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UNIVERSITY
of ALASKA
Many Traditions One Alaska

Date:	June 2, 2017
To:	University of Alaska Board of Regents
From:	University of Alaska Faculty Alliance
Subject:	Shared Governance

At the March 2017 Board of Regents (BOR) meeting, the Faculty Alliance (FA) Executive Council was asked to participate in a conversation aimed at establishing and maintaining a mutually beneficial working relationship between faculty and administration. In order to guide the conversation, prior to the meeting President Johnsen provided a series of questions that explored the faculty's current opinion and future vision of shared governance. The discussion that ensued was productive in that it initiated what may prove to be a very useful, two-way flow of information between the faculty that form the foundation of the University of Alaska and the administrative personnel that provide necessary infrastructure. At the end of the hour-long conversation, members of the Executive Council were asked to further consider President Johnsen's questions and to continue the discussion at the June 2017 meeting of the board.

Since the March 2017 meeting of the Board, the Alliance has solicited faculty input from all the three universities that collectively comprise the University of Alaska. The following is a summary of the feedback received. Please note that President Johnsen's original questions were slightly modified in order to generate concise response and measures that may provide for implementation.

In response to the question "How can administration more effectively solicit advice and counsel from governance on matters of importance or interest to faculty?" written query/response, meetings and indirect communication via third parties were discussed.

Written query/response (i.e. memos) are communicated to the FA which then collects faculty input and prepares a response is perceived by many polled faculty as an effective means of documentation. This approach provides for clear documentation of both requests and response which become important when later reference is needed. The process is effective and responsive to the dictates of shared governance but time-intensive. Oftentimes administration and the BOR believe that relevant decisions are not amenable to the time delays needed for consensus building. In addition, faculty opinions may be attenuated as they pass from senators to Senates to Alliance and then on the BOR. This possible dilution and/or restriction of specific accuracy is problematic when considered in terms of a statewide system that encompasses three distinct universities, each boasting a distinct academic mission.

A proposed solution to several of the drawbacks cited in the previous paragraph is the use of tools such as Google Docs which allow for quick and detailed input from all three universities. Once a request for information is received, feedback can be generated with a turnaround time of days, while still allowing for broad input from around the state. An added benefit to this approach is productive faculty-to-faculty conversations, especially across universities, which in the past has been difficult to initiate and maintain. The Google Docs approach does, however, require a sizeable organizational commitment. It can be difficult for all affected faculty to locate the relevant document, navigate the Google Docs software tools and succinctly address the relevant questions. The former technical details are an unambiguous downside to this approach while the latter complicates the task of condensing response into a coherent whole.

Feedback regarding the advantages of regularly scheduled meetings reflected the largely-held opinion that open discussions in a public forum supports broad input. Ideally face-to-face meetings facilitate mutual understanding and, at the very least, ensure that participant views are entered into record and consequently provide for accurate dissemination of information.

Several variations on meeting format were discussed including administrators and BOR members attending defined portions of Faculty Senate meetings. While administrators are already provided with time allotments at all three faculty senate meetings, the regular appearance of a regent may be a positive experience. On the other hand, faculty governance participation at Summit Team meetings would provide for reciprocity and further contribute to a collegial environment that faculty would welcome. Administration-sponsored special meetings (e.g. the recent enrollment summit) offer good opportunities for communication especially because this venue allows all interested persons to attend, however, there is no direct connection to governance per se. The primary disadvantage to the meeting approach is the additional time demands placed on both administration and governance. Less commonly cited but still a prevalent opinion is that large meeting formats more often limit than lend to frank and open discourse.

The current practice of one-on-one meetings between governance leaders and administration is the approach most amenable to candid discussions of shared governance issues. The frequency of miscommunication between the affected parties, however, makes it clear that reporting of these unrecorded meetings oftentimes results in subjective accounts of the meeting content and outcomes. Clearly, there is a need for a revamping of this approach to shared governance.

A very obvious solution to the problems described above regarding faculty advice and counsel via meetings is the establishment of a faculty regent, or an ex-officio faculty member that would serve as a non-voting member of the BOR. A faculty regent or ex-officio board member would provide immediate faculty input to the UA governing board, increase communication avenues between the BOR, Statewide, faculty and students. Miscommunication would be minimized and response times, while not completely eliminated, would be lessened.

Faculty expressed interest in sharing advice and counsel indirectly through Letters to the Editor and/or Community Perspectives. This type of constructive public debate tends to engage community members and other stakeholders in the issues and complexities affecting the

university and is likely to provide greater perspective on the difficulties faced when developing strategy and policy. In addition to newspaper publications, governance representatives considered legislative meetings and testimony as a useful vehicle for indirect communication with administration. Indeed, administrative invitations for governance participation in legislative meetings and testimony would provide an opportunity to communicate faculty perspectives directly to legislators. Many felt that this line of communication would shed light on the important role that faculty serve in the UA system and discourage the incorrect impression that they are just another constituent or special-interest group. A note of caution regarding tone was prevalent throughout comments on the indirect communications approach. If not undertaken in an encouraging and positive tone, letters and/or testimony could be perceived as the airing of "dirty laundry" in public. Furthermore, some coordination is needed in order to present a unified UA message. The underlying message that all communications must embody is that faculty care deeply about the quality of the programs available in UA classrooms, the research conducted in its laboratories and the graduates that carry its credentials.

Respectfully,

DocuSigned by:

Lisa Hoferkamp

Lisa Hoferkamp
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