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UNIVERSITY  
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February 2, 2009

Representative Les Gara  
State Capitol, Room 500  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Gara,

An educated and prepared workforce is critical to the success of Alaska's future. The University of Alaska provides hundreds of robust programs at campuses across the state, with certificates and degrees geared to meet the current needs of Alaska – petroleum technicians, teachers, engineers, nurses, and more.

However, there is insufficient financial aid available to help these students achieve their goals. The current economy is widening that financial divide. Access to education is especially critical for Alaska's first generation and low-income college students. Unfortunately, Alaska is 51<sup>st</sup> among other states and the District of Columbia in college-bound rates of low-income youth (FY 1994 to FY2005).

This year the University has responded to this tremendous need by awarding \$818K from its annual budget in grants to students. In addition the Alaska Student Loan Corporation and, through your advocacy, the State of Alaska has funded ACPE's program – the *Alaska Advantage* education grant with total funding of approximately \$1.25 million. This is a good start; however for Alaska to reach the average needs-based grant expenditure of other states, nearly \$7 million is required annually. Alaska must continue to invest in need-based financial aid programs.

The Alaska Achievers' Incentive Scholarship Program (HB 94) was developed by the Coalition of Student Leaders at the University of Alaska. Enjoying the full support by both the students and administration of the university, this program would offer substantial need-based relief to eligible, high-achieving students. By directing funds to those students earning a B average or higher, this program will not only provide access to those with economic need, but it will also serve to shore up the future leadership of our state. If they graduate from the University of Alaska, they most always stay in Alaska.

If I can answer any questions or be of any further service, please contact me.  
Thank you,

Mark R. Hamilton, President  
University of Alaska System