

Board of Regents' Office
Phone: (907) 450-8010
Fax: (907) 450-8012
EMAIL: ua-bor@alaska.edu
www.alaska.edu/bor/



202 Butrovich Building
2025 Yukon Drive
P.O. Box 755300
Fairbanks, AK 99775-5300

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Lacey Sanders
Fiscal Analyst
Alaska Legislative Finance Division
P.O. Box 113200
Juneau, AK 99811-3200

Via Electronic Communication: Lacey.Sanders@akleg.gov

RE: The University of Alaska's Response to the Legislative Intent Language

Dear Ms. Sanders:

Please find here the University of Alaska's response to the following legislative intent language enacted in the FY2020 Operating Budget (CCS SSHB 39):

It is the intent of the legislature that the Board of Regents consider a plan to transition the University of Alaska from three separately accredited academic institutions into a single accredited institution with multiple community campuses, and that the Board of Regents provide an update to the legislature on the development of such a plan by December 1, 2019.

In response to this legislative intent, and during a very challenging time resulting from the threat of severe budget cuts, the Board of Regents (BOR) took a number of substantial steps as it considered a plan for transitioning the University of Alaska (UA) from three separately accredited institutions into a single accredited institution. These steps include the following:

- Appointed a special taskforce of distinguished Alaska leaders to consider options for the university's organizational structure. The taskforce met and issued a subsequent report to the BOR. <https://alaska.edu/bor/taskforce/>
- Directed UA President Johnsen to prepare a plan for the Board's consideration to transition to a single institutional accreditation. This process included weekly meetings with staff of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) to examine standards, processes, timelines, and potential risks of transition.
- Formed an ad hoc BOR subcommittee on restructuring. The subcommittee met in the fall to hear a progress report on administrative consolidation, academic program reduction, and planning for a single accreditation.
- Held workshops across the system that convened more than 200 administrators and faculty to explore options and barriers to improving university effectiveness.

- More than 3,900 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community stakeholders responded on an online survey expressing their issues and concerns. The survey found high unanimity on the importance of the university and its fiscal sustainability and a high degree of disagreement between those who favored increased “uniqueness” and those who favored increased “integration.” Survey presentation link: [Stakeholder Survey Presentation \(BOR\)](#)
- Established a systemwide working group to continue engagement with the NWCCU and the U.S. Department of Education to discuss accreditation including issues and timelines associated with merging or integrating our separate universities.
- Created numerous other opportunities for public input from faculty, staff, students and the public stakeholders on UA structure.

On October 7, 2019, after considering a single accreditation through the steps described above, and in light of concerns raised by our institutional accreditor, NWCCU (see 9-26-19 [Letter](#)), the BOR decided to cease consideration of a single accreditation until such time as the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) secures its NWCCU accreditation renewal in 2021.

However, the Board is still aggressively pursuing other means to reduce costs and increase efficiency, including consolidation of administrative functions across the system, clarification of roles and responsibilities between the BOR and the universities, and expedited academic program reviews at each of our universities in preparation for BOR decisions regarding program reduction, consolidation, and elimination. These program reviews are expected to be completed in time for Board consideration and action this spring. If the BOR chooses to actively consider single accreditation in the future, it will direct the president by formal action to do so and will include in that direction the requirement of an independent cost benefit analysis.

In addition to cost effectiveness, the university is focusing on diversifying and increasing revenue through a variety of initiatives including growing enrollment, remedying our land grant deficit, investing in competitive research, monetizing physical assets, and increasing outreach to our alumni and other philanthropic supporters. The legislature's continued support is critical to making these efforts a success.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Sheri Buretta
Chair, University of Alaska Board of Regents

cc: Adam Bryan, Chief Budget Analyst State Office of Management & Budget
University of Alaska Board of Regents
James R. Johnsen, President, University of Alaska