

Pat Pitney, Interim President

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To System Office Administrative Review Committee
Ian Hartman, UAA faculty
Kevin Krein, UAS faculty
Debu Misra, UAF faculty
Monique Musick, System Office staff
Gwenna Richardson, UAS staff (retired)
Tania Rowe, UAA staff
Michael Szidloski II, UAF staff

From Pat Pitney, Interim President

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Pat K Pitney'.

CC Paul Layer, Vice President for Academics, Students and Research
Michelle Rizk, Vice President for University Relations
David Bishko, Acting Chief Human Resources Officer
John Boucher, Interim Chief Information Technology Officer
Matthew Cooper, General Counsel
Myron Dosch, Chief Finance Officer
Mary Gower, Chief Equity and Compliance Officer
Karen Carey, UAS chancellor
Sean Parnell, UAA chancellor
Dan White, UAF chancellor
Sheri Buretta, Board of Regents Chair
Jak Maier, Faculty Alliance Chair
Juella Sparks, Staff Alliance Chair

Re Response to 2021 System Office Administrative Review

Thank you to the System Office Administrative Review Committee for your May 21 report. This provides valuable insight into areas where we can improve service and communication. To frame our response to the review, System Office leadership team members met individually with the Administrative Review Committee co-chairs to seek further insight on rationale and suggestions for the respective functional areas. In addition, I met with the committee to discuss the recommendations. Of note, in those discussions, the committee acknowledged that all committee members' positions were included rather than prioritizing a committee consensus report, thus in some cases there are differing positions on functions in the report. Our response focuses on areas where we do not agree with the rationale presented in the review.

I would like point out that the review focuses largely on the relationship between the universities and the System Office; with faculty and staff serving as the reviewers, this lens is understandable. The report acknowledges that the system operates as a single legal entity and employer, however, the position reviews do not fully address the System Office role in terms of its support of the Board of Regents and representing the university system as a single entity to external stakeholders such as the Congressional delegation, governor and the legislature.

1. System Office Role

The review provides valuable feedback on the perception of the system office and its role relative to the universities. Some of the views seemed to be holdover responses to the “One UA” approach and discussions around a single accreditation that are no longer supported by the Board or system leadership. My focus is on the university as a system with three distinct universities, each with unique missions and focus to serve the state’s residents and needs.

The chancellors and I, along with system leadership, are working towards a more collaborative approach that highlights the strengths and opportunities of each of the universities, leveraging shared services where possible and presenting a unified front to our external stakeholders. As part of this collaborative approach, we are working to provide more context and advance notice for requests of the universities. In addition, we are leveraging the universities’ existing strategic priorities to frame the current “Goals and Measures” process.

The review committee offered five summary recommendations for consideration:

1. Consolidate and reduce executive level positions and expand the use of highly trained and qualified staff.

I agree with the desire to reduce the number of executive level positions, both at the System Office and at the universities. As positions are vacated at the System Office, they undergo a vacancy analysis prior to opening for recruitment 1) to ensure appropriate assignment of job family and classification and 2) to evaluate whether the work is best done at the university level or at the system level. The State Relations Director is one such position, recently reclassified from an executive position to a staff position. We will continue this analysis with future vacancies.

2. Reclassify executive positions currently held by Vice Presidents under the President’s Office as “liaisons” to the respective Universities.

The roles of the Vice President for Academics, Students and Research and Vice President for University Relations are defined in board policy with specific duties relative to the university as a single legal entity. While they work closely with their university counterparts (including the provosts and vice chancellors for administration), their duties are broader than a ‘liaison’ to the universities. Therefore, I disagree with the recommendation to reclassify these two positions.

As noted in response to recommendation #1 above, we will evaluate vacancies in the AVP roles for reclassification as those positions are vacated.

3. Reorganize the President's Office to assume an explicitly coordinative rather than leadership orientation, one that champions the university system and issues direction over shared services, but defers leadership initiatives to the separate universities.

The Board of Regents is the governing board for the University of Alaska system with its three accredited universities. As noted above, the University of Alaska system is a single legal entity. As a single entity and per Board of Regents bylaws and policy, there are areas where the system office maintains a leadership role. We will continue our focus improved service, coordination, and collaboration with the universities within the current organization of the president's office.

4. Reorganize the System Office into five divisions, four with Chief Officers and one as the President's Office.

I agree with the committee's recognition of the value of finance, HR and IT and their critical role in business operations. However, because there is not a cost saving or a functional advantage, I do not agree with the recommendations to restructure. In the individual position reviews, the report recommends that the VP for University Relations be reclassified as a chief position, and the Vice President for Academics, Students and Research be consolidated into the president's office. These positions carry out the responsibilities established in policy and are very tightly integrated with the president's office and for transparency of roles and responsibilities and operating efficiency there are separate budgetary lines.

5. Strengthen offices that deliver shared services and enter into purchase agreements and contracts based on economies of scale, most notably OIT, HR and Finance.

I concur with the recommendation to strengthen shared services functions, and will address comments specific to OIT, HR and Finance in those sections below. In addition, we will continue to look for economies of scale in our purchase agreements and contracts.

2. Academics, Students and Research

The committee reviewed four positions in this area.

- *Vice President of Academics, Students and Research*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. Standard throughout university system offices, the VPASR serves as the "Chief Academic Officer," and plays a necessary role in coordinating academic and research strategy in coordination with university provosts and vice chancellors, working with system governance councils and the Board of Regents. This position is established by the Board of Regents policy and is essential meeting the policy requirements of the Board. Regarding the rationale for reorganization and the recommendation to reclassify this position as a liaison, the VPSAR is an active advisor to the President, bringing academic leadership, perspective and counsel in support of the Board of Regents.

- *Associate Vice President of Student and Enrollment Strategy*

I concur with the rationale for reorganization. The functions of this position are being accomplished at each of the universities, and systemwide coordination is still required and expected to support the Board of Regents. The Chancellors and Vice Chancellors for student success at the universities will be asked to strengthen coordination in this area and work with the VPASR.

Specific need from a system perspective as it relates to student success is additional Student IT system functionality and support. Strategies to meet this need will be developed as the initiative for modernizing the student IT environment matures.

Additionally, as the Alaska Native Success Initiative is a major effort directed by the Board of Regents and embraced across the university system, the Associate Vice President of Student and Enrollment Strategy has been repurposed as the Senior Advisor for Alaska Native Success, Institutional Diversity and Student Engagement.

- *Associate Vice President of Workforce Development*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. Originally a two-person office, the roles and responsibilities of the Workforce Coordinator were incorporated into those of the AVP. Others were delegated to the universities. This position is vital for representing workforce initiatives at a system level and promoting collaboration and coordination with community campuses. There are no analogous positions to the AVP at any of our universities. Thus, a position in the system office provides a single point of contact for external stakeholders such as Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the legislature, federal delegation, and other colleges and programs in Alaska that offer workforce training. Having the position at the AVP level demonstrates the importance that UA places on its workforce mission.

- *Director of Data Strategy and Institutional Research*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. The director of the system IR office provides data and analysis to the President, VPASR and other senior leadership in order to inform the Board in planning and strategy, as well as data to respond to legislative and agency inquiries. In recent years, the Office of Data Strategy and Institutional Research has been reduced to three positions. Two positions were moved to form the Data Warehouse Office, which operates separately as a shared service office and is overseen by the IR Shared Services Council.

3. University Relations

The committee reviewed six positions in this area.

- *Vice President University Relations*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of the position. Specific to the recommendation in the rationale for reorganization that this position be reclassified as a 'chief officer position,' having the position at the VP level demonstrates the senior leadership strategic role that this

position plays in representing the university to external stakeholders such as the governor's office, legislature and congressional delegation.

- *Associate Vice President of Public Affairs*

I concur with some recommendations under the rationale for reorganization, and disagree with others. The position description does need to be updated to omit the federal relations role, and similar to many other positions, upon vacancy, the position will be reviewed for reclassification as a staff-level director position rather than executive. However, the work by this position complements, but does not duplicate, work by the universities; rather, this position coordinates system-level messaging and strategic communication strategy. Regarding the recommendation that this position be merged with the VPUR, that position does not have the capacity to take on these strategic communication duties.

- *Directors of Federal Relations and Director of State Relations*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of these two positions. While similar in duties, the stakeholders that these two positions interact with require extensive familiarity with the respective federal and state landscapes. In addition, while much has been accomplished with virtual meetings in the COVID environment, both positions are very place-specific, with the need for onsite presence in Washington, DC and Juneau, respectively. Because of this, I disagree with the rationale that the director of federal relations takes on duties related to state relations or public affairs.

- *Director of Planning and Budget*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. Regarding the recommendation for reorganization to change the reporting line to the CFO instead of the VPUR, with regard to UA's strategy and advocacy for securing state resources, the position is more closely aligned with university/government relations than with finance. The position coordinates the process to guide, review, evaluate and propose the UA System operating and capital budgets to the UA Board of Regents (BoR) for approval and serves as a liaison between the university and the State of Alaska on operating and capital budgets. Once the budgets are approved by the BOR, legislature and governor, the system finance office oversees the budget implementation and reporting. The position does work very closely with the CFO and provides a strong link from the budgeting request process to the financial implementation as overseen by the CFO.

- *Chief Land Officer*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. While it is currently vacant, a recruitment is underway and we hope to have the position filled soon.

4. Finance

The committee reviewed four positions in this area.

- *Chief Finance Officer*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of the position. I disagree with the suggestion that the work is duplicative with the university-level offices and that this work be centralized. There is value to having finance staff at both levels to advise leadership on budget status for the

respective units. In addition, the work in the system office related to corporate finance (treasury, debt, audit and reporting) does not exist at the university level.

- *Chief Procurement Officer*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of the position, and agree that the centralization of the large-dollar purchasing function has worked well for the system. The request for an updated central procurement website is noted and will be addressed in this fiscal year.

- *Chief Audit Executive*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of the position.

- *Chief Risk Officer*

This position has been eliminated, recognizing that the universities have significant risk management functions and responsibility. Claims management and insurance purchasing will remain in the system office. Without the system Chief Risk Officer, university chancellors and risk officers will be required to take a more active role for coordination and policy recommendations.

5. Human Resources

In addition to the review of individual executive positions, the committee provided feedback on the overall operations of the Human Resources department, with concerns related to the 2019 restructure of the Human Resources department from a small system office with distributed university HR offices to a centralized HR department with department-based HR coordinators. I agree that the process by which this reorganization was developed and implemented created issues of distrust that persist today; I also agree with the assessment that improved communications, regulation changes, and process improvement can make this restructure more successful.

Acting CHRO Bishko agrees with the request that “*Human must be put back into Human Resources.*” HR is working to address issues as they are raised and clarifying where and who to go to for assistance. Spoke and the HR website must be improved, but also remain as only part of the toolkit, with human assistance always available. In addition, the HR team continually listens to feedback and takes note of all process failures, using the occurrences as opportunities to learn and improve. This includes all aspects of the HR process chain, whether internal to the HR department or interactions between HR and the universities.

I concur with the recommendation that we continually review the structure to see what functions are not adequately served at the department level and to identify how to best provide those services. In addition, we will continue to revisit processes to see where we can accept more risk to improve processing time.

The committee reviewed five positions.

- *Chief Human Resources Officer*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position.

- *Director of Operations*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position and the need for improvement as noted. Updates to the operations section of the HR website are expected to be complete this month, which will help employees, supervisors and HR coordinators know where they should go for help in specific areas. Regarding Spoke, HR acknowledges that it will take time for this tool to be fully operational. Spoke's effectiveness increases as people use it. In the meantime, in addition to documentation on the HR website, HR staff are available via phone and email for individual staff questions.

- *Director of Talent Acquisition*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position, particularly as it relates to compensation/classification. The rationale for restructuring this position suggested that it could be absorbed by either the CHRO or the Director of Operations; neither of those suggestions is tenable. As this role is key to recruitment and retention of positions, merging this position would increase the workload of system office and university leadership to the detriment of employee recruitment efforts. Furthermore, the CHRO must serve as both a policy advisor for the system and leader for the entire HR department, and the Director of Operations is its own full-time position, assuring payroll and the many other compliance functions are completed timely and accurately.

- *Director of Employee Transition and Benefits*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. The recommendation for greater engagement from this position is noted.

- *Director of Labor & Employee Relations*

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. The five-person team supports three main areas of HR for the UA system, Labor (four unions), Employee Relations, and Employee Engagement, all of which are crucial to supporting the UA System. The Labor function of this team works with leadership to respond to grievances that are filed from the unions. The grievance response is complicated and while leadership often has a role in reviewing and responding to a grievance, this process is overseen by the LEE team to make sure there is consistency and that the CBAs are followed. The Employee Relations function focuses on performance management and supports leadership and supervisors to work towards providing a positive guided approach to help staff and faculty be successful. Staff is supported through this function as well. The Employee Engagement function is an area that will be a focus for improvement. This is the function of the LEE team that is intended to support employee development and training. While training and development are vital, analyzing the needs of all campuses will likely require additional resources. As noted, the current director, due to prior

decisions, does not reside in Alaska. Although in-state is preferred for a future director, the incumbent's role and knowledge are critical to our organization.

6. Office of Information Technology

Unlike most other departments in the review, where feedback focused on individual positions, the review evaluated OIT more as a department than as individual positions. I agree with the assessment that OIT is critical to the system's and the universities' operations, and that the department is currently understaffed. The highly competitive nature of the IT field has made recruitment and retention challenging, and full staffing remains a priority. To this end, in addition to traditional hiring and recruiting processes, OIT has been working closely with HR to create a path to hire qualified contractors into staff positions. This option provides short-term IT capacity as well as an opportunity to evaluate potential staff. Working with HR's Director of Talent Acquisition, OIT is assessing ways to be more competitive in the marketplace and accelerate the hiring process.

Regarding the observation that OIT response to academic support has not been timely, and relevant to other areas of service to the respective universities, I have asked Interim CITO Boucher to develop service level agreements for different IT functions to clearly define expectations, roles and responsibilities. I expect that this will serve as a model for other centralized functions to create clarity between the system function and the respective users.

7. General Counsel

I concur with the rationale for the affirmation of this position. Regarding the rationale for reorganization, the review noted the perception of conflict of interest, suggesting incorrectly that General Counsel represents administrators, not faculty or staff. General Counsel represents the institution as a whole, not individuals, and advises university business efforts within legal constraints as they apply to each situation. In many cases, this involves counseling people, including administrators, on the advisability of their proposed course. GC is responsible for ensuring that internal disputes follow Board of Regents' Policy, University Regulation, collective bargaining agreements (where appropriate), and fundamental due process requirements.

The rationale for reorganization also offered the recommendation to eliminate the three Associate General Counsel positions. I disagree with this recommendation for three reasons. First, it appears to be premised on the assertion that GC should not focus on internal matters, and instead focus only on legal functions. The suggestion to focus on only legal functions is unclear, since internal advice on the application of policy and regulation, as well as fundamental legal principles, in all aspects of operations is a legal function. Second, the legal advice provided by the AGC positions often helps resolve issues before they escalate further, saving the university both the time and expense of lawsuits or arbitration. Finally, shifting from an office staffed with primarily AGCs to primarily paralegals is not impossible, however, it would not serve the institution because it is likely to increase costs overall. Quality paralegals require salaries close to what AGCs currently earn, and with only two licensed attorneys, GC would likely have to outsource even more work to licensed contract attorneys.

8. Equity and Compliance

As noted in the review, the Chief Title IX Officer is an office of one that supports collaboration on policy and procedure while the universities are responsible for maintaining a high level of service to individuals and compliance with policies.

In the rationale for reorganization, the review noted that there is lack of clarity for this position now that the Voluntary Resolution Agreement (VRA) is complete. While the requirement for direct and constant submissions to OCR and the subsequent federal checking and review of all university documentation ended with the closure of the VRA, the expectation of both OCR and the Board of Regents is that the universities continue operating with a strong focus on maintaining compliance at the level achieved at the close of the VRA. Since the VRA, the system office greatly streamlined processes, removed bureaucracy wherever possible, and placed trust and a stronger emphasis on accountability at each university.

The Chief Title IX Officer, internal audit, general counsel, and human resources all contribute to the needs for Title IX, Equity and Compliance policy, and accountability assurance. Although no changes are anticipated in the short term, optimizing the resources and providing clarity for necessary policy support and compliance will continue to be examined.

[Note: the review report cites a position description for the Chief Title IX Officer instead of the Chief Equity and Compliance Officer position description.]

9. University of Alaska Foundation

While the committee did not review the position of UA Foundation President, the review did note several areas of concern related to the relationship between the foundation and the universities. Concurrent with the review, the foundation was working with a facilitator to identify and address some of the long-standing issues between the foundation and the university-based development teams. In early August, the president, chancellors, VPUR Rizk, foundation president Burnett, the foundation executive team and the university-based development leads met to begin clarifying roles and responsibilities.