

SILVER CITY, N.M. — With the New Mexico Legislature beginning its 2024 session Jan. 16, Western New Mexico University leadership is gearing up to advocate on behalf of the university by requesting the state budget include funding for a number of projects.

The focus of the university's advocacy efforts will occur on Jan. 24, which is Grant County Day at the Legislature. On this day, not only is the WNMU leadership team in Santa Fe, but members of student government will have a chance to meet with legislators, and Mariachi Plata de WNMU will perform in the statehouse.

Heading the list of capital projects for which the university seeks funding is a new Career Technical Education Center to be built in Grant County's mining district. WNMU is requesting \$30 million for this project. The new center would allow the university to expand its vocational programming to more fully address the education and workforce needs of the region.

Assistant Vice President of Facilities and Operations Kevin Matthes noted that "There is a definitive need for more robust career technical certificate and degree programs" in the region.

Another capital funding priority is a request for \$14 million to construct a new home for the New Mexico Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Education. The new building will be on land already owned by the university near the central campus. The new center would bring enhanced educational opportunities, expanded capacity and increased community engagement to the program, and it has the potential to have a beneficial impact on the area's economy, said Dr. Cindy Martinez, Dean of the WNMU College of Education.

As part of its goal to become carbon-neutral by 2030, WNMU is requesting \$15 million to install new renewable energy systems and to improve existing systems. Most recently, the university has partnered with Freeport-McMoRan to install three new EV charging stations, which are located near the photovoltaic solar panels in the Juan Chacón Building parking lot. Additional funding would make expanding and maintaining renewable energy systems possible.

All three of these capital investments are central to the university's 5-Year Campus Master Plan.

WNMU requests legislative funding

Written by gallupsun

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The Associated Students of WNMU are also making a request for legislative funding to equip a student services, study and recreation space at the university's Deming facility.

Other legislative requests from the university will be for instruction, research and public service projects. In particular, WNMU is seeking increased funding for its early childhood education program and web-based network for teacher licensure, and it is requesting that funding for childhood mental health programs be maintained.

Additional instruction and general budget requests will be made on behalf of all state colleges and universities, who are advocating for funding of a number of continuing and new initiatives, including a 6% increase in compensation for university employees with an additional targeted increase for faculty.

The university is also asking for legislation that would allow it to pay 100% of employee health insurance costs.

"The least we can do is figure out how to pay your premiums," WNMU President Joseph Shepard said to faculty and staff at the spring semester convocation on Jan. 4.

According to Shepard, the university also seeks funding to include two additional athletic teams on campus: men's baseball and women's soccer. These two sports would have comparably-sized teams, thus complying with Title IX requirements for athletics.



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