



UNIVERSITY
of ALASKA

Many Traditions One Alaska

8 July, 2020

To: Sheri Buretta, Chair, University of Alaska Board of Regents

From: Steve Patin, CHRO

Subject: Interim UA President Stakeholder Interview Summary

Overview: Members of the UA Board of Regents interviewed multiple stakeholders from the university community from 29 June- 8 July to determine the attributes that they would seek in an interim president. This document summarizes consenting and diverging options and recommended attributes from the engagements along four general themes.

General Theme: Immediate Stewardship of the University

Areas of consensus: Nearly all participants felt that an interim president must actively address the university's current pressing issues and lead meaningful change rather than just be a caretaker. Most participants emphasized the importance of existing trust relationships as well as the importance of a fundamental understanding of the structure and operations of the university (including community campuses), the importance and influence of Alaska's native heritage, and the political environment in Alaska. In our current environment, most agreed that a president without those fundamental understandings would require too much time to learn, make connections, develop relationships, and gain trust. Such a delay would either prevent that person from timely addressing issues or result in unworkable proposals. Most participants emphasized the urgency to "do something meaningful"-- take action.

Areas of divergent opinions: Very few (but some) participants felt that a person with no prior knowledge of the university or Alaska could bring an unbiased perspective that would provide new and innovative thought and break current stalemates/stagnation. An idea from one stakeholder group was that a dual presidency formed through the collaboration of more than one chancellor could be effective.

Recommended Attribute: The interim president should have immediate experience with, understanding of, and passion for the University and its unique

contribution to and connection with Alaskans; and must enter the role with knowledge sufficient to immediately and credibly engage on behalf of the board and the university with internal and external stakeholders.

General Theme: Core Mission of the University

Areas of consensus: Nearly all participants expressed that an interim president must have experience with, an intimate understanding of, and a genuine appreciation for the core missions of the university: teaching, research, and service, while also possessing a fundamental commitment to student access and services.

Areas with divergent opinions: Because of the direct connection of faculty with students, some felt strongly that a faculty member (or former faculty member with teaching, research and service experience) with a terminal degree would best be able to exhibit a commitment to scholarly activity as an interim president. Others felt that an interim president who did not come from the ranks of faculty could be similarly committed. Some pointed out that an interim president must thoroughly understand that research must both contribute to knowledge and produce critical revenue for the university and the state. A few felt that the core mission of the universities should be the focus of the chancellors and that the interim president should focus exclusively on external advocacy with the public and private sector. To address budget challenges, some felt that an interim president must scrutinize all expenditures, especially those that do not directly contribute to students and student access to educational opportunities.

Recommended Attribute: The interim president should have extensive experience with, understanding of, and commitment to scholarly activity including teaching and research, and be committed to a student-centric university.

General Theme: Collaboration and Communications

Areas of consensus: All participants felt that an interim president must be a superb communicator and collaborator and must lead, by personal example, our effort to foster a spirit of collaboration within the university community. The interim president must bolster and highlight the university's connection with students, employees, and the communities the university supports. Most participants emphasized that an interim president must connect with all of Alaska-- metropolitan and rural. Alaska native interests must not be neglected. Listening, empathy, and a genuine attempt at understanding were universally desirable attributes. An interim president must be a positive and optimistic leader with high emotional intelligence and maturity, most cited.

An interim president should establish transparent processes for decision making and remain steadfast in adherence to those processes.

Areas with divergent opinions: Many participants described a pervasive culture of mistrust within the university, although there was no consensus as to the sources or level of severity. Some cited their personal perception that there is discord between faculty and administration as an area that the interim president must address. Others cited a personal perception of discord between the three universities. Some perceived a disconnect between the Board of Regents and various university stakeholders. Most participants from within the university community felt that an interim president must acknowledge and genuinely support the concept of shared governance. Participants from outside the university, who may not have had familiarity with shared governance as a fundamental concept of higher education, did not cite it as important. A few external participants found the shared governance concept limiting to organizational effectiveness and felt it should be deemphasized by an interim president. A few cited athletics as an area of community connection that should be emphasized. One participant stated that no interim president could be effective without board support and clear direction.

Recommended Attribute: The interim president should have successful experience unifying a fractured organization using genuine collaboration and superb communications. An interim president must understand and embrace shared governance as a fundamental element of university leadership, while leading difficult and rapid organizational change.

General Theme: Executive Level Management

Areas of consensus: Most participants agreed that the university, as a large complex organization facing significant financial challenges, must have capable executive leadership from an interim president in areas including finance and budget, legislative and government affairs, employee relations, real property management, and fundraising.

Areas with divergent opinions: There were divergent opinions on the importance of executive management abilities relative to other attributes of an interim president. Some felt that a member of faculty would be best suited to lead in these areas because managerial decisions would then be made in the best interest of the academic functions of the university. Others felt that executive management was the most important function of an interim president and that executive-level managerial experience of large complex organizations would therefore be the most important attribute. Some felt that an interim president should have first hand experience managing large functions within the university. Others felt that it did not matter if the executive experience came from within or external to the university so long as the interim president had a record of

excellence as a change agent. Some insisted that only an experienced external executive from a large complex organization would be a suitable interim president.

Recommended Attribute: The interim president should have substantial executive-level experience leading large complex organizations, and possess a fundamental understanding of key managerial functions such as finance and budget, legislative and government affairs, labor relations, real property management, and fundraising.