Leadership Profile

The University of Alaska

President

This search is being assisted by:

ACADEMICSEARCH
The University of Alaska Board of Regents invites nominations and applications for the position of President of the University of Alaska. The regents seek an accomplished, astute and effective leader who can provide strategic, creative and innovative leadership for the university. With 16 campuses and numerous outreach centers stretching nearly 1,200 miles from Ketchikan to Kotzebue, the University of Alaska serves more than 32,500 students from diverse backgrounds in a place of awe-inspiring geography and immense distances. The university’s broad charge encompasses everything from the community college mission to research intensive, post-doctoral study.

ALASKA

Alaska’s land mass spans one-fifth the size of the contiguous United States. It includes numerous mountain ranges, tundra, coastal shores, rainforests and the only portion of the Arctic in the United States. Alaska was first inhabited by its diverse Native peoples and later by Russian immigrants and gold seekers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Alaska’s population has tripled since statehood was granted 56 years ago and now numbers approximately 735,000 residents. Alaska today includes the growing urban area of Anchorage, the state’s largest city and headquarters for most major corporations; Fairbanks, which serves as the economic hub for the Interior and northern regions of the state; Juneau, the state capital in the southeastern panhandle; and many other smaller towns, villages and communities.

The 800-mile trans-Alaska oil pipeline forms Alaska’s economic spine. The petroleum industry is responsible for one-third of the state’s economic output and makes up around 90 percent of the state’s general fund revenues. Government and a few private industries—oil, tourism, commercial fishing, mining and logging—bring in most of the new money that makes Alaska’s economy grow. Federal dollars support military bases, obligations to Alaska’s indigenous people and large federal land holdings in the form of parks, refuges and recreational lands. The federal government owns 221 million of Alaska’s 375 million acres; individual Alaskans own less than 1 percent of the land. See http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Publications/UA_summ06.pdf.

While these revenue sources have reliably supported Alaska in the past 30 years, new challenges lie ahead. Oil production is slowing. There is hope of a new gas pipeline from the North Slope but that is likely to be influenced by the national and international natural gas markets. The recession stressed the federal budget and the present drop in oil prices presents significant hurdles for the federal and state budgets. As Alaska looks to its future,
diversification of its economy offers visionary leadership great opportunity. As a major leader in Alaska, the president of the University of Alaska has been significantly engaged in shaping this state’s future through higher education. See Shaping Alaska’s Future http://www.alaska.edu/shapingalaskasfuture/

The University of Alaska

The University of Alaska includes all of Alaska’s public colleges and universities in the state. It is a statewide system of higher education that consists of the system office, three regional universities, thirteen community campuses and numerous outreach sites. In conformance with the state constitution, the governor appoints members of the University of Alaska Board of Regents and the legislature confirms them. The board of regents is the governing body for public higher education designated in the Alaska State Constitution. The University of Alaska’s operating budget for FY 2015 totaled just over $924 million, including federal, state and university receipts.

System Office

The president serves as the chief executive officer for the University of Alaska Board of Regents. He or she is a strong advocate for the university. Chancellors of the system’s three major universities report directly to the president. The major universities are the University of Alaska Anchorage (Anchorage campus, five community campuses and several outreach sites), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (Fairbanks campus and six community campuses and numerous outreach sites) and the University of Alaska Southeast (Juneau campus and two community campuses).

The University of Alaska System Office is located in Fairbanks, as is the president’s residence. The system office plays important internal coordinating and external roles. Its primary ongoing responsibilities include maintaining the accounting and management systems including legal, financial, human resources and information technology; developing annual operating and capital budgets; providing leadership, coordination and policy for UA fundraising initiatives; conducting public and governmental advocacy for the University of Alaska; and coordinating academic offerings. See Shaping Alaska’s Future http://www.alaska.edu/shapingalaskasfuture/.

University Campuses

The University of Alaska was founded in 1917 in Fairbanks. Today, UA is a thriving system of more than 32,500 students across the state. In fall 2013/FY14, the university employed more than 8,600 dedicated faculty and staff, with about 24 percent undergraduate and graduate student employees and the remaining 6,500 comprised of regular and temporary faculty and staff. Outstanding faculty members take pride in offering a broad range of academic programs, on campuses, through distance learning, or through a blend of both. The University of Alaska’s mission is to inspire learning and advance and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research and public service which emphasizes the North and its diverse peoples. Led by highly able, widely respected chancellors, the University of Alaska Anchorage, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the University of Alaska Southeast are separately accredited institutions, as is Prince William Sound Community College in Valdez. See http://www.alaska.edu/alaska/about-ua/. As the university reaches out to meet the needs of both urban and rural Alaska, the structure of the statewide system has expanded to incorporate community campuses and to establish learning centers across the state. It is a highly diverse, complex system of higher education in a state where accessibility by road is extremely limited.
There is a strong commitment to environmental issues, sustainability and diversity, particularly as it relates to Alaska Natives, on University of Alaska campuses. The next UA president will benefit from clear insight into the nature of Alaska and its people, as well as the complexity and values of its higher education system.

**Context of the Search**

Superimpose a map of Alaska onto a map of the Lower 48 and one will find that it stretches from California to Florida and covers most of the Midwestern states. This area includes remote communities with small populations in isolated regions noted for their mountains, coastlines and tundra. Sixty percent of the population lives in Anchorage and the Southcentral area. Fairbanks serves as a hub for rural communities throughout the vast Interior region of Alaska, while the state capital is located in Juneau.

The educational needs of Alaskans vary as significantly as the geography. Students include many first-generation college attendees; employed adults who desire workforce training; military families who complete undergraduate degrees; resident Alaskans, both traditional and nontraditional; and graduate students pressing research boundaries.

Alaska also presents varying attitudes about higher education and its role. To some state residents, workforce training should define higher education’s key function, while others seek growing emphasis on academic excellence to position the University of Alaska as the first choice for a college education among residents. A growing percentage of high school graduates attend the University of Alaska today compared to a decade ago, but a significant number still leave the state for a college education. See *Shaping Alaska’s Future* [http://www.alaska.edu/shapingalaskasfuture/](http://www.alaska.edu/shapingalaskasfuture/).

Intellectual expertise needed by Alaska-based corporations is often imported. For some Alaskans, high-quality research is greatly valued and seen as a major contributor to the state’s capacity to compete. For others, research is little known or appreciated. The University of Alaska and its president must focus on the work of structuring a system of higher education to increase the level of well-educated Alaskans who can build the economic and cultural future of the state. The following opportunities and challenges frame the search for the next president of the University of Alaska.

**A University in Transition**

As the University of Alaska stretches to fulfill its mission, it does so through campuses of varying degrees of academic maturation and focus. Each major campus has impressive strengths and capacity to serve within a developing system. Each desires to become the best it can be, even as system leadership wrestles with adequacy of resources to support all aspirations, to protect established investments and to assure accountability to the people of Alaska.

A population shift from rural to the Southcentral part of Alaska has elevated expectations of UAA. Conceived as an urban university,
UAA today seeks to serve broad interests in Alaska’s largest city and to attract high-quality faculty who come with strong research as well as teaching interests. The campus vigorously pursues partnerships to achieve larger community goals. Campus facility expansion has extended UAA’s capacity to serve, but in other parts of Alaska, there is concern that this growth comes at the cost of their regional institutions. UAA, for its part, has felt constrained in reaching its full potential by system boundary issues related to doctoral degree provisioning and perceived funding inequities. However, UAA has experienced several years of strong state funding and now has a joint doctoral degree with UAF in Psychology and a Doctorate of Nursing Practice.

Since its founding, UAF has built a solid reputation for strong research, especially in its Geophysical Institute, the Institute of Arctic Biology, the School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, the Institute of Northern Engineering and the International Arctic Research Center. Its research revenues expenditures, mostly awarded through competitive federal research grants, exceeded $127 million in FY13. The campus currently is being called on to link undergraduates more closely to UAF’s research strengths as well as to relate research efforts to economic development needs in Alaska. New and appropriate research ventures need support, perhaps in collaborative efforts with other campuses. UAF is a doctoral degree granting university.

UAS and all community campus sites seek the strong support of the University of Alaska System Office to ensure stability and sustainability. Their smaller size, yet highly important service, makes them a vital part of the University of Alaska’s mission. UAS feels that high quality, distance-delivered education, and system support of that endeavor, is critical to smaller campuses. UAS believes the needs of campuses in the Southeast region are very different than those in road accessible, urban areas such as Anchorage and Fairbanks. A solid appreciation of educational technology and an understanding of the very different challenges faced by off-road communities are essential for UA’s next president.

These regional rivalries need to be constructively channeled by the next president. He or she will need to work closely with the board of regents, the university chancellors and the body politic to formulate constructive strategies to move the service of each campus ahead in ways that are advantageous to Alaska, Alaskans, the campuses and overall system goals. See Shaping Alaska’s Future http://www.alaska.edu/shapingalaskasfuture/.

There also is expressed campus concern regarding the role, organization and size of the System Office. Striking the right balance between policy leadership at the system level with management, performance and accountability at the campuses remains a work in progress.

The above issues will require continuing strategic thought by the board of regents. The president should have a clear understanding of organizational development of large academic systems, what works and what does not, at the various stages of institutional development. It will require that the president work closely with the board to develop deep understanding of strategies for change that will yield desired results.

Adaptable Leadership
The next president of the University of Alaska will benefit from being nimble and adaptable. Current budgets, with the fall in oil prices, are in flux. Funds that gave the current president and board the capacity to make new investments are now diminished. The next president should have command of strategic budgeting.

As one of the most influential and visible leaders in Alaska, the president of the University of Alaska must constantly draw the connections between higher education and the state’s economic viability. He or she must be a tireless, persuasive advocate willing to travel widely within the state, encouraging support for education and training beyond high school. The next president should continue to elevate UA’s national visibility and be effective with relevant agencies of the federal government. He or she should work effectively with University of Alaska Foundation leaders. He or she must be a coach for chancellors, a wise counselor for the board and trustworthy resource for the legislature. The president must craft partnerships that move agendas forward.

**Desired Characteristics**

The presidency of the University of Alaska is an outstanding opportunity for the leader who enjoys the challenge of raising a complex academic organization to even greater levels of achievement. The board of regents seeks a highly experienced, politically savvy leader who understands how to advance agendas in higher education and to manage a developing university system in a highly competent fashion. The next president must have the capacity to work effectively and well with board members, chancellors, legislators, the university community, faculty, staff and students, University of Alaska Foundation leaders, donors and alumni. He or she must have command of strategic planning, budgeting, facility and personnel issues; a clear appreciation for higher education’s academic values; and a commitment to student, faculty and staff development. He or she must be comfortable working in a unionized setting and with campus governance representatives.

The next president will be an excellent communicator, convincing in speech and adept at listening. She or he will be a leader and partner in the economic development of Alaska, bringing insight and innovative thought to these issues. Familiarity with Alaska will be an advantage.

The president of the University of Alaska will join other leaders to provide the needed workforce, skilled professionals and research base to take Alaska into the future. With historically low enrollments in higher education, Alaska requires a University of Alaska system leader who can reach out to the general populace to articulate the benefits of higher learning. He or she will work closely with K-12 superintendents, the Commissioner of Education and Early Development, Alaska Native leaders and Alaska business and industry.

The next president will recognize opportunities to move ahead. He or she will create collaborative and innovative solutions to challenging issues, think creatively and will be technologically informed. With an approachable style, a genuine respect for others and hard work, the next president will create friends and supporters of the University of Alaska.

**NOMINATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS**

Nominations and applications will be received until the position is filled but, in order to receive full consideration, candidates are encouraged to submit their materials by March 31, 2015. All nominations, applications, and inquiries will be held in full confidence until finalists are identified for on-campus interviews.
The University of Alaska is being assisted in this search by Academic Search, Inc. Nominators or prospective candidates may direct inquiries or questions to Vice President and Senior Consultant Dr. Tom Fitch at rtf@academic-search.com.

Application materials should consist of a curriculum vitae, a substantive cover letter addressing qualifications and desired attributes, and a list of five references, none of whom will be contacted without the explicit permission of the candidate. All application materials must be submitted electronically to AlaskaPres@academic-search.com.

Interested parties are invited to view the Board of Regents’ website at http://www.alaska.edu/bor/ for more insight into the board’s work.

The University of Alaska is an equal employment opportunity/affirmative action employer and educational institution. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other status protected by law. Applicants needing reasonable accommodation to participate in the application and screening process should contact the local Human Resources office.

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