

**REPORT ON ACADEMIC DECISION MAKING IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SYSTEM**

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Executive Summary/Introduction

The educational and research services of the University of Alaska System represent the best opportunity for Alaskans to realize their personal and economic goals and for the state to move beyond the boom and bust cycles of a resource-based economy. States with thoughtfully designed initiatives to increase citizens' participation in higher education and to align the curriculum and research programs with the state's current and anticipated needs witness greater economic stability, rising per capita income and a host of other social benefits associated with high educational attainment. Is the University of Alaska System well positioned to deliver these benefits to the state and its people?

To answer this question, the President of the University of Alaska System asked a group of experienced higher education administrators/educators to serve on a team to review the quality of academic decision-making in the statewide office, among the major administrative units and between all of these entities. The team included Dr. Shirley Clark, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs with the Oregon University System; Dr. Martha Romero, a former community college president and now Director of the Community College Leadership Institute at the Claremont Graduate University; Dr. Paul Zingg, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at California Polytechnic State University--San Louis Obispo; and Dr. Terry MacTaggart, chair of the team and former Chancellor of the University of Maine System and The Minnesota State University System.

The team reviewed mission statements, plans, earlier reports, and statistical information prior to its site visits in Alaska. During the week of April 7, 2002, the team interviewed members of the Board of Regents, as well as administrative and educational leaders at each of the major units and, both in person and by audio and videoconference, representatives of several of the university system's community campuses and students. This comprehensive set of interviews and discussions with a large number of people representing different institutions, units and viewpoints provided the team with a broad

appreciation of differing perspectives within the University of Alaska System.

In summary, the team concludes that while the University of Alaska System enjoys exemplary executive leadership and highly capable financial management, it lacks strong academic leadership to complement its executive team. In order to truly become the engine of economic and social improvement for Alaska, the System will need to deliver on the President's vision with educational programs and services relevant to the priorities of Alaskans. Yet the dearth of academic leadership at the System level means that important tasks such as clarifying the missions of the major institutions, supporting the community college function, engaging in System wide planning, developing and reviewing academic programs, and ensuring educational accountability are only partially addressed. The System Academic Council (SAC) and the President's faculty liaison position perform important functions that are well worth preserving, but by their nature they cannot bring these unfinished tasks to completion.

Thus we recommend that the System hire a chief academic officer to work with other senior System officials, campus provosts and other appropriate administrators and faculty and staff leaders in advancing an educational agenda that will better link the aspirations of the academy with the needs of the state. There was widespread agreement among those we interviewed surrounding the need for stronger academic leadership. While there was not unanimity in support of a chief academic officer, no one presented a persuasive alternative to this proposed leadership position.

The Work of System Academic Affairs

There are at least three good reasons for the University of Alaska System to seriously consider hiring a chief academic officer. First, most of the decisions made by the statewide administration affect academic programs and faculty, but currently are made without the benefit of an authoritative academic leader on the premises. For example, decisions on collective bargaining strategy, how to distribute state funding, what to cut when funds are reduced and what to add when they increase and what priorities to place before the legislature all bear on educational programs and service to students. SAC serves as a useful sounding board for some of these decisions and the faculty liaison, we assume, offers an academic perspective, but

neither can substitute for a strong academic advocate at the table as hard choices and top priorities are being debated.

Second, a chief academic officer plays a powerful symbolic role as the voice and often the champion for academic culture and values. Understanding of the full range and depth of the academic milieu from its fealty to academic freedom and shared governance to the notion of peer review for promotion and tenure to the dynamics of the academic job market and the competition for funding and prestige is essential to effective system leadership. At present, the System enjoys truly exceptional capacity in the person of the President and his executive staff, its financial managers and its representatives to the state and federal governments. They are among the best to be found anywhere. Other System staff seem to be capable in their positions as well, but the System lacks a senior officer with in-depth academic experience and accomplishment.

Finally, the important work of actually delivering on the President's and the System's commitment to the people of the state requires sustained effort from an experienced leader. In this report, we have identified the unfinished business of the system as clarifying missions, supporting the community college function, planning for the future, program development and review, and ensuring accountability. Some of this work can be accomplished in a year while other parts represent a new way of doing business that can only be implemented over time. To successfully develop this complex and time consuming agenda, which is at the very heart of the University System's mission, will require a leader with expert knowledge and experience in academia and its ways.

What kind of person would serve Alaska well in this capacity? Historically, chief academic officers have often been tasked with promulgating rules and enforcing them. That remains an element of the position, but current expectations call for a flexible and practical leadership style that works collaboratively with colleagues in pursuing an agenda of service to the public. The best academic leaders can be described as communicators, motivators, nurturers of new ideas, deliberative, loath to centralize unnecessarily, problem solvers, champions of the values of education, and mediators among the numerous cultures within and outside the university. They combine the virtues of the diplomat and entrepreneur with that of the best faculty in meeting challenges.

The most successful academic leaders within systems follow a collaborative leadership style that, in the case of Alaska, would call for a continuing prominent role of the System Advisory Committee (SAC). SAC's major contributions of providing advice and counsel, facilitating communication among campuses, managing conflict through personal relationships and mutual respect, and representing the interests of their universities in a collegial setting would continue. The system academic leader would add value to the work of SAC by filling the gaps where SAC has difficulty in performing by addressing missions, the community college function, planning, evaluation and accountability.

Clarifying Missions

A number of forces and trends are converging to suggest that the time is right for a major review and clarification of the missions of significant units within the System.

Like most other public university systems, Alaska's is faced simultaneously with fiscal constraints and new demands for services. The state legislature and citizens are coming to accept the need for education beyond high school to be prepared for jobs in the new economy and they want multi-point access to educational opportunities over a career life-time. The President is leading the university system into a new relationship with the state in which Alaska will educate a larger proportion of its population at its own institutions and develop and retain a workforce that (along with applied research and economic development initiatives) helps to transform and diversify the state's economy. The new program initiatives that attracted desperately needed funds arguably define the agenda for many universities in the early part of the 21st century. This agenda includes the primacy of state needs, especially workforce development, and the recognition that delivering more robust programs across the state will require greater collaboration and partnerships across institutions and between institutions and business and community enterprises.

In spite of a thin financial base, Alaska's higher education institutions have been evolving, growing, restructuring and challenging the limits of their traditional missions as they seek to meet new demands for services. On the one hand, these changes represent "mission creep" or "drift" into fields not specifically supported by the mission of one institution, but sometimes

represented in the mission of another. Often these changes at least partially duplicate offerings elsewhere. On the other hand, graduate and undergraduate programs that serve the needs of place bound students at all age and career levels need to be accessible so these learners can take advantage of them.

Like many other states, Alaska's population has grown in areas far removed from the site of its major research institution. Elsewhere, some urban comprehensive universities have moved aggressively to offer professional master's programs and selected practitioner focused doctoral programs to address the educational needs of their regions. In order to minimize duplication while ensuring that legitimate needs are met, some states require that doctoral degrees be offered at comprehensive institutions only in partnership with a research institution. Mounting and sustaining such cooperative efforts requires on going and substantial System level coordination. Because of their high cost, most states demand that no new doctoral programs should be developed or existing programs offered at a distance without a rigorous, external review of market demand and institutional (whether standing alone or in partnership) capacity.

In a case like Alaska where population growth in Anchorage has not been matched in the northern part of the state and where major institutions are evolving at different rates, there is bound to be tension and some friction over missions and program priorities. This situation is rendered more complex in Alaska because all its major administrative units have both regional and statewide mandates and because of the partial integration of community college units within larger institutions.

In this context, several questions arise about missions, programs and authority. How is the public's desire for access to programs relevant to immediate needs balanced with institutional aspirations to advance in academic status? What is the realistic potential for delivering cooperative programs at the graduate level at a distance from at least one sponsoring campus? How can the growing need for services in Anchorage be addressed when those programs are now delivered by the Fairbanks campus? How can the growing needs for services outside of Anchorage be better addressed when those programs are delivered by the Anchorage campus? What role should the Juneau campus play in statewide program leadership and especially in distance education? A related question is where should new

and emerging programs established in the President's Office, such as those involving corporate training and partnerships with the schools, be located?

It is our considered judgment that a review and eventual clarification of missions in light of the economic and demographic changes of the last fifteen years is in order. Specifically, we recommend that:

- The President and the Regents initiate a process to review university missions to determine what authorizations should be affirmed and where changes may be needed to ensure that the System and its member institutions are positioned to serve the needs of Alaskans in the early 21st Century.
- This mission review process should precede, then lead, further strategic planning for the System.
- Responsibilities for major statewide programs should be clarified, affirmed, or reassigned to ensure that institutions do not unilaterally abrogate their responsibility to provide services beyond their immediate region or assume a statewide mandate which jeopardizes the franchise of other institutions.
- Standards and procedures need to be developed for offering new doctoral programs and for reviewing existing doctoral programs.
- The new chief academic officer should oversee the mission review process. If that appointment is not made or is deferred, a senior administrative leader with sufficient time and support from the President and the Board of Regents should be identified to do the job.

Serving the Needs of Community College Students

With the perspective of time, it is possible to see now that the merger of the community colleges with the universities, which in 1987 kindled so much conflict, has in fact resulted in a number of benefits to the state and its students. These positive outcomes ought to be sustained and expanded. At the same time, emerging needs for more responsiveness in two-year and other short term programs, especially programs directed to employment demands, suggest that some changes are in order if the System is to more effectively use this asset. This section of the report outlines the chief benefits of the merger then identifies some of the problems associated with it

before offering recommendations intended to preserve the many positive results but correct some of the deficiencies.

Benefits of Merger

- Problems of credit transfer from two-year to four-year programs have been substantially reduced.
- The model of citizen advisory groups, extensive in vocational programs but less so in academic programs, has become fairly widespread at all levels, especially at the University of Alaska-Anchorage.
- In many instances, faculty governance effectively includes community campus faculty, many of whom have emerged as leaders.
- Faculty with appropriate credentials and experience can teach both lower and upper division courses, if the union contract permits.
- At some community campus sites, students are able to complete or make substantial progress toward four-year degrees.
- Some scale economies have been achieved and money saved by combining two administrations and eliminating a sub-system within the System.

These and other positive results suggest that this is no time to propose an undoing of the merger. But it is also important to recognize the unintended negative consequences.

Continuing Problems

- The operational needs of the community colleges tend to be underrepresented when academic policy is developed.
- Open enrollment principles, so critical to the mission of two-year programs, often compromise the quality of some programs at the university level.
- Student retention measures and other indicators of effectiveness do not always accommodate the diverse goals of students who attend community colleges.
- Course and program approval procedures are unnecessarily restrictive and time consuming, and seriously hamper responsiveness to the needs of business and industry.

- Enrollment declines in vocational programs and consequent frustration by employers seeking better prepared workers and students seeking new job skills are probably linked to the reduced role of the community college within the larger university context.

Recommendations

In order to maintain the benefits of Alaska's integrated higher education organization but also to realize the need for greater prominence of community college services, we recommend that:

- The System initiate a discussion of practical ways of supporting the values of community college services including excellence in teaching, the primacy of teaching over research in the community college context, and providing services to students who enter with minimal preparation for college.
- Educational leaders within the system find legitimate ways to speed up the course, program and faculty review and approval process so that units offering community college services can respond more quickly. This is especially important in the area of non-credit courses.
- The System gather more information on the performance and effectiveness of its community college units in fulfilling the missions traditionally associated with two-year, open admissions, career and transfer oriented programs.
- The System consider assigning an experienced leader to be responsible for planning, coordination and support of community college services. This should be a senior position, perhaps at the provost level and thus a member of SAC, reporting to the recommended chief academic officer. Since the community college sector is represented at all of the major administrative units, this position needs to report to the System official whose responsibility cuts across all of the institutions. The charge to this community college leader and advocate would include giving voice to the primacy on teaching excellence characteristic of the best community colleges, fostering communication among the extended campus units whatever their major administrative unit, and developing academic

- and human resource policies within the system that permit the two-year programs to respond more quickly to local and regional needs.
- An alternative, though not ideal, to the assignment recommended above would be to include responsibility for community college representation and leadership as a major component of the job description of the proposed chief academic officer.

System wide Planning

During the dozen or so lean years in the University of Alaska System, most planning focused on how to continue important services and programs with an ever diminishing supply of money. More recently, an able and intuitive President who quickly identified the state's overarching needs and adjusted University priorities to address those needs has led strategic planning. With the first stages of the turn-around in the University's relationship with the state largely accomplished, the time is ripe for a more measured and systematic approach to planning.

Among the central purposes of comprehensive public university systems is the mandate to link the intellectual assets of its universities with the often utilitarian needs of the state, to obtain the political support and the financial resources so the universities can carry out their missions, to develop a well educated and civically responsible citizenry, and to partner with other enterprises and institutions—notably the employer community and the schools—in contributing to economic and social advancement. To accomplish these noble aims requires systematic, efficient and rigorous planning.

Planning processes within the System need to take into account the needs of the service region and the state, to coordinate institutional plans and decision making processes so that the system wide product represents a coherent whole, and to take a strong future oriented approach focused on improving conditions and opportunities for Alaskans.

In Alaska, as in most other states, current topics demanding attention in the planning process include:

- Connections to the K-12 system and especially teacher preparation and development
- Education, training and research in the health professions, especially nursing
- Education, training and research in the human service professions and especially in fields relevant to serving a rural, native and aging population
- Support for the economy and economic opportunity including education and research to underpin existing industries and emerging ones

Effective system wide planning works to align institutional purposes with the needs of the state, engages educational leaders from all levels in the process, involves representatives of business, government and education from outside the university in the process, protects the important values and traditions of the academic enterprise, recognizes the need for distinctive strengths at specific institutions and the need to minimize redundancy in programs across the state.

There is ample literature on planning processes and therefore no need to summarize the steps in a planning process here. However, the following recommendations we believe to be germane to planning in the Alaska context.

- As part of the process, industry and community advisory boards should be consulted (or created where they do not currently exist). These groups will help the System and the universities in environmental scanning, advocacy, building partnerships to achieve goals identified in the planning process and managing stakeholder expectations.
- The planning process also needs to be linked to setting standards for academic program development, approval and termination. Issues such as program location, regional versus statewide service, coordination among campuses and faculties and the transfer of “one time” initiatives into core operations should be recognized in the planning process.
- The satisfaction of state needs should guide the process of determining institutional and program metrics and benchmarks. Budgetary rewards and incentives should be geared to these outcomes

- such as the achievement of student learning goals rather than just inputs such as credit hour generation.
- System and campus institutional research activities need to be proactive and anticipatory and not just focused on responding to requests for past information and surveys. Analytical “white papers” which explore multiple options, take models in use elsewhere and apply them to the Alaska environment, critique current strategies while proposing better alternatives would contribute to the depth of the planning process. Institutional research priorities should be strongly informed by the System’s academic leadership. The System might consider increasing the role of expert faculty in the conduct of these research activities.
 - Having said all this, system wide planning must avoid becoming a lugubrious activity that consumes many hours while producing ambiguous results. Leadership for this activity, which we believe should come from the office of the proposed chief academic officer, will need to keep the process focused on relatively few critical topics, on a tight schedule with a fixed end date, and interesting to the participants. It will also require the President’s and the Board of Regents’ strong endorsement and participation.

Program Development and Review

There is a need within the University of Alaska System for clearly understood and consistently applied guidelines for adding, evaluating, eliminating or de-emphasizing academic programs. The System must be able to demonstrate to its many stakeholders, and especially the legislature, that it can and will make tough choices among articulated priorities. Absent a rigorous process for development and review, new programs may reflect institutional aspirations rather than the foremost needs of the public and they may unnecessarily duplicate programs available elsewhere. Program review is important to achieving excellence in programs with potential for distinction and as an inducement to weed out programs of low quality and those which no longer serve a need. Logic suggests that revising the program review process should follow mission clarification.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education developed one of the best-known and most successful statewide program review initiatives in the early 1990s. Known as the PQP initiative—standing for Priorities, Quality, Productivity--this project eliminated or consolidated some 600 programs while adding 100

new ones. It freed up millions of dollars for reinvestment in higher priority efforts and laid the groundwork for improved legislative funding as well. While there are immense differences in scale between Alaska's system of higher education and Illinois', the principles guiding the program review process are similar. Proposals for new programs should demonstrate:

- Clear need based on objective surveys of potential students and employers
- Appropriateness of the program to the mission of the campus
- Capacity of the campus with respect to qualified faculty, physical facilities and other resources
- A means of evaluating the program within five years including enrollment, educational effectiveness and societal need
- For graduate programs in particular, an evaluation of the program by outside experts in the field who are selected jointly by the campus and the system

Existing programs should be reviewed on a scheduled basis using similar criteria to see if they should be continued, augmented, de-emphasized or eliminated.

Performance and Accountability

Concerns about performance and accountability in the public sector have intensified both nationally and globally in the past decade. The University of Alaska System has not yet fully confronted these rising public expectations or considered how to turn them to advantage. The positive aspect of coming to these questions late in the game is that Alaska can avoid the mistakes of early adopters and emulate successful practices.

Increasingly, citizens and their legislators demand to know the results of their substantial investments in higher education. Governance publications are replete with references to benchmarking and high stakes performance measurement. The large scale testing of K-12 students furnishes a prominent example, as are tests required prior to admission to the teaching and other professions.

A performance and accountability agenda should start with a focus on the Regents' major goals for the System. Measures and indicators flow from these goals. This approach contributes integrity to the process and helps avoid the tendency to select some measures largely because they are easy to identify. Campuses would be justly concerned with "one size fits all" measures. In a System as diverse as Alaska's, and especially one that imbeds the community college functions within comprehensive and research institutions, measures should be tailored to individual campuses and programs. To address this problem, some states combine common measures applicable to all institutions with campus-specific indicators.

Most state systems are now required by their governing boards and/or their legislatures to report performance outcomes such as graduation rates, retention rates, student performance on standardized examinations and licensure tests, employment of graduates as well as indicators of cost effectiveness. Some states have developed programs linking performance to funding either by reserving a portion of the general allocation as a reward for improvement or adding to the appropriation as a bonus for high performance. While not popular with campus or system administrations, these programs enjoy great currency with some legislators during times of fiscal constraint.

It may be that Alaska's legislature will not seek performance reports or if they do will not tie performance to funding. However, it makes sense for the System to anticipate such requests and be prepared to address them on terms consistent with accreditation requirements and System and university priorities.

In light of all this, we recommend that:

- System leaders objectively assess the need for a coherent performance and accountability framework driven by System and campus goals as well as the requirements of external accreditation bodies. (Discussion of and consensus on the goals across the System will likely be a first step.)
- Based on the experience of other Systems, Alaska will want to focus and limit the number of goals and measures to avoid confusion about what is most important and to keep the entire project manageable in cost and time.

- Special attention should be given to the new initiatives in order to demonstrate the presumed positive results from the additional state investment.
- The performance and accountability process not simply result in a series of reports, but should be tied to actions aimed at improving service, quality and efficiency.
- This recommended process will need to balance the requirements for performance and accountability with the complexity of the university and the value, in terms of responsiveness and creativity, that results from decentralized decision-making and shared governance.
- Overall responsibility for the assessment process should be in the job description of the proposed chief academic officer.

Summary

The University of Alaska System can serve as the single most important resource in providing richer opportunities for individual Alaskans and a better economic and social future for the state as a whole. Thanks to the vision, energy and leadership of President Hamilton, his executive staff and the many capable, hard working and dedicated administrators, faculty and staff across the state, important strides have been made in this direction. To carry this work forward, however, the System needs to engage in several important tasks in the academic affairs area. These include clarifying the missions of the major institutions, supporting the community college functions embedded within the universities, setting up a systematic approach to planning, establishing a process for developing and reviewing academic programs, and ensuring greater accountability for educational and other program through a cooperative program of assessment. In order to carry out these initiatives, the System will need to identify an experienced educational leader to serve as its chief academic officer.