

Kate Ripley, Director
Office of Public Affairs
206 Butrovich Building
P.O. Box 755340
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-5340
(907) 450-8102
FAX (907) 450-8101
email: syserve@alaska.edu



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Board Wraps Up February Meeting

JUNEAU---The University of Alaska Board of Regents wrapped up its two-day meeting in the Capital City Thursday.

Much of the first day was spent meeting with legislators about university priorities and with Gov. Frank Murkowski, who called on the regents to work with his administration to match the university's research capacity with the state's economic development opportunities.

On the second day, the board approved four new academic programs, received an overview on the Alaska Teacher Mentoring Project, and approved a revised total project cost for the UA Museum of the North in Fairbanks.

The Alaska Teacher Mentoring Project is a collaborative effort between the state, university and school districts across the state initiated by Education Commissioner Roger Sampson and UA President Mark Hamilton. It matches 350 new K-12 teachers in Alaska with 22 experienced teachers trained specifically as "mentors" who offer professional support, regular communication and personal visits.

Sampson, addressing the board Thursday, said the program's goal is to reduce teacher turnover, which is demonstrably tied to student success. Sampson said typically, in districts across Alaska, an average of 15 teachers quit over the holiday break. This year, just eight months into the new program, "we had zero (quit)," Sampson said. "That's pretty powerful."

Teachers most often leave because they don't have someone to turn to for feedback or solutions to difficult situations.

"We can't have a sink or swim kind of culture for our teachers," Lorrie Scoles, director of the mentoring project and a national board certified teacher, told the regents. "We've found the piece that is going to make the difference."

In other business, the board approved the following new academic programs:

- A bachelor of science in engineering at UAA;
- A bachelor of science degree in computer engineering at UAF;
- A certificate (two-year) in pre-radiologic technology qualifications at UAS;
- And a certificate in drafting technology at UAS.

In addition, the board approved a new total project cost for the museum at \$42 million. Earlier estimates accounted separately for construction, a \$3.5 million loan approved by the board in December, and another fund--largely comprised of private donations--for furniture, fixtures and exhibits. While the board had been apprised of all costs in earlier meetings, Thursday's vote combined those funds and included a \$1 million increase to complete the project. The new funds come from accrued interest earnings on previously approved capital projects.

Regent Joe Usibelli Jr. noted the project, about 15 percent above original estimate, is not unusual for a project of this size. "It's a great building. It was the largest, single fund-raising effort, ever, by the university," Usibelli said. "Let's get on with this project and celebrate it."

Usibelli's comments were met by applause. The board unanimously approved the increase.

The board also unanimously approved:

- Revised collective bargaining agreements with United Academics, the Alaska Community Colleges' Federation of Teachers and the Alaska Higher Education Craft and Trades Employees, which together represent 1,450 faculty and staff statewide. The unions and the Legislature must still approve the contracts--which include substantial modifications to the health benefits plan in response to rising health care costs as well as a one-year extension of the contracts--before they would become final.
- Resolutions honoring and thanking the work of former regents Mike Burns, Elsa Demeksa and Kevin Meyers. The terms of Burns and Demeksa expired; Meyers left his post as president of ConocoPhillips in Alaska to take a similar position with the company in Russia;
- And a resolution honoring the 75th Anniversary of the Cooperative Extension Service in Alaska.

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For more information call Kate Ripley, 907/474-6311 or 907/388-3506 (cell)

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