

Newly minted UNM president visits Gallup branch

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
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Dr. Garnett S. Stokes, the 23rd President of UNM, stopped by the Gallup branch as part of her statewide listening tour May 21.

Stokes is the first female president in UNM's 129 history. She began working for the university on March 1, and was formally installed during commencement on May 12.

She is a first generation college graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology, master's degree in industrial-organizational psychology and a doctorate in industrial-organizational psychology.

Prior to her career in academics, Stokes worked for Fortune 500 companies and government agencies as a consultant.

"People told me they were afraid that I was going to change my mind, but I did not. I came here to be the president of the University of New Mexico," she said.

Before becoming president of New Mexico's flagship university, Stokes served as provost and interim chancellor at the University of Missouri at Columbia.

Previous to that appointment, she served as provost and interim president of Florida State

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University. Stokes' career in higher education began at the University of Georgia, where she served as department head and as a dean.

"My field is industrial organization psychology, which means I understand a lot about psychology in the work place," she said.

Stokes noted that such experience should help her as a university administrator.

"I started off my college career at a branch campus," she said, noting that she first began taking classes at Indiana University Kokomo.

Initially, Stokes did not plan on attending college. She grew up in a military family. She changed her mind about higher education when all of her friends left after high school.

Eventually, she began going to school at Carson-Newman University in eastern Tennessee at the recommendation of her father, who was a Southern Baptist deacon and an airman in the U.S. Air Force.

"My experience being on a branch campus and as an administrator at an institution that had branch campuses led me to realize just how important branch campuses are for meeting the mission of a flagship university," she said.

The purpose behind the listening tour is to meet with students, faculty, staff, and community members to hear firsthand the priorities of their branch campuses, she said.

UNM has branch campuses in Gallup, Los Alamos, Taos, Valencia, UNM West, and online-distance education.

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It was Stokes second visit to Gallup. She previously visited for the legislative finance committee meeting.

Although she has not established priorities because she wants to visit all of the branch campuses first to hear from the people directly, Stokes said two areas of concentration will be campus security and dealing with declining enrollment issues.

“It seems especially important that we would make investments in both being a military-friendly institution and also a student veteran-friendly institution,” she said.

“I’m trying not to identify too many things because I really think that this listening tour is going to be important to shaping the priorities,” she said.

Student success in academics and the world of work is the purpose, she said, adding that UNM is a research institution that contributes nationally and internationally.

Stokes’ 100-day mark will be on June 9, and she said she is going to issue a report at that time. In September she will hit the 200-day mark and anticipates on concluding her tour of the state.

“At that point, I’ll be able to rollout just what some of the major initiatives will be going forward for our university and our branch campuses,” she said.

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