Volume 17, Number 4, September 2012



Coalition of Student Leaders
Shauna Thornton, Speaker

The Coalition of Student Leaders is gearing up for the year. We have set the dates for our Annual Presidents’ retreat in conjunction with the UAA Legislative Luncheon on October 4th. The retreat will follow this event and be held from October 5th through the 7th. The Coalition will also meet for Legislative Affairs in Juneau from February 2nd through the 5th.

The last few days have been a whirlwind of excitement as I toured the UAF campus and met with Statewide officials including President Gamble, Vice President of Academic Affairs Dana Thomas, Associate Vice President for Institutional Research Gwen Gruenig, Associate Vice President for Budget Michelle Rizk, Associate Vice President for State Relations Chris Christensen, Executive Director of the UAF Alumni Association Joe Hayes, Faculty Alliance Chair Cathy Cahill, Director of Public Affairs Kate Wattum, Chair of the Statewide Administrative Association Monique Musick, Scholarship Officer for the UA Foundation Dory Straight, Student Regent Mari Frietag and many more to connect and form cohesive directions for the Coalition this upcoming year. I want to thank them all for the warm welcome and open dialog.

Our first official meeting will be on 10th of September at 7 pm by phone conference. We will be tackling the Strategic Direction Initiative, student involvement, and Coalition of Student Leaders visibility on all campuses. We have some challenges including a temporary decrease in governance staff and a planned FY14 budget cut to UA statewide including the system wide governance office. We are confident that we will find workable short-term solutions that will allow us to grow in our experiences as students and more importantly gain valuable training for our future careers.

*Shauna Thornton has been a member of the KRC Student Union for several years, and a member of the Coalition of Student Leaders for the past two years. She successfully led the KRCSU to rally against cuts to the campus budget saving the campus hundreds of thousands of dollars, and was one of the leaders in Juneau for need based financial aid.*

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Staff Alliance
Juella Sparks, Chair

It’s that time of year. The statewide governance groups have met in preparation for the new academic year and the FY14 budget preparations are in full swing. During our retreat the members of Staff Alliance re-elected me as chair and discussed our goals for the year ahead.

The most time-sensitive goal is advocating to our regents for a meaningful compensation increase in the FY14 budget request. At our June meeting, we passed SA Motion 2012-6 requesting a 5.5% increase for FY14. This 5.5% is much more than a number to us. It is an expression of our frustrations and of our concerns about what is happening to our compensation as UA employees.

Later in June, President Gamble announced a 2% tuition increase for the 2013-14 academic year. This decision will certainly benefit our students but it also places any compensation increases above that amount on the backs of non-represented staff. It has been said that if the legislature doesn’t fund more than their customary 50% match of the represented and non-represented employee increases, there could be reductions in staff. Given this possibility, Staff Alliance agreed during the August retreat to drop their 5.5% to just 3.5%.

We understand that President Gamble is a “numbers man”, wanting clear, value-driven justification for proposals and requests. In light of this, we could review the trends in our healthcare premiums or the cost of living and their negative impact on our take home pay. We could ask to look at the number of employees who opted out of the health insurance benefit and/or left the university and discuss the cost of recruitment versus retention or the loss of institutional memory and forward momentum. We could also bring forward concerns about a long-term lack of recognition for longevity and the inequity of the existing performance recognition system.

President Gamble has said that giving increases every year is not sustainable. This may well be true given the make up of our state’s economy. But there are other ways to recognize and value staff. And unless and until the administration steps forward prepared to discuss this, Staff Alliance is asking you to recognize the essential role of staff in the mission of this university and thoughtfully consider our 3.5% compensation increase.

*Juella Sparks was born and raised in Alaska and graduated from UAF with a B.B.A. in Management. After several years working for the state and starting a family, she came back to the university to work for Cooperative Extension Service in December, 2002. She was active in student government and moved quickly to being active in staff governance at UAF. In her words, “I am looking forward to working with Staff Alliance and the System Governance Council to strengthen our UA system, especially with two teenagers contemplating post-secondary education.” Juella has in past years served as Staff Alliance vice chair 2007-2009, chair of the System Governance Council 2008-2009 as well as president of the UAF Staff Council 2008-2009.*



Faculty Alliance
Cathy Cahill, Chair

Faculty Alliance met for its annual retreat in Fairbanks on August 12-14, 2012. President Gamble, Vice President Thomas, Associate Vice President Rizk, Chief Information Technology Office Kowalski, and Executive Director Smith all briefed Faculty Alliance and discussed the major issues they see facing UA and its faculty, staff, and students. The main issues addressed throughout the retreat included: the UA Strategic Directions Initiative (SDI), Complete College America (CCA), the System Governance Office, the E-laboratory Task Force recommendations, General Education Requirements (GERs) across MAUs, and the uniformity of course management systems and other informational technology systems. The outcomes of these discussions are as follows:

1. SDI – Faculty Alliance, acting in coordination with the MAU Faculty Senates, will assist in the SDI efforts in formulating the problem statements for the challenges discussed during the July 23rd SDI meeting. We will also work with the faculty to suggest potential solutions for the identified problems.
2. CCA – Faculty Alliance is in agreement with the MAU Faculty Senates that we do not believe joining CCA will benefit UA. We agree with CCA’s goals and are already pursuing a concerted effort to achieve these goals with Alaska-appropriate methods. These methods include establishing pre-major status for students who wish to pursue a Baccalaureate degree but are not ready to enter the challenging Baccalaureate curriculum, revising GERs, investigating transferability issues, enhancing our advising, etc. We have engaged on these topics recently and expect to see improvement soon; however, it may take several years to see the improvements due to some of these efforts. For example, the MAUs just received the funding for enhanced advising, so we expect it will take at least two years before we see any statistically-significant results.
3. System Governance Office – Faculty Alliance is working with Vice President Thomas to recruit an Executive Officer and support staff to fill the gaps in the System Governance Office. The Executive Officer position is identified in Board of Regents Policy and Regulations and is essential for providing continuity in institutional expertise in governance during the continued turnover of student, staff, and faculty leadership.
4. E-laboratory Task Force – The recommendations from the Task Force are being discussed at UAA. If the UAA Faculty Senate proposes changes to the recommendations, the other two MAUs will evaluate the suggested revisions and potentially negotiate the final recommendations.
5. GERs – Faculty Alliance, in conjunction with Vice President Thomas, are proposing to hold an Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) Institute at UA. The Institute will focus on developing common learning outcomes among GER courses. We expect this conversation would expand to address topics such as common numbers for GER courses across UA, minimal admission standards, common placement scores, etc. Faculty Alliance is putting together a proposal for this Institute for Vice President Thomas.
6. Informational Technology – Faculty Alliance and Chief Kowalski discussed many topics related to how informational technology and course management systems are handled across UA. We specifically discussed how to make our systems student friendly through techniques such as a single sign on, while reinforcing our students’ knowledge of which MAUs are offering the courses they are taking. This reminds the students that courses from different MAUs may have different schedules or accreditation requirements and may not be comparable.

The Faculty Alliance is ready to assist the UA Administration in tackling the aforementioned and any other issues that arise during the upcoming academic year. President Gamble has requested a more frequent dialogue to assist in these endeavors; therefore, we are scheduling times for additional audio or videoconferences between President Gamble and Alliance members. We are looking forward to this increased communication and an interesting year.

*Dr. Catherine F. Cahill is an Associate Professor of Chemistry at the University of Alaska Fairbanks where she teaches a wide variety of classes ranging from undergraduate General and Physical Chemistry to graduate Environmental Chemistry.  Cathy also mentors undergraduate and graduate students, conducts cutting-edge research on atmospheric aerosols, develops payloads for unmanned aircraft systems, and contributes her professional expertise to professional, public, and university needs.*