

UNM-G chancellor search nears its end

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 23 December 2022 02:25



You might say that Dr. Sabrina Ezzell's whole life has been leading up to this. The interim chancellor of the UNM-Gallup campus for the past eight months is on the verge of taking the permanent position as chancellor.

Originally from Albuquerque, Ezzell has spent the past 25 years in the Four Corners area, starting as a nurse at Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado in 1997. She gradually worked her way over to McKinley County in the 1990s and UNM-Gallup in 2015. There, she has worked as a nursing faculty member, director of the nursing program, and the chair of the Education, Health and Human Services Division.

"Our location makes us unique because we are so close to the Navajo Nation and the Zuni Pueblo. A large percentage of our students are Native American," Ezzell said of UNM-Gallup. "Our mission really speaks to that, because we talk about preparing people to reach their educational goals in the context of the traditions and values we serve here."

As part of the chancellor selection process, the college held three community forums with Ezzell on Dec. 6 and Dec 7: one with students, one with faculty and one open to the entire community. Participants were given an email address to submit their comments directly to the provost, who's weighing the hiring decision.

Responding to community questions, Ezzell said she has three top priorities for the school, starting with, "Stabilizing our financial situation. We have reliable funding coming from state appropriations each year but it doesn't grow. We're looking for ways to supplement our revenue."

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That will likely include increasing federal funding, partly by getting UNM-G designated a Native American-Serving Nontribal Organization. Private grant funding is also on the list, and the school has recently secured two endowments.

Ezzell hopes to expand student services to make the campus more of a home for students. The college is working on hiring a daycare director, which would let it reopen the on-campus daycare center that was shuttered five years ago. Students have also asked about creating a space for them to gather to socialize between classes.

Campus safety and security is also a concern. The school is updating its Emergency Area Plan, which covers response to unexpected events, from use of automated external defibrillators (the campus has three now, but plans to have two in each building) to an active shooter event. Training will be offered in the spring for those who want it, Ezzell said.

Ezzell also wants to increase enrollment, especially in career-track programs, partly by expanding course offerings.

She's already joined the Gallup Executive Directors Association, which helps her engage with business leaders in an effort to keep up with community labor demands.

"It does allow me to hear what the county is doing, what the city is doing, what their needs are," she said. "I'm also allowed to meet with new businesses that are coming to Gallup to see what their training needs are."

Ezzell isn't all work. When she can find the time, she likes to read fiction, snow ski, and hike – another reason to love Gallup.

"I love this place. It's an honor to be able to help a community and to give back to a place that has helped me so much," she said. "Knowing the needs of the students in this community and the people that work here and how much they love being here and working here...that is key to

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really helping this college the way it needs to be helped.”

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