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Via Electronic Communication: [ua-bor@alaska.edu](mailto:ua-bor@alaska.edu), [jndavies@alaska.edu](mailto:jndavies@alaska.edu)

University of Alaska Board of Regents  
PO Box 81781  
Fairbanks, AK 99708

Dear Chair John Davies and Members of the University of Alaska Board of Regents:

I write to share the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities' (NWCCU) support for the students of Alaska and to express my continued concern with the ongoing funding challenges for the state's institutions of higher learning.

NWCCU is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) and accredits 161 institutions of higher education in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington by applying evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and success.

Students, the public, state regulatory agencies, such as the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, other higher education institutions, and employers recognize that accredited institutions offer universally accepted degrees and programs. Students at *only* accredited institutions are eligible for federal funding, i.e., Title IV federal financial aid and federally sponsored grant programs.

Loss of accreditation has had devastating effects at institutions of higher learning that have failed to maintain the high standards required to be recognized by a regional accrediting agency, including: *loss of all federal funding, such as financial aid and federal grant programs, the loss of state authorization to operate within a state, and even closure.*

In previous correspondence and testimony to Alaska Legislators, I acknowledged that the University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Alaska Anchorage, and University of Alaska Southeast have been subjected to a series of budget reductions for most of the last decade. Significant additional cuts, reductions, and program closures *could pose a material and significant risk to the quality of education provided to the students within those institutions.*

If student success and achievement are demonstrably affected, it could potentially jeopardize the accreditation status of these institutions. Students attending such institutions then become ineligible for federal financial aid and grants that, combined with the loss of scholarships from the state of Alaska (<https://www.adn.com/politics/alaska-legislature/2019/07/10/alaska-students-lose-state-scholarships-as-consequences-arrive-following-failure-of-obscure-budget-vote-rural-power-subsidies-may-be-next/>), could be the death-knell for the University of Alaska.

On Friday, July 26, 2019, NWCCU was made aware of the Alaska Governor's intention to present a proposal to the Board of Trustees on July 30, 2019 calling for specific cuts to auxiliary functions, administration, and athletics, consolidation of colleges, and expansion of fundraising activities.

While NWCCU respects the right of all constituents to express their views, we require an *independent and functional Board of Trustees or Regents*. This independence is a *foundational requirement for eligibility as an accredited institution* (See NWCCU's Eligibility Requirements 4 and 7 at <https://www.nwccu.org/accreditation/eligibility-requirements/>).

The Bylaws of the University of Alaska Board of Regents (<https://www.alaska.edu/bor/policy/bylaws.pdf>) specify that the "... *board will be responsible for the governance of the university as provided by the Constitution of the State of Alaska and the laws enacted pursuant thereto.*" The University of Alaska Board is vested with the responsibility to provide strategic direction and is to be held accountable for promises and obligations to students, the public, and NWCCU.

NWCCU remains concerned about the long-term consequences of reduced funding as it relates to student learning and educational attainment. The additional and, perhaps, inappropriate strong-arm "guidance" of the Alaska Governor in place of the proper and shared-decision making processes central to the healthy functioning of an institution of higher learning poses yet another factor as NWCCU considers the long-term viability and accreditation status of the institutions within your stewardship.

We encourage you and your colleagues to continue to find ways to meet the obligations to students. The institutions of Alaska are critical innovation and economic engines, as well as engines for social mobility and the hope for many to lead a better life for themselves and their families. I write today to share my continued concern over the proposed reduction in funding, concern over the proper and ongoing shared governance of the institutions, and urge you and your colleagues to work collaboratively and creatively to ensure the University of Alaska campuses are continue the delivery of high quality public education to the citizens of Alaska.

Thank you and please do contact me.

Sincerely,



Sonny Ramaswamy  
President