

Faculty Alliance
2025 Yukon Drive
P.O. Box 757780
Fairbanks, AK 99775



UNIVERSITY
of ALASKA
Many Traditions One Alaska

106E Butrovich Building
(907) 450-8042
ua-sygov-faculty@lists.alaska.edu
alaska.edu/governance/faculty-alliance/

Date: May 7, 2018

To: Gloria O'Neill
Chair, UA Board of Regents

Cc: James R. Johnsen
President, UA

From: Lisa Hoferkamp
Chair, UA Faculty Alliance

Subject: Addendum to the Faculty Alliance Report, March 1, 2018

Dear Chair O'Neill,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of March 28, 2018. Without hesitation, I can assure you that the united faculty of the University of Alaska (UA) system share with the Board of Regents (BoR) a common interest in advancing the ability of the university to serve its critical mission for our students and the State of Alaska. In the past year, the Faculty Alliance (FA) has noted some efforts at improved communication. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the refreshing, two-way communication style of Interim VP for Academic and Student Affairs, Paul Layer. VPASA Layer has for the most part engaged faculty in conversation regarding academic issues and subsequently incorporated that input into determinations and explanations of final decisions. The FA would, however, like to reiterate a common opinion among UA faculty that more often, their feedback and input do not appear to weigh significantly in the numerous decisions that may or may not include VPASA Layer's influence but that directly or indirectly impact academic programs. Members of the FA, throughout their various faculty governance positions, as faculty members, and as members of strategic pathways teams have oftentimes heard and experienced what can politely be described as disregard for their input and a lack of communication.

In your March 28, 2018 reply to the FA, via Lisa Hoferkamp, regarding her Addendum to the Faculty Alliance Report, March 1, 2018, you wrote: "I know from my discussions with President Johnsen that several decisions he has made to increase faculty involvement come from this same sense of shared interest".

As you note, your discussions were with the President, not with the faculty. It is likely that the President and the faculty have different perspectives of shared interests and the effectiveness of recent attempts to increase faculty involvement in system-wide decision making. Because the faculty deal directly with students, while the President and other statewide administrators are isolated from classroom and online challenges and opportunities, obtaining their direct input will lend to informed decision-making.

In the spirit of two-way communication, the FA would like to offer the following perceptions (highlighted in red below) of the several instances of faculty involvement cited in your March 28 letter:

- **The addition of faculty to all statewide councils – While we appreciate the opportunity to participate in the councils, they are advisory only, and there is no indication that faculty input is being considered**
- **The expansion and inclusion of governance leaders on the Summit Team – The FA wanted a faculty member on the Summit Team because it was a decision-making body. While the President added a faculty member to it, he also added approximately 25 other members, and then removed its decision making power**
- **Support for the Faculty Initiative Fund – The FA appreciates having the opportunity to participate in the policy regulating the distribution of the funds that will allow faculty to create enhancements that will improve the experiences of students and research productivity, and therefore benefit the entire university system**
- **Inclusion of faculty on the Alaska Teacher Education Council – The UA faculty cautiously appreciate having a faculty member on this council, depending upon the value attributed to our input**
- **Inclusion of faculty on the search committee for the new Executive Dean – A position necessitated by a decision that faculty from all three universities advocated (and still advocate) against**
- **Inclusion of faculty in all 23 Strategic Pathways teams – The numbers the President cited for faculty participation always combined faculty and deans. While most deans were once faculty, they are administrators, and are not faculty now and are not represented by the faculty collective bargaining unit, nor are they eligible to be members of Faculty Senates. Further, there is no indication that input of the faculty serving on the teams was considered. Instead of actual recommendations, the President asked for options, apparently allowing him to choose options upon which he had already decided. Evidence of that exists in the instances where he chose a path that was not one of the options presented, without consultation of faculty. This led to surprise, misunderstandings, and roll-backs of decisions, i.e. the decision to form the AK College of Education was not supported by faculty and this opposition was made clear in numerous communications**
- **Support for the truly important work faculty are doing to align GERS - We appreciate the President's encouragement for the faculty to continue this work that they began before he became President. However, many faculty continue to question whether or not BOR-mandated alignment of GERS was necessary or even optimal to address the original concerns about transferability of GERS. Had faculty been consulted before mandating a change to the curriculum -- one aspect of a university traditionally and exclusively built and maintained by faculty experts in a wide variety of fields -- the concerns could very well have been addressed much faster and with much less effort and disruption. Ultimately, the enormous amount of time spent on aligning GERS instead of pursuing a simpler solution that allowed for variation among**

universities according to their strengths is less time spent delivering the teaching and research missions at each university

- **Support for other aspects of our service delivery in ways that improve our students' success – It should be presupposed that the faculty, who deal directly with the students, have a good understanding of how to improve those students' success. Those faculty efforts should be encouraged and supported**

Again, the FA would like to thank the BoR for their efforts at embracing the role of shared governance in University decisions that affect academic programs. We truly hope that these efforts will continue into the future. The BoR' and the FA' mutual desire to implement actions that promote improvements in and sustain the quality of education at the University of Alaska is best served if we cooperatively work towards truly effective communication.

Best Regards,

Lisa Hoferkamp
Chair, UA Faculty Alliance