



WHO IS SENATOR HARRIS?

Fred Harris is a Professor Emeritus of Political Science at UNM, as well as a former U.S. senator, former U.S. presidential candidate, the author of more than twenty books, and the former national chairperson of one of our country's two major political parties. He was also a member of one of the 20th century's foremost civil rights commissions (Kerner), in addition to being a scholar who has advanced our understanding of politics and political science. Professor Harris founded the Fred Harris U.S. Congressional Internship in 2006 and served as internship director and faculty until his retirement from UNM.

Continue reading to find out more about this dynamic scholar who is nationally respected for his commitment, intellectual passion, creative democratic vision, and fascinating personal story.

Fred Harris and the Kerner Commission

Former Oklahoma Senator and the Department of Political Science Internship founder, Fred Harris, was featured in The New York Times on February 28, 2018. In the article, Fred Harris recounts his time in the Kerner Commission, which was appointed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967. Today, Harris is the lone survivor of the Commission.



National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in session in Washington in 1967. Known as The Kerner Commission, after the chair, Otto Kerner, seated at the head of the table, the group was convened by President Lyndon Johnson in the wake of the 1967 race riots. Fred Harris is the second person to the right of Kerner, Underwood Archives/Getty Image

“Headed by Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois, the 11-member commission

was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in July 1967 to uncover the causes of urban riots and recommend solutions. The report, which declared that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal,” called for expanded aid to African American communities in order to prevent further racial violence and polarization.” - NY Times, Fred Harris & Alan Curtis, 2018. Read the full NYT article [here](#).

Senator Harris was also interviewed in 2021 by NPR, All Things Considered:

The Kerner Commission's Last Living Member Says We Still Need To Talk About Racism

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 27, 2021 · 2:18 PM ET

HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

By Mycah Hazel

9-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST



Fred Harris, pictured in 2016, is the last surviving member of the Kerner commission. Their report openly discussed racism in the U.S. in a way that sent shockwaves through the country.

“It may seem that Americans are only now discussing racism and all its ramifications out in the open after last year’s nationwide protests against police brutality and the glaring social inequalities exposed by the pandemic.

But in 1968, a government report openly discussed racism in the United States in a way that sent shockwaves through the country.”

Hear Senator Harris’ thoughts on racial justice throughout the years, his feelings about the Kerner commission, and his suggestions for a better future.

You can listen to his interview or read the transcript [here](#).

The Department of Political Science continues to benefit greatly from Senator Harris' wealth of knowledge and uncompromising values. In addition to coordinating the internship program he has participated in many departmental events. The UNM Political Science department was honored to host Senator Harris as commencement speaker in 2018.

In 2023, Senator Harris was recognized for his many achievements and awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of New Mexico. We were again honored to host him at convocation in 2023, as a guest speaker alongside his former student and now Secretary of the Interior, the honorable Deb Haaland.



In his address, Senator Harris spoke passionately about his work on the Kerner commission, racial justice, and his time teaching at UNM. In addition, he emphasized that regardless of the political divide in the US today, we work best when we work together.

Secretary Haaland thanked Senator Harris for his support during her time as a student at UNM; and went on to note his teaching prowess and passion for American democracy.



**UNM Political Science graduation May 10 2023,
featuring Secretary Haaland, graduates, and faculty.**



Fred Harris U.S. Congressional Internship

An Internship with Lasting Results

Through his work and the support of the university, Senator Harris has made national politics accessible to New Mexicans, helping them to build foundations for successful careers. The program continues to train bright students to be capable policy leaders of the future.

“In our office, our Fred Harris interns help craft legislation, write speeches and materials to inform the public, conduct research, and interface with the people we serve. And in so doing, they hone their skills, passion, and leadership for New Mexico.

The Fred Harris interns are top-notch, professional, hardworking, and well-qualified. Our office is always thrilled to have UNM students in our office. We couldn't be prouder to host and connect these interns as they pursue their dreams and paths in service.”

U.S. Representative, NM



Each semester, UNM sends five students to be paired with the five offices of New Mexico's U.S. Senators and Representatives.

This program provides UNM students opportunities to learn about and contribute to the democratic institutions that govern their lives.

More articles, videos, and interviews with Fred Harris:

NPR podcast interview: “50 Years On, Sen. Fred Harris Remembers Great Hostility During 1967 Race Riots”. 2017.

Listen or read the transcript on [NPR's website](#).

New Mexico in Focus, Episode 1127: “Fred Harris Revisited”. 2018.

Watch this episode [here](#).

Encyclopedia Britannica: “Fred Harris: American Politician, Educator, and Writer”, Read more about Harris’ career [here](#).

NPR full length documentary, American Experience: “The Riot Report”. 2024. Watch the full movie [here](#).