

STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA 2019

Introduction

63 years ago Alaska's Constitutional Convention took place mere steps from here. Three years later the US Congress passed and President Eisenhower signed the bill making Alaska our nation's 49th state.

The struggle for statehood was long and hard, a lot like our winters. But the struggle was a success because Alaskans of all stripes, political parties, and regions of the territory came together and applied those same qualities that have helped Alaskans thrive through the dark and the cold for more than ten thousand years—our grit, confidence, cooperation, creativity, and commitment to a cause greater than each of us alone, a cause beyond one time or place, a cause that makes us and our state better than we are.

That struggle for statehood had many deep roots across Alaska. Among the strongest were right here at the University of Alaska. For one, the founding of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines in 1917, some 52 years before statehood, reflected the well-established model of land grant universities driving the human and economic development of our country.

Later, the conversion of the college to the University of Alaska in 1935 reflected awareness of a still practical but broader, more universal role of knowledge, its expansion through research, and its transmission through education and outreach. All in service to Alaska.

And then in 1956, when the document that became our state's constitution was created, that drafting was done here at the University of Alaska.

That inspired document set out the structure and the functions of our government, but more importantly it established the University of Alaska, reflecting our values as a people and how we would make important decisions about living together in this land for decades to come.

Those values would serve citizens of the new state, but especially through advanced education provided by of the University of Alaska, governed by a Board of Regents, separate from the other branches of government and subject to the laws of the state.

Over the years the university's progress has reflected developments in the broader society and economy. So we grew as the Alaska's economy and state appropriations grew. We restructured and cut back when things got tight.

Through those ups and downs, the university expanded its focus and diversified its financial base by conducting more funded research, charging students tuition and fees, and raising funds through generous gifts from Alaskans who saw the value of our work.

I wish I could stand here and say that we diversified through development of the generous land endowment we were provided as a land grant university, but I cannot because we were conveyed a small portion of our rightful land grant.

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We have and will continue to develop those lands we were granted and we are pushing hard now to address the deficit.

Thanks are due to the legislature, the Dunleavy administration, our federal delegation, and the Department of the Interior for their stepped up efforts in getting this 103-year-old problem resolved.

UA Today

As we look at the university today, we are at once a single constitutional, legal and financial entity; and a single employer; all governed by the Board of Regents with administrative leadership support from a System office. Thank you Regent Perdue for your long time leadership in our state and for your current service as a regent.

At the same time, we are three separately accredited universities based in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau with thirteen community campuses, from Ketchikan in Southeast 1,282 miles to Kotzebue in the Northwest.

Contrary to popular opinion, just because we have administration in the statewide and university levels does not mean we are redundant in our functions. Academic, research, and student services are handled largely at the university level with modest coordination from the system office. Our legal functions, policies and regulations, IT network, land management, human resource system, and our relations with federal and state governments, banks and financial rating agencies, unions, and major philanthropists are managed by Statewide.

I would be the last person to say that we cannot improve administrative efficiency in support of our academic programs and student services, and that's why we have and will continue to standardize and, in some cases, consolidate administration.

Students

As we look at our university, the single most important perspective is that of our students, over 26,000 of them. From that view, we are a single university in that:

- all of our credits transfer from one campus to another,
- our tuition is common,
- we have a single IT system (our email, and on-line learning management systems, for example)
- our schedules (semester start and end dates) are in sync, and
- our commitment to providing a safe learning environment, free from sexual misconduct of any type, is consistent and strong across the university

Our students have access to a range of occupational certification from our community campuses and a choice of universities that provide unique and distinctive strengths and programs.

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At UAS, students can study the ocean and glaciers at a campus set midway between an ocean and a glacier. And they can prepare to manage small businesses, become teachers, pilot a ship, or work as miners in one of Alaska's historic and most important industries.

At UAA, our students can study business in Alaska's economic and financial base, nursing in Alaska's health care center, logistics in one of world's leading air cargo hubs, and gain practical experience through internships with leading Alaska Native corporations.

Thank you, Aaron, CEO of one our great Alaska Native corporations and strong friend of the university for joining us today.

At UAF, students conduct undergraduate and graduate research with world class researchers, learn from faculty with hands on expertise in their field—business, engineering, biology, education, the list goes on and on—and they dominate national competitions in steel bridge design and construction.

Thank you, Chancellor White, for your leadership of UAF, Alaska's first university.

And at our more than a dozen community campuses across the state, our students gain access—face to face, on-line, and hybrid formats—to the classes they need to take the first step on their path to advanced education and the next step in their careers.

There is perhaps no single recognition in the world of a student's success in college than the Rhodes Scholarship. UAA student Samantha Mack won that recognition last year and she is now pursuing a master's at Oxford. Our students also win prestigious Fulbright and Marshall Scholarships, another clear demonstration of the quality of UA!

Lest we think all our students are 18-22 years old, children of college graduates, with English as their first language, not so. Our traditional students have for a long time been non-traditional.

With an average age of almost 30, our students are typically going to school part-time and working at least part-time. They support families. They are often the first to attend university and, unlike most traditional students "outside," they are paying as they go.

Put together, this means our students tend to take longer to complete their studies. And complete they do! Not only are our students not traditional in terms of family background and age, they are increasingly high schoolers.

Based on successful programs like the Rural Alaska Honors Institute and the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program, which provide college-ready high schoolers access and opportunities to pursue advanced education when they are ready to, our Middle College High School programs in Anchorage and Mat Su are helping students succeed at their pace, saving students and their families money, and building a strong pipeline of college-ready young people in Alaska.

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Our students have access to academic offerings ranging from occupational endorsements to doctorates in fields of high workforce demand such as education, nursing, engineering, maritime trades, atmospheric physics, and process technology.

We provide these and other excellent programs both in face-to-face and on-line to over 26,000 students all across the state and in many other states across the nation.

Excellence at our universities and community campuses is ensured through institutional accreditation. UAA just received its review with several notable commendations. Congratulations are due to UAA Chancellor Cathy Sandeen and her team for this success.

Chancellor White here at UAF and UAS, led by Chancellor Rick Caulfied, are in the midst of the process now and look forward to successful renewals. In addition, dozens of our programs enjoy program accreditation. These are marks of quality in the programs and courses our faculty provide to our students.

Our recent loss of accreditation of the initial teacher licensure programs at UAA is most certainly a failure. Fortunately for our students, with strong support from UAA, UAF and UAS stepped in to make sure students in Anchorage have a certain path to teacher licensure from accredited and approved programs at UAF and UAS.

The Board of Regents will be deciding soon—April 8—whether to seek accreditation for those UAA programs that lost accreditation. No matter the decision, UA is unwavering in its commitment to teacher education students in Anchorage and we will make sure they have a certain and dependable path forward in Anchorage. Thanks to Regent Karen Perdue, chair of the academic and student affairs committee of the board, for joining us today.

Alongside our many academic degree programs that provide education to our students is another key element of our mission, research.

Research

UA research is nothing short of world class. As the number 1 Arctic research university on the planet—not Harvard or Berkeley--the University of Alaska leads the pack in understanding the North in its physical and social importance to the entire planet.

The Geophysical Institute just won a prestigious University Affiliated Research Center from the Department of Defense, allowing us a fast track to more than \$25 million in funding for important security related research. UAF also oversees a statewide research initiative called EPSCoR, a 5-year \$20 million project to study climate-driven changes to Alaskan wildfire regimes and coastal ecosystems and the Institute of Arctic Biology recently had its major health research program renewed to the tune of \$19 million over 5 years.

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Our Alaska Center for Energy and Power – widely known as experts in managing complex micro grids--played a key role in hosting the directors of the US national energy labs, resulting in literally dozens of research collaborations that will benefit Alaska for years to come.

UAA's Arctic Domain and Awareness Center – which over the past 5 years has accomplished \$13.4 million in research supporting the U.S. Coast Guard and the ever expanding number of operators in the High North —was recently notified of an additional 2 years of funding at approximately \$3.5 million annually by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Our College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences was renewed by the National Science Foundation as the operator of the nation's most advanced Arctic research ship and our CFOS faculty conduct critical research in support of Alaska's world class fisheries.

Our Institute of Northern Engineering works with leaders in natural resource development to help bring the best science to bear on those important industries for Alaska.

And our highly respected Institute of Social and Economic Research, long known for excellence in deepening our understanding Alaska's economy, continues to lead the way through its credible and unbiased analysis of important policy choices facing Alaskans.

Our research not only expands our knowledge about our world, it brings us unparalleled financial returns. For each state dollar we invest, our researchers bring in \$6 from outside the state.

Moreover, we are beginning to see the fruit now of investments made in prior years in the commercialization of our intellectual property.

UAF's Center for Innovation, Commercialization, and Entrepreneurship (Center ICE) is leading the way in the creation of faculty owned companies, an early and critical step in developing and diversifying our economy.

The Business Enterprise Institute at UAA supports small business development in a host of ways and UAS is focusing on mariculture to make its mark.

And just a couple months back, UA hired its first Chief Innovation Officer, a skilled Alaskan entrepreneur, who is bringing the fruit of our research to the market, benefitting UA, our faculty, and our state's economy.

Service

The third major component of our mission is service, extending the discoveries and the knowledge out to the people of Alaska.

Whether through Cooperative Extension or Sea Grant programs, or community service that our faculty and staff provide through consulting and volunteering, UA's reach extends well beyond its campuses into the workshops, kitchens, barns, and homes of people all across Alaska.

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These qualities of our university rightly make us proud. Our mission, our cause, is second to none in serving our state and our people. We provide excellence in our research, in our education and training programs, and in our service to the state.

I would like to thank our faculty, our staff, our partners, our donors, and most of all our students for all you do for our university and our state.

Challenges

As I stand before you today, our state needs UA more than ever.

We all know that Alaska is in the midst of a long, grinding economic recession.

Our state's population has been in decline for 6 years in a row.

We have highest unemployment rate in the nation.

The highest health costs in the nation.

Among the highest energy and transportation costs.

The lowest job growth rate in the nation.

The lowest college-going rate in the nation.

You've heard me say many times that we rank among the lowest states in the New Economy Index, an assessment of the states' economies along 25 criteria for success in the 21st century. And although Alaska is the only state in the nation without a statewide personal income, sales, or property tax, and our state has savings of close to \$64 billion, we are facing a proposed state funding cut of \$1.6 billion, or roughly 30 percent.

For UA, the proposed cut is \$134 million, or 41 percent of our state funding of \$327. And that cut is on top of state funding cuts four out of the last five years, resulting in program reductions and the loss of more than 1,200 faculty and staff. **These cuts hurt UA and they harm Alaska's ability to grow the highly trained workforce we need to be economically competitive with other states.**

In an attempt to justify the proposed cut to our state funding, we hear that UA is below average in our cost effectiveness, in our tuition, in our completion rates, and in our philanthropy. Those who make that claim or say we are below average are comparing us to geographically smaller states with much larger populations – states that received their full land grants and that enjoy economic diversification and growth.

We are compared to universities that are large and in a single location, giving them the advantage of scale. And our own universities are compared to each other, despite the fact that they are all three quite different in their mission, location, size, mix and levels of degree programs and research and outreach activities.

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In response to those critics who throw averages around, I ask you is there anything about Alaska that is average? I think not. Is our geography average? Our coastline, our national parks and forests? Our mountains average? Our climate?

What if Alaska were average in terms of geographic size, population, portion of our land in the private sector, cost of living, college going rate, economic diversification, taxes paid by citizens to the state for public services, local government contributions to community campuses, and last but not least, the annual dividend states pay to each of their residents?

As you all know, averages can be very helpful, but they have their limits when, as the old lesson from Statistics 101 reminds us, your feet can be frying on the stove and head frozen in the freezer while your body temperature is, on average, 98.6 degrees.

Nor are averages very inspirational, are they? Remember President Kennedy's challenge to be the first nation to go to the moon? He said: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth" This goal unleashed a *massive* scientific, social, and economic leap forward for the United States.

What if he had said "I believe that this nation should commit itself to putting a man in an orbit at an average distance from the earth and bringing him back more or less safely again." Not likely to marshal an entire nation's support!

Or more relevant to the challenge we face today: "I believe Alaska should resign itself to continued economic recession and population loss by cutting the budget—and the services and economic opportunity it provides to the people of Alaska—by one-third this year."

Conclusion

While some have said the university is failing, I say we are UA Strong! We are succeeding. And our fellow Alaskans agree. Many say **UA is VERY important to the future of the Alaska economy and agree that funding for the university is an investment in our future and is a good or excellent value for the money.**

I am the first to admit that we are not perfect, and no doubt we will be making significant changes in the coming months and years, but there is no other cornerstone in this state more successful than the University of Alaska in creating success for Alaskans, from our days as a territory, through the fight for statehood, through our current hard economic times and into the future.

So, I ask you, what does our success for Alaska look like?

It looks like more than 100,000 alumni who have left our university with more skills, knowledge, and abilities than when they arrived. Who are working in Alaska. And who are increasingly giving back financially to UA.

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It looks like more than 4,500 graduates each year with the certificates and the degrees—in teaching, nursing, engineering, welding, maritime trades, biology, and on and on—that will give them and their families a better life and grow our state.

And it looks like:

- Our enrollment of Alaska’s first people, which recently began to exceed their share of our population.
- Our students interning in legislative offices in Juneau, with the support of the Senator Ted Stevens Foundation, learning about our politics so they can lead in the future.
- Our research, which literally leads the world in understanding life in the North. Our environment, our cultures, our energy, our infrastructure, our politics, our economics, and more.
- Our Board of Regents plan, which sets clear and ambitious goals and measures, and which guides investment in the strategic initiatives to reach those goals.

Finally, UA’s **vision** for advanced education in Alaska in 2040 asks “what if, why not”? A **vision** that builds on our tremendous assets, including the diverse people who call Alaska home and their university.

A **vision** that says we can put our students at the center of all we do, making the knowledge we discover available to students wherever they are on their educational pathway, whether they are

- seventh graders interested in E-sports,
- teachers seeking to know more about the science of learning,
- farmers interested in how to grow and market Peonies,
- professionals wanting to know more about Artificial Intelligence, or
- seniors interested in reflecting on the big questions of human life or just wanting to learn Indian cooking.

That vision for our university is only possible if we think more like the founders of our state and our university, who focused a lot less on “me now” and more on all Alaskans as citizens of our state and what the future Alaska could look like.

So, as we assess the state of the University of Alaska in 2019, and make decisions about its future, let us do so through the eyes of that Alaska we all want—a state with a strong and sustainable economy providing opportunity for meaningful work, a state that welcomes and supports a free people from whatever background they come, a state full of vibrant communities that provide strength to their members. A state that embraces knowledge and a respect for those who want to do better.

As true across the nation as it is here in Alaska, that’s a state built upon the discoveries made by the faculty of its universities, the knowledge shared with its students, and the service it provides to its communities.

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When we think about how to move forward starting today, and embrace the fact that UA is strong, I would challenge you to ask yourself these questions, adapted from a scholar who lived many years ago:

- If not UA's cause, what?
- If not Alaska, then where?
- And if not now, then when?
- And finally, if not you—faculty, staff, students, alumni, partners, donors, and our state's leaders now deliberating our fate – then who?

As we answer those questions, I urge you to recapture those same qualities that have helped Alaskans thrive through the dark and the cold for more than ten thousand years—our grit, confidence, cooperation, creativity, and commitment to a cause greater than each of us alone, a cause beyond one time or place, a cause that makes all of us better than we are.

Thank you.