Strategic Pathways

How we optimize our system to achieve our goals for higher education in Alaska

The Case For Change

Alaska faces unprecedented challenges as it shifts from an economy heavily reliant on industry to a knowledge-based economy. Sustaining the university’s critical role for the state requires facing two very powerful forces: dramatic reductions in state funding and Alaska’s unmet and growing need for a trained workforce. UA must do everything possible to become more cost effective while continuing to be a strong contributor to the economic and social wellbeing of the state and meeting the increasing demand for an educated workforce. To do this UA must cut expenses in academic programs and administration while investing in areas of need and opportunity, and reduce redundant programs while maintaining wide access to those programs for place committed students.

Our Vision

Tomorrow’s university will be built upon the accomplishments, qualities and strengths of today, but it will be a different university – one that is more nimble, more competitive, more forward leaning, less expensive to operate, more accountable, more open, and more entrepreneurial. It must be tightly integrated with the state and recognized as the “go-to university” for our students, our employers, and our policy makers.

UA must change how we serve our students, how we partner with employers, how we work with legislators and community leaders, how we organize ourselves, and how we finance our operations.

Strategic Pathways Values

Focus: We will reduce unnecessary redundancy to more cost effectively meet the state’s higher education needs by focusing each university on its unique strengths.

Access: We will increase Alaskans’ participation in higher education by maximizing use of innovations in e-Learning, supporting high demand programs, and ensuring affordability.

Diversity: We will offer a wide diversity of academic degree and certificate programs across the university system, though not all programs will necessarily be available at all locations.

Excellence: We commit to excellence in everything we do, in the classroom, in our labs, and in the communities we serve.

Consistency: We will streamline and increase consistency in business practices, policies, processes, and systems that support expedited student progress through our programs.

Fiscal sustainability: We seek to be more entrepreneurial in our strategies to grow and diversify our revenues.
Our Process

Strategic Pathways is being implemented in three phases. Phase I initiated in summer 2016, Phase II in October 2016 and Phase III started in January 2017. The process involves review, implementation, and revisiting our priorities to ensure that UA activities support mission goals, are of high quality, are cost effective and enhance the student experience.

Review teams, comprising faculty, students, staff, alumni and community members, are charged with assessing the pros and cons of potential structural realignments and to focus on options that would establish efficiencies, reduce redundancies and/or find a means of funding that would reduce dependence on state general funds. Each team is asked to consider options in context of the core principles: focus, access, diversity, excellence, consistency, and fiscal sustainability.

Instead of agreeing on specific recommendations, the review teams present pros and cons of a variety of options to the Summit Team. The president takes the information presented by the review teams, feedback from the Summit Team and input from the community into account and presents recommended directions to the Board of Regents. Johnsen is meeting directly with affected programs to discuss the impact of options. As part of the review period, feedback is collected and forums are held on campuses and in communities. So far, nearly 2,000 comments offered by email or feedback form have been received and reviewed.

Following the approval or adjustment of initial directions, implementation teams are selected to establish goals, timelines, further details and cost analysis for each academic program or administration function under review. The decisions made in Phase I alone have increased UA accountability and streamlined UA bureaucracy by 30 percent.

Lead Campuses

A key concept of consolidation is the identification of lead campuses when the practice makes sense. The options for how a lead campus model will be implemented will vary on a program-by-program basis based on such factors as mission centrality, cost effectiveness, quality and access. Distance learning can play a role in all options as will the development of a common catalog.

One example of a lead campus structure already in the system is the UAA nursing program. This program is referred to as a “sole provider” model. Students in Bethel, Dillingham, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Kotzebue, Mat-Su, Nome, Sitka and Valdez are all taking nursing classes at their home campus, but the program is run through UAA and degrees are all conferred from UAA.

Other potential “lead campus” models include having a similar program at multiple locations, but each program’s focus tied to unique campus mission and region; having a similar program at multiple locations but only one location offers graduate level degrees in the program; or having similar courses offered at multiple locations but only one location offers bachelors or higher level degrees in the program.

These organizational changes will not change the requirements students are expected to fulfill in their degree programs. It will mean, however, that certain programs may be eliminated or combined with other programs. A university must “teach-out” eliminated programs, allowing students already enrolled in the program an opportunity to finish.

The lead campus model is not just for academic programs – administrative and support functions will also be reviewed. We must look hard at our administrative structure and bring those costs down and put that money into classrooms, labs and elsewhere critical to the university’s mission.

Initial Strategic Pathways Outcomes:

- Consolidation of 3 research administration offices into 1;
- Consolidation of 3 procurement offices into 1;
- Consolidation of information technology (IT) functions at each of the universities, with governance at Statewide;
- Collaboration and efficiencies between the two schools of engineering;
- Collaboration between the UAA and UAF management and business programs;
- Consolidation of the UAS management programs into the School of Arts and Sciences;
- Consolidation of three schools of education into one, serving all of UA