

## **Perspective of Student and Faculty Leadership**

Scott Downing, UAA Faculty Senate President; Associate Professor  
of English, UAA (Kenai Peninsula College)

Alex Jorgensen, USUAA, Speaker of the Assembly; Student

Prepared Opening Statement:

**Scott Downing**, Associate Professor of English, UAA (Kenai Peninsula College); UAA Faculty Senate President.

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To the chair, my name is Scott Downing. I am an Associate Professor of English at UAA's Kenai Peninsula College campus and I currently serve as president of the UAA Faculty Senate.

I'm here today to emphasize the importance of faculty, faculty perspectives, and faculty governance in the life and success of UAA as we consider structural changes in the UA system.

Faculty embody the mission and values of an institution through their responsibility for programs, curriculum, teaching, research, and academic policy. The Faculty Senate serves as the collective voice for that work. Universities are incredibly complex institutions that must serve the needs of the students and communities with which they are connected.

They must remain true to their mission as evaluated by accrediting bodies. Those accrediting bodies' (ours is the NWCCU) ensures the degrees students are receiving have value to the employers and the public. The existence of an institution depends on its accreditation.

Faculty **MUST BE** deeply involved in the accreditation process to ensure that the requirements for accreditation are being met. Administrators, while often well-meaning, cannot know all the consequences of their decisions, and that is why accrediting bodies **REQUIRE** the input of faculty in the process.

There continues to be an absence of meaningful faculty involvement in far reaching decisions, including the discussion of single accreditation and other structural options. There has also been a widespread failure to use cost benefit analysis before recommending major structural change and a lack of transparency surrounding those decisions.

In the last four years, there have been no less than 15 resolutions and memos from Faculty Alliance and UAA Faculty Senate asking President Johnsen and Statewide Administration to include more meaningful faculty involvement in decision making and to provide detailed cost benefit analyses on these decisions.

These resolutions have questioned a variety of strategic initiatives that have been pushed forward without cost benefit analysis and without meaningful faculty involvement.

The University of Alaska College of Education situation is one example. In Dec. 2016, the president recommended the Board of Regents approve consolidation of the UAF, UAA, and UAS Colleges of Education under a single accredited college.

This decision was pushed forward without the support of the faculty and ignored their concerns about its effect on accreditation.

Nine months later, in a report on the progress of that effort, President Johnsen stated that “we have learned that there are significant uncertainties that could possibly impact UAS’ institutional accreditation.”

In the report, the president also noted that NWCCU President Susan Ellman had concerns about the request saying it would be “challenging because it is unprecedented in her long experience at NWCCU”. She went on to characterize the request as “much more complex than the NWCCU is accustomed to reviewing due to the number of institutions involved and the major scale and implications of the change.” Those same concerns had been raised by the faculty. This is but one example of the importance of in-depth meaningful faculty involvement in discussing structural change BEFORE it moves forward.

Recent efforts to conduct academic review across the Statewide system moves important decisions away from those program faculty who are best able to assess and evaluate those decisions. In a larger sense, the current Statewide structure undermines the effective involvement of faculty at the three universities in important decisions.

Faculty governance through the Faculty Senate serves as the means to share faculty perspectives. It is not the opinion of an individual administrator or faculty member. It encompasses the wisdom of the faculty as a whole. It helps protect accreditation through a continuous process of the assessment of learning. It helps ensure our students and communities are effectively served. Faculty governance is the collective voice of the values of UAA, and, now, more than ever, it is imperative that it be heard.

Prepared Opening Statement:

**Alex Jorgensen**, USUAA, Speaker of the Assembly; Student.

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To the chair, my name is Alex Jorgensen, and I am a senior at UAA, with a major in political science. I have been part of student government since coming to UAA and currently serve as Speaker of the student Assembly.

When providing formal testimony, I always try and stick to the facts. I firmly believe that combined with logic, the facts always lead to rational decision-making. However, in the situation we find ourselves in, I see no more pertinent information than the current feelings of the student body.

Over the past four years, I have grown to love every single aspect of UAA. From its diverse community to its open-access mission, UAA has become a second home. During my tenure here at UAA, we have experienced some significant setbacks, from declining state support, to the loss of programmatic accreditation for our initial licensure programs. Despite these challenges, our current situation is something different. I am fearful for the future of my institution.

Ever since February 12th, 2019, students in the University of Alaska system have been sent a crystal clear message; that we are not important. When governor Dunleavy announced a \$135 million reduction to the university, we were told our future was not important. When we lost scholarships that we earned through hard work and a rigorous curriculum, we were told that the work we do for our communities is not important. When the legislature failed to override the vetoes, we were told that we were simply not valuable or worthy of Alaska's investment. These were hard messages that we received.

The pending decision by the Board to consolidate UAA into "One UA" amplifies that pain. Students feel that this "one university" is being shoved down our throats. At the same time that the statewide administration was forcing us to accept the one university model as reality, statewide was telling the world that the student body was being actively engaged in the process. We were not.

Working groups were established the week before classes to begin the process of consolidating the eight academic colleges. Were student governance groups consulted on including students in the process? No. We were barely even on campus.

We were sent a weekly email, and the administration did have one or two conversations with a few members from student governance groups. On this basis can it be said that the administration is actively engaging the more than 25,000 students across the system? The answer is an unequivocal NO!

The conduct of the administration on this matter sends us a clear message yet again, that we, the primary stakeholders of this university, are not important. This has been the entire tune of this top-down centralization approach from President Johnsen.

Because students aren't involved, because we are not apart of the process, it is leading to devastating consequences — one of those being the loss of open-access admissions policies. As many of you may know, UAA is the only fully open-access university in the state. The majority of our bachelor programs do not require selective admissions. Now, why do we have that? Why is open access necessary? Because EVERYONE deserves an opportunity at higher education. That student who barely made it through high school with a 1.5 GPA because they had a rough home life. Yes, he or she deserves a chance at higher education.

UAA has developed systems and support networks to give students like this a chance. They may take, 6, 7, or even 8 years to graduate, but they get the job done. UAA graduates students who would not be successful in any other traditional academic institution.

A few weeks ago when I was in a meeting with President Johnsen, I explained to him the importance of open enrollment to our students and the Anchorage community to which he replied: "we will have to balance the enrolment policies if we choose to consolidate." I'm sorry, this just doesn't cut it. You are either open enrolment, or you are not. You either provide access to higher education for ALL, or you don't. There is no in-between. This top-down centralization approach is putting pathways to education for generations of students in jeopardy.