

# Governance Report

February/March 2019



UNIVERSITY  
of ALASKA  
*Many Traditions One Alaska*

## Coalition of Student Leaders

Nick Bursell, Chair

Thank you for taking the time to hear from the Coalition of Student Leaders. Due to the timing of our recent meetings, I have a fairly brief update for you at this time regarding the Coalition's latest activities.

At the time of writing this report, the Coalition last met on January 23 and are schedule to meet next the week of February 18.

The Coalition is currently considering a resolution regarding the UAA School of Education accreditation issue. The resolution is still being drafted but there is general interest in advocating for waived transfer fees and other forms of support for students among other things. I will have more information on this potential resolution at the time of the meeting.

Our annual Legislative Advocacy Conference is coming up March 16-19 in Juneau. Planning for the conference is near complete, with multiple speakers tapped and strategies planned and discussed. We should have a strong turnout from student governments around the state this year with almost 30 students registered to attend. Discussions around the state budget have a lot of students engaged and excited to advocate for the University of Alaska.

That is all for now. Thank you for taking the time to hear from students.

*The Coalition of Student Leaders consists of student government representatives from the University of Alaska campuses and portrays the diverse scope of student affairs and needs. The Coalition promotes the educational needs, general welfare and rights of all University of Alaska students, and functions as an advisory group to the UA president and administration on student issues.*

## Faculty Alliance

Chris Fallen, Chair

Faculty Alliance held its winter weekend retreat on January 26 and 27 at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). During the retreat, the Alliance drafted initial bylaws for an ad hoc committee charged with maintaining alignment of GER courses, drafted a revision to the review process for this round of the University of Alaska (UA) Faculty Initiative Fund (FIF), finalized FY20 nominations for faculty members on the systemwide academic councils, discussed President Johnsen's recent directive to each university chancellor to increase the systemwide average student-to-faculty ratio, discussed the response to the loss of accreditation for initial licensure programs with the School of Education at UAA, and

reviewed initial results from the UAF survey on course sharing options and discussed similar surveys planned at UAA and UAS.

The FIF is in its second academic year and the Alliance incorporated some lessons learned during the first year to improve the request for proposal (RFP) process earlier this academic year and is now working on improving the proposal review and ranking process. Specifically, the Faculty Alliance views the main task ahead as streamlining the review process and suggests that the smaller Tier II and Tier III proposals be evaluated on a binary scale for each of the nine evaluation criteria while the largest Tier I proposals be evaluated on a trinary scale (with the highest ranking requiring narrative justification). Faculty reviewers will be drawn from the Faculty Alliance in addition to faculty who received FIF awards the previous year. On January 30, the systemwide Academic Council rejected these initial suggestions, preferring a five-point scale for each of the nine criteria for all proposal tiers. Faculty Alliance has not yet met to discuss alternative proposals to streamlining the proposal review process at the time of this report.

Several of the new UA systemwide councils include faculty members who are nominated by Faculty Alliance and approved by the council chairs in coordination with President Johnsen and Vice President Layer. Faculty Alliance finalized nominations for faculty members of the systemwide councils for AY2019-2020 so that the service may be incorporated into their workloads, soon to be under negotiation with their deans and directors, and so compensation may be arranged when that service extends into the summer or other times when faculty are off contract.

The GER maintenance committee will meet at least once per semester and be composed of at least two faculty from each university, nominally from the respective faculty senate GER and curriculum committees, in addition to a member from Faculty Alliance and non-voting ex officio members from each of the registrar offices. Faculty Alliance Vice Chair Dr. Maria Williams from UAA will convene the committee early this academic year. Initial committee tasks are to nominate and elect a chair, edit and modify the committee bylaws, and communicate with the registrars at each university to allow the committee to receive appropriate notifications in Course Leaf. In particular, the committee will request that Course Leaf include a reminder in the course proposals section to communicate with discipline counterparts at the other universities before submission and to add a notification to the GER maintenance committee chair at the end of the workflow when a university approves a new course. Moving forward, the committee will review alignment as each new GER course is approved and continue coordination on courses that are still out of alignment.

Faculty Alliance is concerned about recent directives to increase the systemwide student-to-faculty ratio for two main reasons: the first being, lower student to faculty ratios are often accompanied by small class sizes which are associated with student success and quality of education (Alaska Native students in particular are known to thrive in small classroom environments); and the second being, general issues and concerns with the data collection and analysis leading to the reported student-to-faculty ratios at UA. Taken simply as the number of students per faculty at UA, increasing the ratio without increasing enrollment

necessarily means reduction of faculty, or perhaps reclassifying research, clinical, and extension faculty as non-faculty. Given that many faculty at UA, especially at UAF, are largely supported by external grants and contracts so do not have teaching as part of their workload, Faculty Alliance encourages clear and transparent disclosure of how the student-to-faculty ratio is calculated before pursuing major initiatives to “improve” this ratio by the stated goal of six students per faculty member in three years. The Alliance does not currently accept at face value the quoted figure of approximately 11 students per faculty at UA which presumably includes all faculty, including research faculty and adjuncts. Another question raised by the Alliance is whether or not teaching assistants and postdoctoral researchers also included?

The recent loss of education program accreditation at UAA is obviously disappointing and concerning, if not surprising given the CAEP “response to the self-study” report delivered in 2018 and program disorder extending many months prior. Faculty Alliance recognizes that the accreditation failure ultimately resulted from failures at multiple levels of UA including faculty, executive leadership, and board oversight of executive leadership. In addition to immediate corrective actions currently underway to serve current and future education students at UAA, Faculty Alliance suggests root cause analysis to identify the factors leading to the loss of program accreditation to prevent similar issues with program or even institutional accreditation throughout UA in the future. It is thought-provoking to note that both UAA and UAF education programs underwent the CAEP accreditation process at approximately the same time but the UAF program earned accreditation with strong marks in every metric. The education programs at both universities faced tremendous uncertainty in their immediate future following the Regents’ decision at the December 14, 2016 full meeting to discontinue both the UAA College of Education and UAF School of Education, and importantly, house all the education programs entirely at UAS. The decision to place all education programs at UAS, even those at UAA and UAF, not only created substantial uncertainty for faculty and students at UAA and UAF who would soon become UAS students and faculty, but also uncertainty in the path and utility to renewing program accreditation within each institution. Faculty Alliance notes that during this period of uncertainty, UAF education programs and their accreditation efforts were well-served by a strong and relatively long-serving dean and provost while the corresponding positions at UAA, including the chancellor, were held at interim status and all underwent turnover through the accreditation process. Tentatively, Faculty Alliance concludes that sustained executive leadership turnover from the dean, provost, and chancellor, combined with significant and rapid organizational changes such as mergers of entire schools and colleges such as Education, Business, or Engineering from different universities into a single university, are together toxic to program accreditation processes requiring substantial sustained and directed effort from faculty, staff, and administrators. Faculty Alliance fully supports any additional resources needed to help UAA students through the interim period as UAA education programs regain accreditation, including transfer to UAF and UAS. The Alliance also supports course sharing initiatives that allow Anchorage students to earn education degrees from UAF and UAS.

Faculty Alliance is coordinating surveys of faculty and students at the three universities, conducted by the respective faculty senates, to explore options to facilitate inter-university course sharing through synchronous and asynchronous distance teaching technology in ways that include but are not restricted to alignment of course blocks as part of the aligned common calendar. The three universities each have unique identities that are shaped by their student demographics and spatial locations. Forcing a one-size-fits-all alignment would erode these unique identities in addition to creating unnecessary strife when a focus on the core university mission is more important than ever.

This specific effort by Faculty Alliance is in part inspired by President Johnsen's challenge to the Alliance during its fall 2018 retreat to present options for an "80% solution" to inter-university course sharing. (Faculty Alliance proposed and is looking forward to a response to a corresponding counter challenge to President Johnsen and the UA Statewide Administration to present options for an "80% solution" to the tuition revenue sharing and distance technology problems that together also pose substantial barriers to course sharing that are perhaps even more formidable than non-alignment of course blocks.)

The UAF Faculty Senate defined operational goals for President Johnsen's "80% solution" to be:

- **initial goal:** 80% of University of Alaska students will have the opportunity to take synchronous courses within their program of study at more than one of the three universities during their academic career
- **long term goal:** expand this vision as allowed by funding, enhanced technological resources, and faculty resources

UAF faculty suggest a suite of options to expand opportunities for the three universities to share courses and faculty. As a research intensive, doctoral-granting university, UAF faculty are strongly resistant to shortening class periods to match UAA's class times (72% opposed). Instead, UAF faculty suggested a suite of options to facilitate inter-university course sharing for consideration by the systemwide Academic Council. Some highlights of those options include

- sharing synchronous once-per-week three-hour evening classes; this model would require minimal time changes at UAA and none for UAS and UAF
- expand course sharing options outside of the regular academic year, e.g. Summer Sessions, Maymester, Wintermester, Augustmester
- develop a hybrid model where a three-hour course would include, for example, 1.5 hours per week of synchronous class meeting by video conference and 1.5 hours per week asynchronous coursework, e.g. recorded lectures, films, small group work, class discussion, and virtual lab work
- weekend college, especially for GERs; with three-hour synchronous video conference classes on Saturdays and Sundays
- once-per-week three-hour evening classes which would require minimal time changes
- twice-per-week late afternoon classes which would require minimal time changes

The UAA and UAS Faculty Senates are in the process of conducting similar surveys to obtain feedback from faculty on their perspectives on course block alignment. The Alliance expects surveys will be completed later in the academic year.

Finally, this exercise in exploring options for inter-university course sharing exemplifies the power of shared governance, where the diverse and expansive expertise and creativity we cultivate among our faculty, students, and staff is unleashed to find solutions to problems that could never be envisioned in a single office or committee. Universities are unique organizations much different than businesses or government, requiring correspondingly unique management that plays to the strengths of a highly educated, decentralized, and independent workforce. The importance of true shared governance or participative management (inclusive of faculty, staff, students, and administrators) is a cornerstone of any successful university because it cultivates an environment that allows creativity and innovation to thrive. Top-down decisions should be viewed with caution, as they limit the valuable input of the shared governance units that contain vast academic experience, domain expertise, and institutional knowledge. Faculty Alliance encourages administration to facilitate coordination and communication among all university constituents and harness their collective wisdom when making decisions that directly impact the teaching, research, and service missions of the University of Alaska.



The University of Alaska Faculty Alliance AY2018-2019 during its Winter Retreat January 26-27, 2019. Clockwise from left: Morgan Dufseth (UA System Governance Executive Officer), Megan Buzby (UAS), Scott Downing (UAA), Sine Anahita (UAF), Syndonia (Donie) Bret-Harte (UAF), Maria Williams (Vice Chair, UAA), Robin Gilcrist (UAS), Chris Fallen (Chair, UAF), Sharon Chamard (UAA), Heather Batchelder (next Vice Chair, UAS).

*The UA Faculty Alliance is the system-wide governance group elected to represent the faculty in promoting welfare and education effectiveness at UA, to provide consultation to system executive leadership, and to facilitate system-wide communication among faculty at all three universities at UA.*

## **Staff Alliance**

Josh Watts, Chair

University of Alaska Staff Alliance met on Thursday, January 24 and is scheduled to meet again on Friday, February 15.



Staff across the system have been reviewing the new Total Compensation Review FAQs posted by HR, President Johnsen's message on January 16 regarding the budget, and the draft of the proposed Alcohol and Marijuana Regulation.

We appreciate SW Human Resources' efforts to answer and publish timely FAQs related to the Compensation Review. Staff at UA are eager to have access to as much data as is legally allowable, and hope that we are kept abreast of the situation as the decision making process with General Counsel continues. In addition, staff were pleased to see that a communication plan to notify those impacted by the equity study is being developed, and our team at Staff Alliance is interested in discussing that with HR as it forms.

President Johnsen's candid January 16 memo regarding the FY2020 budget was welcomed by staff despite its dire contents. Many staff across the system have been closely following the budget request originally submitted by Governor Walker, which will shortly be amended by Governor Dunleavy, and were relieved to hear about the efforts being made by President Johnsen to collaborate with the new OMB director and governor's staff. I would like to take this opportunity to express, again, my encouragement for the various leadership teams around the system that are responsible for their budgets to keep recent cuts to staff in mind as they prepare for FY2020. As I mentioned at the last meeting of the Board, our hope is that a thoughtful and measured approach to this fiscal year will see 'personnel' low on your list of opportunities for cost savings.

Staff Alliance has been asked to provide feedback on the draft UA Proposed Alcohol and Marijuana Policies and Regulations. At the time this report was written, there hasn't been much opportunity to generate much feedback on the document, however, the first pass seems to have been met with acceptance, with very little to be surprised about. By the time that the Board meets at the end of this month, our teams will have some meaningful feedback to provide on the proposal.

Lastly, it's award season! Staff Alliance has opened nominations for its annual Staff Make Student Count award. It's a fantastic opportunity to recognize staff that go out of their way to make an impact on the UA students around them through their dedication, service, and positive behavior. I encourage staff and faculty across the system to take a moment to think about why they work here at the University of Alaska, and our mission to *inspire learning, advance and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, and public service, emphasizing the North and its diverse peoples*. In these difficult times, staff can serve as a waypoint for others as we move into potential budget cuts. Polaris, the North Star, isn't special just because it's bright. It's special because it stays in place while the whole sky spins around it. If we can keep that mission in mind, it might be just a bit easier to decide what sort of work is valuable for you and your team to get done, and what work isn't, when resources are scarce.

*Staff Alliance serves the classified and administrative, professional and technical staff throughout the University of Alaska system.*