

April 22, 2016

Dear Colleagues –

Today, I released the external review of factors that led to the breakdown in student discipline processes at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). The Board of Regents and I commissioned an independent review last fall, and I retained Anchorage attorney Jeff Feldman to look at three issues: the root causes for the discipline breakdown; whether UA leadership (UAF, System, & Board) took appropriate action once the problem was discovered; and whether effective steps were taken to address the systemic or other failures that occurred.

The report identified three primary causes for the failure: the discipline philosophy of the former UAF dean of students; an initial lack of understanding and response to 2011 Title IX guidance; and a lack of oversight by top UAF administrators as well as inadequate resources for Title IX and student discipline.

In addition to the primary causes, the review concluded there were multiple factors that led to the failures including: “the lack of an informed and capable staff for a period of time, insufficient allocation of resources to student discipline and Title IX compliance; a lack of oversight by UAF administration, a lack of early guidance and oversight at the statewide level; and, UAF’s tendency to handle matters internally.” The report noted that: “These were organizational – institutional and systemic – failures; but they were not the result of an intentional disregard of legal requirements.” The report also concluded that while there was some initial delay in addressing the mishandled cases, UA and UAF administration took effective action, including identifying the facts, evaluating deficiencies in procedures and the handling of particular cases, and pursuing corrective action.

Regarding systemic issues, Feldman concluded that “(a)t the statewide level, the Board of Regents and President Johnsen have declared a firm commitment to Title IX compliance through words and action, and there is far greater statewide oversight and system-wide coordination regarding Title IX compliance.” At the campus level, Feldman found that UAF had implemented procedural, staffing and structural changes to meet Title IX requirements and prevent future lapses. “Equally important, UAF personnel described a fundamental change in culture that encompasses far greater awareness of Title IX obligations and a commitment to compliance.” Finally, the report warned of the need for continued emphasis on oversight and adequate resources.

While profoundly disappointed when I learned about these failures, I am pleased that UAF has implemented a great number of improvements. I am especially thankful that Chancellor Mike Powers and his team confronted the problems in a very proactive and public way. He has involved the campus community to ensure change happens, which has had a remarkable effect, and the country and his community and campus have noticed.

Sadly, sexual assault is all too common across the nation, in Alaska, and at the University of Alaska. Spurred by widespread recognition and condemnation of sexual assault and concern for its victims, I have appointed a Title IX liaison, Associate Vice President Saichi Oba, to coordinate a multiyear initiative with the goal of providing learning environments safe from sexual assault. The actions underway include:

- Faculty & staff training and expanding the Green Dot Bystander Intervention Program
- A system-wide working group comprised of campus staffs from HR, Student Conduct, Title IX offices and from SW General Counsel, Public Affairs and Student & Enrollment that audio conference weekly to discuss and collaborate on issues germane to Title IX
- A quarterly Title IX scorecard from all campuses that documents status of staffing, training, compliance and overall awareness
- Commencement of climate surveys and 3rd party quality and compliance reviews
- Ongoing reporting to the Board of Regents

Of course there is more work to be done. Cultural change can't be accomplished overnight. But we are doing the right thing, and taking responsibility when things go wrong. We are making the necessary changes but we have to recognize it will be a process that will require ongoing training and vigilance with the absolute commitment to put our students' safety at the top of our priorities

The full report can be found at www.alaska.edu

Sincerely,
Jim Johnsen
President, University of Alaska

<https://www.alaska.edu/stopthesilence/>
<https://uaf.edu/titleix/>