

September 21, 2007

Professor Pete Pinney
Interim Director
Cooperative Extension Service
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Dear Director,

I appreciate the courtesy of your invitation to provide input into the CSREES review, October 21-26, 2007. I know most of the review team members, either professionally or by reputation. They are well credentialed and I am sure they will do a great job.

In the guidelines for input by faculty and staff, a 2 page resume, along with other materials were requested. Since I retired in mid 1997, I have not maintained an active resume. However, I will fax an old style resume, current up to the time of my retirement, which can be used or not used as you may decide.

A brief summary of some of my credentials, relevant to the review include 37 years of federal credited service in Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in 3 states, Wyoming, New Mexico and Alaska. The time in Wyoming and New Mexico was as a part of the College of Agriculture. In Alaska CES, I was initially in a statewide unit named the Community College, Rural Education and Extension (CCREE). Later after the restructuring in 1987 with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, which was initially a separate major administrative unit (MAU), and then later with the College of Rural Alaska. Some of the relevant positions I have held include service as a County Agent and later Director of Extension (Wyoming), State Leader of Ag Programs (New Mexico State University), Land Resource Chairman and later Director of Extension, and upon retirement, Professor Emeritus (University of Alaska).

Since I retired in 1997 and left the state, my first hand knowledge of performance of the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences (SNAES), Agriculture and Forestry (AFES), and CES has been limited limited. Therefore, the value of my input in relation to the performance of these units would be of limited value without having the opportunity to review materials being assembled for the review team.

In your September 12th, memorandum of instructions to faculty and staff, it was stated that “the review team will address the placement of CES within the UAF administrative structure that will best enable the unit to carry out an engaged outreach program that is commensurate with the UAF land grant mission”.

I have been professionally involved in 3 CSREES type of reviews, including reviews at the University of Wyoming, New Mexico State University and the University of Alaska. During these reviews, I do not recall having a review team asked to address the administrative structure and placement of units within the institution. Generally the

administration structure and organization of the institution are considered somewhat “sacred ground” issues and the internal business of the institution not to be dictated or infringed upon by the federal partner. The hidden question, unless it has already been decided would appear to be “Should CES be an Agricultural Extension Service within SNARS or a broader UAF entity, or as a part of a statewide Extension and outreach entity?”

With the charge to address the placement of CES I would assume that the placement of SNARS and AFES in the UAF system, and possibly within the University of Alaska system, would also be addressed. Thus the challenge to the review team is greatly increased.

In relation to the placement of CES, when I worked in Wyoming, the Agricultural Extension Service (AES) and the name later changed to CES was part of the College of Agriculture. However, as the University of Wyoming restructured in relation to changing times, various components of the College, such as Ag Engineering, some elements of Ag Economics, micro-biology and rural sociology, to mention a few were stripped out and integrated into other colleges and units of the university. The budgets, personnel and research and teaching also base went with them. With these changes and realignment, the support base from the college for CES programs was greatly weakened, thus affecting the breadth, depth and quality of CES programs and outreach to the people of the state.

Many states have restructured under university outreach and Extension service entities including CES with great success. Other states have addressed the issue in a variety of other structures with varying models in relation to the uniqueness of their state and higher education alignments.

I am aware of continuing controversy about the placement of CES and other old elements of CCREE within the UAF system. The restructuring of the total University of Alaska system in 1987 because of the approximately 30% recession of the university budget in July of that year resulted in many drastic changes accompanied by many anticipated and unanticipated consequences. The president of the system was charged by the board of regents to develop a plan to restructure the total system to accommodate the rescission within a 6 month period. The massive rescission of a major university was unprecedented and dealing with it was without a blue print was further exacerbated by the 6 month deadline.

The Extension Director, who had previously announced his planned retirement for the fall of 1987, organized and convened a University Extension System Review to provide background and opportunity for input into the upcoming restructuring. The review consisted of two days of dialogue and analysis among University of Alaska statewide administration, administrators of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Southeast, selected UAF deans, Federal Extension, and Sea Grant administration and representatives of the University of Alaska CES administration, faculty and staff. The review was held on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus August 31 through September 1, 1987.

While the document is dated, I believe it would provide useful background material in addressing the placement of CES. I assume that this document is available at the Extension Director's office in Fairbanks, but, if not, I will fax a copy with the suggestion that it be made a part of the background information pertinent to the placement of CES.

Many stakeholders, including community colleges, rural education and other rural entities felt the budget rescission crisis was resolved on the backs of the rural colleges and rural Alaska at their expense. Each of the community colleges was assigned to a four year institution. These entities, such as CES with statewide responsibilities were also assigned to one or another of the four year institutions, with the caveat that they were still to function statewide across the 3 four year institutions. In theory, the plan and model was workable, but with Extension and outreach being attached to one institution, the delivery of Extension programs in regions covered by the other two institutions was greatly impacted. This resulted in under served rural areas, and a diminished relationship with the community colleges and other rural education entities.

As the review team addresses the placement of CES, hopefully they will consider the statewide responsibilities and linkage to the other two institutions.

I am aware that there have been some discussions about the appointment of a Chancellor for extension, outreach and continuing education at the system level. I would encourage that the review teams to examine the feasibility of such a model.

I have great faith in the review team and the process, and am sure they will provide substantive opinions and rationale on the placement of CES. I am pleased to have been invited to make input.

Sincerely,

Irvin W. Skelton
Professor Emeritus,
University of Alaska