Faculty Alliance
John Petraitis, Chair

In June 2010, out-going Faculty Alliance Chair Dr. Jon Dehn’s year-end report to Regents emphasized (1) the importance of more faculty involvement in writing the Academic Master Plan, (2) the unity of Faculty Alliance in acting on behalf of faculty as a whole, rather than our own specific MAUs, and (3) the hope of re-establishing a closer relationship between Regents and faculty.

As out-going Faculty Alliance Chair, I am struck by my predecessor’s comments because they set the tone for the year we are finishing. One highlight of the year came in October when President Gamble gave faculty the opportunity to repackage the AMP. Faculty rearranged their schedules and gave up personal time to deliver a major re-draft in December, and a finished AMP in February.

Echoing the 2010 year-end report, a second highlight of this year was the continued unity of Faculty Alliance. We were able to revise the AMP so thoroughly and quickly because we allowed our campus-specific concerns to take a back seat to serving UA and Alaskans. In fact, of the five goals of the AMP, collaboration among the MAU’s is – in our opinion – the most important. We sincerely believe that partnerships among the MAUs are the key to serving more and more Alaskans in an era where legislative funding might not keep pace with enrollments.

A third highlight of the year was that Faculty Alliance did, as we hoped, re-established closer relationships with the Board of Regents. This became clear when out-going BoR Chair Cynthia Henry closed the December BoR meeting by encouraging the Board to “do two things: take care of this place and trust the faculty.” It also became clear when current Board Chair Fuller Cowell set aside time in BoR agendas for regular reports from faculty, staff, and students. Faculty Alliance wants to thank the regents for trusting us.

Trust in faculty seems to have also grown outside of BoR. The Statewide Academic Council now has three faculty representatives (one from each MAU); President’s Cabinet now meets with SAC regularly, thereby allowing faculty to contribute to conversations that affect UA; and SAC has asked Faculty Alliance to form a taskforce to deal with the pedagogy of electronic/distance labs.

In the coming year, under the leadership of incoming Faculty Alliance Chair Dan Monteith from UAS, Faculty Alliance hopes (a) to partner with others in UA and Alaska on the upcoming strategic plan, (b) to continue putting state-wide needs above campus-specific issues, and (c) maintaining strong relationships with BOR, SAC, and President’s Cabinet.

Faculty Alliance says goodbye to two members: Dr. Genie Babb of UAA is relocating to SUNY Plattsburg, and Dr. Jonathan Anderson of UAS is relocating to Cal State San Bernadino. Joining Alliance for 2011-2012 are Dr. Michael Stekoll from UAS, and Dr. Robert Boeckmann from UAA (scheduled to be Faculty Alliance Chair in 2013-2014).
This has been a productive and exciting year for the Coalition. Student workers received a badly needed wage increase, the Coalition managed to work with the Board of Regents and President Gamble on a tuition compromise and we have built a strong working relationship with other governance groups and the UA administration.

Our legislative advocacy was particularly productive this year. As has already been mentioned, the legislative conference in Juneau included students from every active campus in the state. Students from as far away from Juneau as Bethel were able to meet with their legislators and talk about how much financial aid is needed for UA to remain affordable and competitive. Unfortunately our efforts to push for financial aid were distracted by issues regarding the UA budget.

The most noticeable distraction for us is a disagreement over why tuition is increasing and how tuition relates to our budget. Legislators consistently claim that they give enough funding for tuition increases to be unnecessary (presumably beyond inflation) and that the Regents raise tuition to fund extra growth and cover for administrative waste. When we talk to UA administrators, we hear that even if there were no new programs tuition would need raised because the legislature doesn’t give enough increases to maintain what we have much less cover expansion. It seems likely that both stories contain elements of truth. Despite the inconsistency, student advocates have never wavered in their support for full funding of UA’s budget requests and we intend to continue doing so. We hope that our willingness to spend student fee dollars to travel to Juneau and advocate for UA’s budgets while simultaneously taking on tuition and fee increases is recognized and appreciated.

Another distraction has been the claim from legislators that they already are generous to public education because of K-12 funding. In order to counter this effort to pit UA and K-12 against one another, we wish to work more closely with the K-12 system. We are considering combining our annual legislative conference next year with K-12 student advocacy efforts. It would be helpful to have the collaboration duplicated at every level possible. Dollar for dollar funding for our University and our K-12 systems should never be seen as mutually exclusive. Both strive to accomplish similar goals and should be seen in essence as one comprehensive education system.

Thankfully these budget distractions did not prevent us from achieving our goal: extra funding for merit and need based financial aid. The greatest
achievement is undoubtedly securing record funding for AlaskAdvantage. We hope this level of funding will grow as the performance scholarship grows over the years.

Even though it has been a productive year, there is still much work to be done. Student fees are the next major internal university issue facing the Coalition. The current plan is to work through the UA Task Force on Tuition and Affordability and depending on the results of the fee review either address fees on a campus by campus basis or come up with a comprehensive set of recommendations to be carried out from the top down.

Tuition is of course next on the list of concerns. We have not yet taken a position on whether or not the Board should eliminate the two year notice for tuition rates given to students in favor of a one year notice that will provide for greater accuracy in setting the rates. We hope that when tuition rates come before the Board they will do whatever possible to keep future rates low.

On a more positive note, we will be having an unusually competitive Coalition Speaker Election this year. There are currently 4 experienced students running for the position. Whoever wins will have some very active student governments to work with and will make an excellent addition to the governance team. Thank you to the Board, President Gamble, and theUA staff who have helped make this such a great year for students. We look forward to working with all of you in the future.

Have a great Summer!

Save the Dates!
Annual Summit
June 4-5, 2011
Fairbanks
Staff Alliance

Maria Russell, Chair

Staff Alliance would like to thank the Board of Regents for all of the work put in this past year. This year has provided a wide range of topics and concerns for Staff Alliance to focus. As chair of Staff Alliance I was pleased with the diverse group of individuals from across the state that worked together to meet staff concerns with this array of topics. The Staff Alliance membership will change over the summer, we look forward to having a new group of energetic staff members to take on this role and work with the Board next year. I have grateful for the individuals on the Alliance whom have dedicated a significant amount of time and energy into staff concerns.

Presidential Search:

We would like to thank the Board of Regents one last time for the opportunity to participate on the Presidential Search Advisory Committee. Staff throughout the state participated in setting up events and providing feedback at the various steps. By allowing staff participation we were encouraged that our voice valued and heard.

Staff Compensation:

Throughout the year there was a strong concern that with the rising cost of healthcare and other living expenses that staff may actually step backwards in the next fiscal year. Staff Alliance stressed to the Board that although we acknowledge the budget process is the difficult practice of balancing various and often times competing interests throughout the UA system, the Board and the administration need to remember that staff members play a role in all sectors of the university. In regards to compensation our effort has been to look at the salary issue in regards to the budget submission, we will continue to stress our issues, but will broaden our efforts to better compensate staff. We would like to thank the board one last time for the 2.5% increase for FY12, we also encourage the Board to consider putting into policy annual increases for staff. We will continue to work on our compensation concerns with the Board in the upcoming year.

Staff Makes Students Count Awards and Staff Appreciation

At the June Board meeting you will have the opportunity to meet some staff members whose efforts truly make students count here at the University of Alaska. Of course, many staff fall into this category. This is a yearly opportunity to highlight a selection of them. In additiona efforts, staff from each MAU work with human resources to put on staff appreciation or development days. These appreciation events help build the university community!

From Sitka, Maria Russell attended UAF as a UA Scholar and graduated with honors in 2004 after earning BA degrees in History and Anthropology. Maria worked for the Bunnell House Early Childhood Lab School while a student and accepted a position with the Institute of Arctic Biology upon graduation. She currently divides her time between the fiscal management of the Specialized Neuroscience Research Program and the coordination of IAB’s recharge centers.
Healthcare:

To increase staff opportunity for involvement in healthcare-plan changes, Staff Alliance passed two motions (#2011-6, #2011-7). In the first Staff Alliance moved to endorse the SHCC (Staff Health Care Committee) motion that the University begin the process of considering potential plan changes at the beginning of the fiscal year preceding the year in which the changes would be implanted. In the second Staff Alliance moved to endorse the SHCC motion that open forums on proposed healthcare-plan changes be held on campuses in early November to allow input while changes can be made, followed by spring forums to discuss final changes. Earlier engagement in the healthcare-planning process and increased communication with staff will enable timely and better-informed healthcare-plan design.

Tuition Waiver

To address staff concerns Staff Alliance unanimously recommended that no changes be made to the employee tuition waiver benefit until a participative process involving staff governance and other affected parties has had the opportunity for input, going into effect no sooner than January 2012 (Motion #2011-8). Staff are eager to engage the University in this conversation. Tuition waivers provides valuable professional development to University staff and encourage retention of quality employees.

Cash in Leave Motion

To mitigate increased out-of-pocket health care costs and increased cost-of-living expenses, Staff Alliance requested that non-represented staff be allowed two opportunities per fiscal year to cash in up to forty hours of annual leave, for a maximum total of eighty hours per fiscal year (Motion #2011-4). This will provide staff greater flexibility to better offset changing financial obligations.

The Governance Report is prepared by the System Governance Office. For further information, contact Pat Ivey, Executive Officer, phone 907-450-8042, fax 907-450-8041, email pmivey@alaska.edu, http://www.alaska.edu/governance.