

University of Alaska
System Governance
2025 Yukon Drive
P.O. Box 757780
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-5000



Phone: (907) 450-8055
Fax: (907) 450-8002
www.alaska.edu/governance/

MEMORANDUM

Date: April 21, 2022

To: Sheri Buretta, Chair UA Board of Regents
Members, UA Board of Regents

Thru: Pat Pitney, UA President

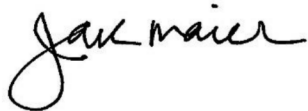
From: UA System Governance Council

Re: Common Table Concept

At the System Governance Council's meeting on February 11, 2022, the members were presented with a proposal on a Common Table from the Staff Alliance's Ad hoc Shared Governance Committee (AhCSG). The members of the SGC support this proposal of a new mechanism for improving shared governance at the University of Alaska. For additional information and background, the proposal from the AhCSG is attached.

As you can see in the proposal, there are additional details that need to be resolved before the Common Table can be implemented. With this memorandum, the members of the SGC are **seeking your commitment to the concept of a Common Table**. Before we expend the very limited resources of all the governance groups on this effort, we're asking if you **will join us at the table**. There is clearly confusion and distrust around shared governance at UA and we're hoping the UA Regents see the importance of "diverse perspectives and informed decisions necessary to rebuild the university community and launch a culture of trust and empowerment for innovation and growth."

Thank you for your consideration.



cc: Paul Layer, VP Academics, Students & Research
Pat Pitney, President, University of Alaska
Noel Romanovsky, Governance Support

The Common Table

Background

In the beginning of 2021, feeling the effects of several years of budget cuts and the resulting reduction in staff capacity and reduced admin support for governance, Staff Alliance formed an Ad-hoc Committee on Shared Governance (AhCSG). The purpose was to have a forum to discuss the processes of shared governance and propose ways to elevate and improve them. While doing research to inform the work of the group, a case study from AGB titled “Shared Governance: Changing with the Times” was found. This short case study detailed an intensive process Rhodes College went through to improve their university’s shared governance. One of the main products coming out of this process was something they called the Common Table. It was a group made up of representatives from their Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The common table was the response to the question: “What is the best approach to mobilize the abundant collective intelligence of all stakeholders in the Rhodes community in the spirit of collaborative engagement?”. Out of this new group came many concrete impacts, as well as several noticeable positive changes in the university culture.

Proposal

The AhCSG proposes taking this idea of a common table and making it our own. The proposed role of the Common Table will be to provide consistent opportunities for discourse between the chairs and representatives of Faculty Alliance, Staff Alliance, the Coalition of Student Leaders, the alumni associations, members of the UA Board of Regents, and the UA President. This is not a decision-making body, but rather an advisory group to the president.

The AhCSG recommends using the Rhodes College example as a starting draft, with a focus on formalizing the roles and increasing the participation of each group in the governance of the UA System. The group is also recommending that the specifics be worked out by an ad-hoc committee of the current System Governance Councils’ choosing.

This proposal for a Common Table is intended to provide a framework for bringing “all hands on deck” and improving shared governance at the University of Alaska. The state of Alaska, and by extension, the university, have been facing a challenging economy for several years, creating an environment of uncertainty, budget cuts, low morale and distrust. Just as concerning is a decade of declining enrollments at the university. The university must make real changes to come out of this environment leaner, more efficient and innovative. We believe the Common Table would ensure the diverse perspectives and informed decisions necessary to rebuild the university community and launch a culture of trust and empowerment for innovation and growth.

Specific details to be worked out

- Membership details (number of members from each group)
 - Suggested: 10 members (2 each of faculty, staff, students, regents, and alumni)
- How members are chosen
- Frequency of meetings
 - Suggested: Monthly
- Open or closed meetings

Related materials

Link to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges’ case study referenced in the proposal above, *Shared Governance: Changing with the Times*, March 2017:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18_2Uto6ML7oIC_0OBdxLUV0LF-rMBX4E/view?usp=sharing

Link to a recent article from Inside Higher Ed by the president of Rhodes College, *Shared Governance is a Strength During the COVID-19 Crisis*:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/04/29/colleges-healthy-shared-governance-perform-better-crises-those-top-down-decision>

Highlights of the article:

- Being transparent in communicating the financial realities of the college's business model.
- Building a culture of trust so that decisions are in the hands of those with the most information and expertise.
- Creating inclusive teams so that multiple perspectives can be considered.