocacy with content specific to New Mexico and its residents. Sponsored by the Autism Programs at the UNM Center for Development and Disability, NMPP has affirmed not only my commitment to advocating for disabled Lobos but also my inclusion of disability affiliates. To ensure information about “Academic Pipelines for Lobos with Disabilities” is distributed widely, I will collaborate with staff in the aforementioned offices and arrange to announce the series at New Faculty Orientation.

By fostering community, commitment, and knowledge among disabled and disability affiliated instructors, I hope to lay the groundwork for a mentoring program like the one initiated by Graduate Studies in 2022. Just as the Graduate Studies’ program provides faculty of color mentors for under-represented minority graduate students, the program that I envision emerging from my proposed Presidential Teaching Fellowship activity will pair disabled and disability affiliated instructors from across UNM with students with disabilities, both undergraduate and graduate. Securing an institutional home and adequate funding for this next stage will be the focus of the final semester of my Presidential Teaching Fellowship.