

Alternative Models

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Prepared Opening Statement:

Dr. Max Kullberg, Assistant Professor, Pharmaceutical Sciences and the WWAMI School of Medical Education.

To the chair, my name is Max Kullberg. I am an Assistant Professor with the WWAMI School of Medical Education.

Thank you for this opportunity. I would like to talk to you about decentralizing the University of Alaska system, which has been proposed by the Chancellors. Decentralized models for universities exist around the country including the Claremont colleges in California and the recently decentralized Oregon university system. Decentralizing is a strategy for reducing administrative costs and increasing local governance. As has been mentioned, decentralization could be accomplished by legislatively moving powers to a board of trustees for each university, or by creating a separate Alaska State University. The advantages of a decentralized model compared to a centralized merger model, are as follows:

First, a decentralized model would largely save costs by reducing administration. We have heard from legislators and stake holders that they would like to see the university's money go to instruction and for cost savings to come from reducing administration. This makes sense, since the University of Alaska system spends nearly double the national average on administration. Over 40% of that cost is from UA statewide, which has a budget of \$52M per year. If we are going to reduce administrative costs, we must talk about creating a more efficient statewide unit. The Oregon legislature recently took this step. They gave autonomy to the chancellors, created boards of trustees for each public university and downsized their central administrative office. We should and can do the same. The legislature of Alaska has the authority to shift responsibilities, now possessed solely by the Board of Regents, to boards of trustees for UAF, UAS and UAA.

A more decentralized leadership structure would reduce the unchecked administrative spending at statewide and allow the Chancellors to make precision reductions to local administration. The Chancellors have already made such cuts, largely absorbing this year's \$25M cut. If cuts do extend to academic programs, adjustments are best managed locally by those who know their program's mission, curriculum, students and community connections. Such local control has already led to natural collaborations between UAA, UAF and UAS in chemistry, philosophy and engineering as the programs rely on each other to accomplish their goals. Much more disruptive to students would be the top down approach of merging the three universities, which would largely eliminate face to face contact at two of the campuses and rely on distance learning to the third, lead campus.

The School of Education is an example of this approach. Not only did it precipitate the loss of accreditation at UAA, it has also resulted in a 38% decrease in student

enrollment in education this year across the whole university system. That is 38% fewer teachers that will be available for our k-12 school districts in just a few years. My daughter's second grade class already has 29 students. What is it going to look like in a few years? This will disrupt our community. A system-wide merger and consolidation will impose this disruption on a larger scale, on the entire state.

The most important aspect of decentralizing is that it would allow for increased local governance. As Mayor Berkowitz pointed out at the last Board of Regents Meeting, he doesn't think consolidation is the answer and said that the system works best when there is a local authority at the University that can work directly with the community. This is contrary to the President's proposed leadership structure, which would eliminate the Chancellors and Provosts and transfer authority to himself. Only with local autonomy can a university truly serve and align with its community.

UAA, UAF and UAS serve very different cities with different workforce needs and different students. Our students at UAA have made their voice heard. They don't want an online education. They want to be face-to-face with their teachers. They want to sit next to their peers. Moreover, research has shown overwhelmingly that underrepresented students like those at UAA, do not do well with online education. With online educations they are more likely to fail their courses, are less likely to graduate and will have more difficulty finding a job after graduating. We have data from UAA that confirms these conclusions. In organic chemistry, 30% of students fail when it's delivered in a face to face format. When the exact same content is delivered, by the exact same teacher, just moved to an online format, 70% of students fail. That is over double the failure rate from moving a course to online, and this is the model that the President wants for our entire university system.

UAA has evolved to fit the students of UAA and has aligned with the community so that students can most effectively transition into our workforce. If the universities are required to merge and UAA is governed from a plane ride away, this community will lose this university and once it's gone it's not coming back. In summary a decentralized model would decrease unchecked administrative costs at UA statewide and would increase local governance so that UAA, UAF and UAS truly serve the students and their regions.

Prepared Opening Statement:

Dr. Paul Dunscomb, Professor and Chair, Department of History, UAA.

To the chair, I'm Prof. Paul Dunscomb, chair of the department of history at UAA.

When we to talk about the restructuring of higher education in Alaska, it is critical to note this is not a discussion about declining budgets and cost savings. It's not about how diminished state support gets distributed. Questions regarding the structure of higher education in Alaska are much more fundamental. They are about mission, and purpose. Who shall have access to higher education, and who shall not? What value can the state of Alaska expect to realize from its system of higher education.

Higher education in Alaska has evolved since the days of statehood and it must evolve again. It is also clear that no matter what model we ultimately end up adopting for the system (how our product is delivered), the basic governance structures for higher education in Alaska require reform. The Alaska Legislature has a critical role to play in this.

In 1974 the Board of Regents and the UA President Robert Hiatt approved a measure to grant the branches of the University of Alaska in Anchorage and Juneau permission to seek their own accreditation. In 1975 the University of Alaska deeded its own accreditation to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. When it did so the University of Alaska as such, an accredited, degree granting institution whose faculty teaches students and conducts research, ceased to exist. During those forty-five years the vast bulk of higher education in the state of Alaska has been delivered by three separately accredited universities, known since 1987 as UAF, UAA, and UAS. While there remains an entity known as the University of Alaska it is a purely administrative one, costing \$52 million a year.

The basic shape of higher education in Alaska has been at variance with the constitution for forty-five years. Up until last week, the only proposal for restructuring that had received serious attention was for consolidation of the three universities into a "new UA." One justification for it was the language of the constitution (Article VII, Sections 2, 3), which describes a University of Alaska under a Board of Regents. However, trying to stuff forty-five years of institutional evolution and growth into that form is rather like the tailor cutting the customer to fit the suit. Far better would be a new legal framework building on what presently exists and providing for greater autonomy and improved local governance.

There are three particular ways the legislature could do this.

The constitution could be amended to conform with the current reality. This would likely prove a heavy lift, however. There are measures short of constitutional reform that the legislature might entertain.

Article VII, Section 3 notes the Board of Regents shall operate “in accordance with the law.” As authors of the law you have the power to redefine and separate the duties of the board to allow for more effective governance by giving each of the three universities local boards of trustees and requiring the chancellors to answer to them.

Finally, Article VII Section 1 does permit the state to provide for other public educational institutions. This could take the form of a separate and independent Alaska State University to which you can convey the assets of the University of Alaska Anchorage (land, buildings, curriculum, and accreditation). Prof. Nabors referenced the 1988 Alaska Supreme Court Decision *McAlpine v. University of Alaska* that implied the legislature has the right to do this. In that vein it should be noted that in 1976 the legislature moved and considered a bill that would have broken out all of Alaska’s community colleges into a separate system independent of UA.¹ They ultimately stopped short of doing so, but they did give the matter serious consideration.

Higher Education in Alaska has evolved beyond the ability of a single Board of Regents perched at the very top of the system, to exercise effective governance over the three universities in their charge, especially not peering down through the overcast of Statewide Administration. A decentralized model providing local control and greater autonomy, which you have the authority to provide, is a far more effective answer to the challenges we face than merely insisting on reverting to the form described in the constitution regardless of how ill-fitting to the needs of Alaskans that form is.

Thank you.

¹ W. A. Jacobs. *Becoming UAA, 1954-2014: The Origins and Development of the University of Alaska Anchorage*. University of Alaska Anchorage, 2014. 64-66.