

Governance Report

September 2019



Coalition of Student Leaders

Teresa Wrobel, Vice Chair

Written report submitted by ASUAF President Bernard Aoto.

The students of the University of Alaska Fairbanks have been disappointed with the apparent lack of inclusivity and regard for student perspectives in the development process of a new UA. The absence of student voices during the discussions for a structure that is “for the students” comes off disingenuous at best. As a student body president, I have been engaged throughout the summer to advocate for students and to promote their best interest. As their elected representative at UAF, I am telling you that we demand inclusion in this process. It has been frustrating to watch on the sidelines as working groups and committees focus more on discussing analogies about houses being on fire and things thawing and freezing rather than taking the time to engage with the students whose futures are being affected.

It is also necessary to ensure that, in the spirit of shared governance, the student governments and their elected leadership are consulted and sought out for feedback regarding these changes because they are meant to represent the will of the students. An example of this negligence would be the recent facilitated workshops, where some groups apparently included students. However, after consulting with the student governments at each campus it was revealed that none of us were consulted for participation in a manner similar to faculty or staff participants. How can we trust the statewide administration to accommodate the day-to-day needs of students in the new UA, when they all seem too busy or dismissive to meet us at our level now? If students are the center of every decision that needs to be made, we need more than just a reassurance. We need to be consulted, involved, and invested in the process so that current, future, and past students can be proud of what their university, or universities, will become.

UAA and UAS student governments were asked for a written update, however, they opted to not submit anything at this time. Additional updates will be included in the oral report.

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

Maria Williams, Chair

It has been a challenging summer due to the confusion on what the final UA budget would be for this current academic year. Faculty Alliance is relieved that we finally have an established budget and the \$25 million cut is significantly less than the initial \$136 million cut.

We have the opportunity to plan in a more extended timeframe and address restructure in a thoughtful and deliberative way. Faculty Alliance is supportive of cost reduction and identifying ways in which the University can be more cost effective.

The Report addresses several items that include:

1. Results of UAA, UAF and UAS Faculty Surveys on restructure
2. Concerns of shared governance principles not being adhered to
3. Expedited Academic Program reviews and its connection to curriculum
4. Need for budget transparency and cost benefit analysis on all consolidations, both administrative and academic

Faculty Survey results on Restructure

UAS Faculty did a Qualtrics survey and the results are:

1. Do you have enough info on the two options discussed at the July 30, 2019, BOR meeting, which included the Chancellor's Consortium model and President Johnsen's one accredited university model?
YES – 22.39% NO – 77.61%
2. Do you favor the single accredited one university model as presented by President Johnsen?
YES – 17.91% NO – 62.69% No opinion – 19.40%
3. Do you favor the Consortium model as presented by the Chancellors?
YES – 53.73% NO – 19.40% No opinion – 26.87%
4. Do you have other models that you would like to see pursued?
YES – 18.75% NO – 79.69%

A lengthy and informative written commentary on UAS' results is available online [HERE](#).

UAA Faculty did a survey and the results indicate:

1. Do you have enough info on the two options presented at the July 30, 2019, BOR meeting?
YES – 26.70% NO – 73.30%
2. Do you favor the single accredited one university model?
YES – 7.41% NO – 82.54% No opinion – 10.05%
3. Do you favor the Consortium model as presented by the Chancellors?
YES – 76.06% NO – 9.04% No opinion – 14.89%
4. Do you have other models that you would like to see pursued?
YES – 31.87% NO – 68.13%

Shared Governance Principles

At the July 30, 2019, UA BOR meetings, the chancellors provided a consortium model and identified how they would address the original Dunleavy budget (\$136 million cut); President Johnsen addressed how he is moving forward with a consolidated model and moving towards a single accredited institution, including consolidation of administrative units. The chancellors deserve recognition for adhering to principles of shared governance as they had faculty leadership on this committee, as well as executive staff.

Faculty Alliance and the three faculty senates have convened emergency and/or special meetings with their respective executive committees and have met in regular sessions. The sentiments of the faculty clearly indicate three major recommendations:

1. Slow down the reorganization of both Academic and Administrative functions since the shortfall for AY 2020 is \$25 million; and
2. Develop a transparent process for decision making that includes all stakeholders (chancellors, administrative executive staff, provosts, faculty, staff, students) that adheres to principles of shared governance; and
3. Cost Benefit analysis **must be provided** in order to make good decisions

At the BOR sub-committee meeting on August 28, 2019, President Johnsen and VP Layer addressed academic restructure or 'expedited academic program review process'. Faculty are willing to work with our respective deans, provosts and chancellors on this and hope that this review is transparent and takes the proper amount of time, i.e. not rushing too quickly.

VP Layer and President Johnsen hired an outside consultant to bring UA faculty and deans to address consolidation in a Task Force on Structural Options. The process was assembled in a little over a week, and although there are merits to bringing in outside consultants, there were disconnects in this process that included not having enough students or staff representation. The process also did not include the chancellors—who are key.¹

Academic Program Review and its Connection to Curriculum

Curriculum remains in the purview of the faculty, and currently there are three separately accredited universities that have active curriculum committees that review any and all changes to their respective curriculums.

On August 8, 2019, I convened a Zoom meeting with a small group of curricular experts, most of them were involved in GER alignment. We discussed how best to move forward, how to establish a larger working committee that includes the UAA, UAS and UAF curricular gurus as the university addresses restructure. This nascent committee led to the establishment of a Faculty Alliance Curriculum Task Force which met on August 26, 2019.

¹ Minority opinion provided by Dr. Sine Anahita, UAF Faculty Senate President: "UAF Faculty Senate or UAF AdCom did not address this. I have earlier stated my opposition to the suggestion that chancellors to be our facilitators as they have a vested interest in maintaining their turf, and not in consolidating functions."

We are asserting our roles as faculty, and therefore we must be involved in curricular planning, not just in terms of curricular content, but more importantly in the process as it relates to academic program review. **Accreditation is the absolute fundamental element of any university's existence, and moving too quickly, or not consulting with the respective faculty curricular committees, stands to jeopardize accreditation.**

We have the special program accreditations that also must be considered, i.e. ABET, AACSB, ACBSP, NASM, CSWE, CSHSE, etc. These could be jeopardized if the process moves too fast. What are the criteria for determining what the main college of Engineering or Business will be? Or CLA or CAS? Would the former colleges' curriculum have to go through the lead university's curriculum committee if the BOR moves to a single accredited system?

We also believe that the secondary curricular layer, consisting of registrars and associate vice provosts from UAA, UAS and UAF must also be consulted. Regardless of the outcome—whether that is a single accredited model, consortium model, hybrid model, etc.—the Board and President Johnsen must have a thoughtful, deliberative and inclusive process.

Below are the caveats that we feel are vital for this process to be legitimate:

- Determining how the curriculum process would work if Academic programs are consolidated, i.e. one College of Engineering, etc.
- Identifying how the process incorporates assessment plans (this is paramount!)
- Determining how to standardize courses across campuses, depending on which campus would have the lead in a specific major (some of this has taken place with both UAF and UAS with a few courses.)
- Identifying courses that are unique to specific degree programs on one campus and reconciling disciplinary orientations (this is where two universities may be offering the same degree but the approach and philosophy are very different; for example, the discipline of History is designated a social science at UAF but located in the humanities department at UAA.)

There are currently different curricular processes at UAA, UAF and UAS. How do they differ? Course Inventory Management System is universal, but used slightly differently. This newly established committee is developing a template that illustrates the curricular processes at each university.

Given all of the complex processes, we estimate that this effort would minimally take three years, and ideally five years.

In summary, Faculty Alliance would like to see:

1. More shared governance processes; and
2. During their discussions, the UAA and UAS Faculty Senates have made it clear that they wish to have their chancellors involved; and
3. Request more information on the upcoming restructure of administrative offices that include alumni relations, development, procurement and other administrative functions, given its impact on the work of faculty.

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

Mathew Mund, Chair

It has been a rollercoaster for UA employees these last few months. We have all gone through the ups and downs of having our budget vetoed, restructuring and briefly entering into Financial Exigency. With the fall semester started, staff have spent most of their time working to prepare and support our students and faculty to fulfill our diverse missions and goals. Staff have taken time out of their busy schedules to advocate to legislators, community partners and whoever would listen, to ensure Alaska understands why the university is a crucial asset to our state.

Most recently, Staff Alliance elected Mathew Mund as Chair and John Moore as Vice Chair. Along with the chair and vice chair, Staff Alliance is made up of Dawn Humenik, Carrie Santoro, Crystal Duncan, David Felts, Lauren Hartman, and Josh Watts, together constituting a proactive group of governance leaders who strongly believe in the importance of staff involvement in all aspects of the university.

Staff have spoken up to governance to voice what is really important to them during this time of uncertainty and to emphasize the great contributions that staff make to this institution. Staff feel truly dedicated to our university's diverse mission and hold the knowledge necessary to help it through this dynamic time of change. This is why it is crucial to ensure that staff who are front-line functional area experts and staff governance be included in every level of the decision making process. In the past, staff governance has often been given the opportunity to comment on a final draft plan after it has been formed. This process does not give staff the context needed to have an opinion. Staff need to be given the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the planning process to fully understand the plan. By including staff you will ensure that the end product or plan has the best opportunity for success and buy-in from the UA community. If you find yourself in a strategic planning meeting where staff (front-line functional area experts) are not present, please question this and ask yourself why they are not involved.

You may also find that staff may not have a strong opinion on a specific subject. For example, you may have noticed that staff governance has not come out with an opinion on a New UA or consortium model, financial exigency or not. This is because staff are either 50/50 on the subject or do not have enough information to formulate an opinion. This is why staff desire regular, open and consistent communication. Communication transfers information from our leaders to staff in both middle and front line positions. A dearth of communication leads to inaccurate assumptions and rampant, often time negative, as well as rumors that make staff feel undervalued and not heard. If leaders do not have any new information, just say that during standard times such as a weekly video message or article. Supervisors should

make extra emphasis to check-in with their staff and give them a specific time to ask what is on their mind and truly show care for their employees. Many leaders are leading by example, such as the president's weekly video messages. Staff are grateful for these efforts, but are hopeful for expansion of communication, such as posting public recordings of Board of Regents meetings.

A common thread for all staff during this time of uncertainty has been a strong interest in advocating for our benefits and having a clear definition of what new concepts not clearly defined in policy mean. While it is wonderful that financial exigency has been lifted and we revert back to our standard policies, under financial exigency staff were thrown for a loop where they could be terminated vs laid-off and potentially have their valued benefits be withdrawn. For example, staff with family had planned for years to use their spouse/dependent tuition benefits to get their kids through college. Other staff have managed their annual leave in a way that if they lost their job, they would have their annual leave payout to support them until they find a new job. It was simply unclear if benefits such as these were being cut. Whatever time leadership can take to show that they value staff benefits and see cutting them as a last resort, is of value to staff. A prevalence of ill-defined terminology under financial exigency caused much confusion and frustration for staff.

During the last five years of cuts, staff have also seen their workloads increase and not always felt on a level playing field with their executive and faculty counterparts. For some, financial exigency felt like it may level the playing field and alleviate the perception that staff are easier to cut to reach a budgetary goal. During the last month, I was glad to see many faculty and executives have shared that staff are crucial to the organization and I have seen this expressed at the various planning meetings I have attended. Even with this positive rhetoric, I am still concerned that staff will unevenly feel the brunt of cutbacks as the university workforce is reduced. From my perspective, the only way to avoid this is to follow through with the idea of doing less with less. This idea has been expressed by the president but has not come through at the various planning meetings. Rather, I have seen an interest in doing the same or more to help us reach our larger academic, research and institutional goals. I love this forward thinking and it is essential to ensure we are a strong university, but we simply do not have the same resources and need to talk about how we are going to do less with less in each of our conversations. This is essential to reduce the workload of our already overtaxed staff.

On top of the workload that each staff carries, it has become apparent to staff governance that there are discrepancies between the way each campus recognizes its staff for their accomplishments and longevity. Staff governance wants to see all UA staff recognized for their hard work and the years of service that they have dedicated to the institution. We envision this at minimum to include a dedicated recognition ceremony, tokens of appreciation, and ideally inclusion of staff development and training. We are an organization of people and people need to feel appreciated. This type of recognition is valued by staff and should not be overlooked or undervalued during this next year.

This brings me to the idea of trust. Trust comes up as a core value and indicator of staff in many of our morale surveys and conversations. When staff feel that they are trusted to do their job and can trust their leadership, this leads to a high functioning relationship. During this time of uncertainty, it appears to be only human to take control of an organization and hold it at the top level. While this may make sense in some ways, it makes staff feel they are not trusted to do their job. Many staff understand the dire financial situation and have the skill sets necessary to make independent and quick financial decisions to help meet a financial goal. Recent changes in our budget situation has allowed some restrictions to be lifted; I encourage everyone in leadership to continue to return decision-making power to those who work on the front line with general guidance on spending reductions. This will help restore, and in some cases grow, the trust in staff and the trust staff have with leadership.

Staff governance takes its role as the main conduit for communication between staff and leadership seriously and seeks to empower each UA staff member to use their local representatives and staff councils to elevate their ideas, thoughts, and concerns. This must be maintained in the New UA model and staff governance has already begun to think about what staff governance would look like under a single university. We have identified our values, and after we gain more clarity on the university's direction from this meeting, we will propose a staff governance structure to ensure we have the ability to advocate, communicate and collaborate with leadership regardless of structure.

Staff Alliance is also happy to see that the president and his team are continuing to move forward with compensation adjustments related to the compensation survey. We will be watching closely to support those who were found to have pay inequality and those under market value see movement in there pay in FY20 despite the budget cuts.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to truly listen to the staff who work to help the University of Alaska meet its mission and vision. Staff are dedicated to moving through this change together and recognizing that they are all going through “big emotions” that pull us in multiple directions. Please show your co-workers grace as we all process the complex and overwhelming process of change. Staff are here to support UA through this time of change.

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