

SHAPING ALASKA’S FUTURE

The University of Alaska shapes Alaska’s future through leadership in higher education, research and innovation, partnerships with communities and industries, and engagement within circumpolar and Pacific Rim nations.

Listening to Alaskans and Observing National Trends

During 80 listening sessions, university leaders asked students, faculty, staff, alumni, Alaska’s business leaders and employers, elected officials, K-12 partners, and community members, how the University of Alaska system is performing and how it can better serve the needs of the state and its people. *Shaping Alaska’s Future* rests on a foundation of the responses, having distilled them down to five major “themes.” In addition, an informal but extensive environmental scan was undertaken to identify state and national trends evident in higher education journals, reports, opinion pieces, and speeches. Specific statements within each theme more narrowly address compelling issues raised about university system activities. In turn, the effect statements associated with each issue statement then collectively become the way forward to achieving an even higher level of quality as a premier education institution.

Theme 1: Student Achievement & Attainment

Issue A	Like other non-selective and open-admission institutions, UA’s graduation rates are lower than those of selective peer institutions. And UA students on average take longer to complete degrees than students at peer institutions.
	Effect: Full-time baccalaureate degree-seeking students graduate in four to five years similar to those at peer institutions. Full-time associate degree-seeking students graduate in two to three years similar to those at peer institutions. Part-time students complete their degrees in proportionate time frames. UA institutions may set their own goals for graduation rates and will ensure that academic standards are rigorously maintained.
Issue B	Like many large and complex institutions, UA can be administratively challenging for students to navigate.
	Effect: Students view the University of Alaska as accessible, efficient, and transparent.
Issue C	UA students must demonstrate skills and knowledge in their particular majors. However, they also need to develop critical thinking skills, good judgment, and high ethical standards to be responsible citizens and leaders.
	Effect: Students take responsibility for meeting their educational objectives and both students and graduates demonstrate ethical personal, community, and civic responsibility.
Issue D	UA needs to increase national and international recognition of its quality education, programs of distinction and exceptional research in order to enhance recruitment of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty.
	Effect: UA’s reputation for academic quality, programs of distinction, and research makes it an attractive highly competitive choice for undergraduate and graduate students.
Issue E	UA recruitment, retention and graduation are low for disadvantaged and minority populations and especially for Alaska Natives.
	Effect: UA’s graduates reflect the diversity of Alaska.
Issue F	Alaska has serious unmet needs for advanced degree graduates.
	Effect: More advanced degrees are earned at UA especially those that fulfill Alaska’s specific needs.

Theme 2: Productive Partnerships with Alaska’s Schools

Issue A	With high expectations for the continuing impact of the Alaska Performance Scholarship and the new K-12 Alaska Academic Standards notwithstanding, today half of UA first-time freshmen do not place into college-level courses and require one or more university developmental classes at student and university expense.
	Effect: High school graduation requirements and UA freshman placement requirements are aligned and accepted across Alaska.
Issue B	The turnover rate of new teachers is high in rural Alaska. Lack of teacher retention results in less continuity in curriculum and pedagogy for students. Some new rural teachers moving to rural Alaska from outside the state do so without an adequate understanding of life and culture in the villages. Although UA cannot unilaterally improve teacher retention rates in rural Alaska, it can wield significant influence.
	Effect: Teacher retention in rural Alaska is stable and approaches that in urban Alaska and is significantly assisted by educating and certifying more Alaska Native teachers.
Issue C	The quality of life and the economic potential of Alaska depend on an available educated population. Currently, Alaska has one of the lowest rates of high school graduates continuing directly into post-secondary education. At the same time, increasing numbers of jobs in the state require postsecondary education.
	Effect: The college-going rate in Alaska, the proportion attending college in-state, and the proportion entering postsecondary education immediately after graduating from high school are similar to other western states.

Theme 3: Productive Partnerships with Public Entities and Private Industries

Issue A	State revenues are declining; at the same time the state is facing the additional need for workforce education, employee training, community outreach, and research needs.
	Effect: UA meets needs of the public sector and private industry for skilled employees and for research solutions via partnerships that are strategic, mutually beneficial, and address the needs of the state.
Issue B	Partners have specific needs that may not be addressed through conventional approaches.
	Effect: Through flexible, innovative and responsive partner relationships UA contributes more effectively to Alaska’s economy.

Theme 4: Research and Development (R&D) to Enhance Alaska’s Communities and Economic Growth

Issue A	The University needs to attain greater recognition for its accomplishments in research and development and its contributions to economic diversification and quality of life for Alaskans. This will require a paradigm shift.
	Effect: UA is the first choice of state and federal entities and private industries in Alaska to meet their research and development needs.
Issue B	Some Alaska Native languages and cultural traditions are endangered. And since some of Alaska’s communities do not have sufficient resources to nurture culture and the arts, UA plays a vital role in preserving and advancing this knowledge and these traditions.
	Effect: UA is Alaska’s center of culture and the arts, with an emphasis on Alaska Native cultures and languages.
Issue C	Circumpolar communities including Alaska need research-based knowledge to adapt to the broad and profound effects of climate change and UA is uniquely qualified to provide it.
	Effect: UA is a recognized world leader in circumpolar-interdisciplinary climate change research informed by traditional ecological knowledge.
Issue D	Limited state investment in UA research capacity makes it difficult to remain competitive for research grants, contracts, and faculty.
	Effect: UA recruits and retains top research and development faculty and students and maintains modern world class research facilities.

Theme 5: Accountability to the People of Alaska

Issue A	The higher education environment in which UA operates is changing rapidly. Effecting the associated cultural shift that is needed can only occur as a result of widespread faculty and staff support, commitment, and leadership at every level.
	Effect: UA leadership, faculty and staff articulate our future direction, discover pathways to achieve the vision, and are empowered to effect the changes required.
Issue B	Diversity is one of Alaska’s strengths. Yet, the richness of what our University can offer to students, employees and the state of Alaska will not be achieved until UA more fully reflects and celebrates Alaska Native and other minority cultures.
	Effect: The diversity of UA faculty, staff and administrators reflects the diversity of Alaska’s peoples.
Issue C	Current facilities must be actively managed to meet student, teaching, and administrative needs without regard to artificial program boundaries or traditional 9 am to 5 pm schedules.
	Effect: UA facilities are fully and efficiently utilized and scheduled to meet student, academic and research needs.
Issue D	UA is often judged, not by the quality of its education, research or outreach, but rather by the personal experience that an individual encounters when accessing those programs. Similarly, employee effectiveness and morale depend upon their own personal experiences when they need assistance from another employee or group within the university.
	Effect: UA values, supports and delivers excellent service at every level.
Issue E	Alaska’s fiscal condition over the next few years will only heighten the expectations of the UA Board of Regents, legislators, and other community leaders for collaboration across the UA system.
	Effect: UA is widely recognized for collaboration across the system.
Issue G	Five years of consistent state funding has significantly reduced the rate of increase of deferred maintenance. However, the deferred maintenance backlog continues to grow and there is no funding commitment after 2015 to address UA’s needs. Deferred maintenance is the UA Board of Regents first capital priority because the risk posed by the backlog is unacceptable and must be addressed.
	Effect: UA’s deferred maintenance backlog is reduced to an acceptable level.