



UNIVERSITY  
of ALASKA

*Many Traditions One Alaska*

# Regents' Recap

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UA BOARD OF REGENTS' MEETING December 2005

## Regents Approve Workforce Training Tracks, New Research Centers

The University of Alaska Board of Regents at its meeting on December 7-8, 2005, unanimously approved two new workforce training tracks that enhance the UA system's community college mission. In addition, board members approved the establishment of two new research centers at the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus, made possible from federal grants and anticipated non-federal matching funds, over the next five to six years.

The workplace training tracks—called an

Occupational Endorsement and Workforce Credential—were hailed as a strong signal of support for community college offerings, typically aimed at older, part-time students taking classes for specific career goals, like a promotion.

UA President Mark Hamilton said the new program tracks would provide inspiration to students who receive work-related training through the university. "Now they'll gain not only the skills but, in some cases, also college credit, for coming back to school,"

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*The University of Alaska Board of Regents is the governing body responsible for the university policy and management through the president. Regents are appointed by the governor for eight-year terms, subject to legislative confirmation.*

*A student regent is appointed for two years from candidates nominated on each campus. (Regents' term of office shown in parentheses.)*

## A Thank You to BP and ConocoPhillips



*A Thank You to BP and ConocoPhillips—The Board of Regents, at its December meeting, held a dinner in honor of BP and ConocoPhillips for their important charter donations over the last six years, now totaling \$11 million for BP and \$11.8 million from ConocoPhillips, for a grand total of \$22.8 million. The dinner included testimonials from UA faculty about how the charter donation money has helped the university go the extra mile with exemplary programming and faculty assignments. The companies were also presented with framed copies of an advertising campaign last spring aimed at thanking them. Pictured here are, from left to right, Regent Brian Rogers, Rick Mott of ConocoPhillips, Maureen Johnson of BP, and President Mark Hamilton. Photo by Kate Ripley © 2005 University of Alaska.*

he said.

Craig Dorman, UA vice president for academic affairs and research, said students receiving this type of education in the past haven't been officially recorded as successful graduates of a program because classes may not have resulted in enough credits for an associate's degree.

"We count the students who come and do this now as non-completers, which is far from the case," said Dorman.

"We want to turn that around, for purposes of better record keeping and to celebrate the body of knowledge these students are learning."

At some campuses and departments, a "Certificate of Completion" for certain programs has been available, but not at others. The new degree and credential program tracks are:

- Occupational Endorsement: Ranging from 9-29 credits applicable in some cases toward a higher degree, such as an associate's or bachelor's, and officially counted on a student's transcripts. It would require formal admission and be eligible for financial aid. Courses could include classes in numerous fields, from professional and technical courses to emergency response and early childhood training, among others.
- Workforce Credential: non-credit programs that could include, for example, sexual harassment training or a special training on mine safety and health.

## Research centers established

The two new research centers will involve all UA campuses but be headquartered at the College of Engineering and Mines at UAF. The Alaska University Transportation Center will be one of 10 such centers mandated in the recently approved federal highway bill.

With a total of \$18 million in federal grants (requiring a non-federal match) over the next five years, the center will work in an interdisciplinary fashion with other agencies on transportation research, coordinating engineering with science, business and other disciplines.

The Arctic Engineering Research Center, funded for a total of \$18 million over the next six years under the federal energy bill, will address long-term solutions to unique design, construction and maintenance of structures in the Arctic. The center will work closely with the Cold Climate Housing Research Center, the state Department of Transportation and others.

## Board Delays Action on ORP Changes

The Board delayed action on proposed changes to the Optional Retirement Program, deciding instead to discuss the matter further during a special Human Resources Committee meeting, to be held prior to the Regents' annual board retreat in January.

The UA administration presented a proposal to further modify ORP, effective July 2006, but regents wanted more information. Deferring action will provide statewide staff with more opportunity to review the various options with faculty and governance groups.

The proposal, presented in the interest of reducing the impact of fast rising retirement plan costs while maintaining the university's ability to recruit and retain highly qualified faculty and staff, is to create a New ORP, called NORP II, that includes a two-year vesting period for the employer's contribution and a medical savings account. Under the plan, the university would make contributions into savings account for retiree health expenses. Also recommended was tying eligibility for the UA Pension to election of NORP II, rather than PERS or TRS.

This is the second time changes to ORP have been before the board in recent months. In June, the Board capped employer contributions into ORP at 12 percent, for new hires only. The motion asked the administration to develop additional options for slowing retirement cost inflation—thus this latest proposed ORP action.

Meanwhile, ORP costs for those enrolled in the original plan, prior to the July cap, continue to rise. Old ORP plan cost inflation has increased from 13 percent last year to 16.33 percent this year. Unless further action is taken

by the board or the Legislature, next year the rate is expected to increase to 21 percent, far in excess of comparable defined contribution plans across the country and in Alaska.

Total ORP costs for FY05 were \$6.9 million; in FY06, it is \$8.9 million. ORP cost is projected in FY07 to be \$11.6 million and in FY08 it will rise to \$15.6 million.

## New Board Officers Elected

Board chair is now Mary Hughes of Anchorage, replacing Brian Rogers of Fairbanks, who served three consecutive years as board chair; vice chair is Joe Usibelli Jr. of Healy; secretary is Cynthia Henry of Fairbanks; Carl Marrs of Anchorage is treasurer.

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## Future Board Meetings

February 15-16, 2006  
Juneau

April 12-13, 2006  
Nome

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