


To: Dr. Dan White
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research

Michelle Rizk
Vice President of University Relations & Chief Planning, Strategy, and Budget Officer

From: Richard Caulfield, PhD 
Chancellor

Re: Legislative inquiry about UAS Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Marine Transportation

Date: February 10, 2016

In response to legislative inquiries, you've asked for information about the newly-approved UAS Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in Marine Transportation, housed in our UAS Ketchikan Campus. You've also asked about the extent to which this degree duplicates offerings at AVTEC in Seward, and whether there was communication with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development about this program. This memo responds to your questions.

- AAS Marine Transportation: An academic degree in a career pathway

The Board of Regents approved of the new AAS degree in Marine Transportation in September 2015. It is important to note that the AAS is an academic degree program requiring 60 academic credits, including general education requirements (communication, English, mathematics, social sciences, humanities) plus discipline-related degree requirements. The AAS is part of a professional career pathway that extends from an Occupational Endorsement (9 academic credits) to options for baccalaureate degrees in fields such as business administration, fisheries, or natural resources management.

As an academic degree program, the AAS Marine Transportation is fundamentally different from the important workforce training offered by AVTEC. Our understanding is that AVTEC, accredited by the Council on Occupational Education, offers an array of USCG/STCW compliant maritime training courses and programs that enable a participant to earn discrete licenses, credentials, or endorsements. The University of Alaska Southeast is an institution of higher education accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. As such UAS offers academic degrees that include general education courses common in accredited

associate-level degrees offered nationwide. Thus, even if the name “marine transportation” may appear in both UAS and AVTEC offerings, the programs differ in significant ways.

- Alignment with Alaska Maritime Workforce Development Plan

In seeking Board of Regents approval of the AAS in Marine Transportation, UAS was responding to important recommendations found in the *Alaska Maritime Workforce Development Plan*, produced (2014) in partnership between the University of Alaska, industry employers, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Alaska Marine Highway System, and other key stakeholders.¹ The Plan “is a call to action and a guide for industry, government, and educators to work together to enable Alaska’s maritime sector to remain economically vibrant, ensure that Alaskans are qualified to fill these skilled and well-paid positions, and increase the number of Alaskans in this workforce” (p. 1).

One of the priority occupations identified in the plan (p. 44) is “Vessel operations: Deckhand, Engineer, Captain, and Officer.” Most of these positions require advanced education and training, including both academic degrees and workforce-related licensure or endorsements. The plan calls for action to develop partnerships between industry and educators to introduce Alaskans to vessel operations career opportunities.

- AAS Marine Transportation responds to industry partners and student demand

In developing its Marine Transportation offerings, UAS is responding specifically to the education and workforce training needs of Southeast Alaska, which has over 6,770 jobs in the maritime sector.² Jobs in this sector have grown 15 percent in the last five years, with 29 percent growth in earnings.³ Major employers in the region express strong support for the UAS Marine Transportation program, including the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS), headquartered in Ketchikan. A majority of AMHS employees live in Southeast Alaska, and the agency has taken advantage of affordable, locally-based academic degree options and workforce training.

Other Southeast Alaska employers/partners expressed strong support for the AAS Marine Transportation, including the United States Coast Guard (in public testimony during Regents meeting), Allen Marine Tours, Southeast Alaska Pilots’ Association, Amak Towing Company (Ketchikan), SEA Link, Inc., Marine Exchange of Alaska, Ketchikan Gateway Borough, and Vigor Alaska (Alaska Ship and Drydock). Letters of support for the AAS Marine Transportation are attached.

Importantly, the UAS Ketchikan Campus has been training mariners for over 30 years. The Marine Transportation Program served 465 mariners in AY15, provided credit-bearing university course work and degree pathways. Because courses are credit-bearing and because

¹ https://www.alaska.edu/fsmi/AKMaritimeWFDPlan_HighRes_5-22-14.pdf

² Southeast Conference and Rain Coast Data, *Southeast by the Numbers 2015*, September 2015. p. 6.

³ *ibid.*

the AAS is an accredited degree program, Marine Transportation students can receive federal financial aid. Veterans and current military service members are also eligible for financial aid.

- **Maritime careers increasingly require post-secondary education**

Success in maritime careers increasingly calls for post-secondary education—beyond workforce licenses, certificates, and endorsements. The U.S. Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010 requires formal training for all commercial fishing vessels. While the regulations haven't been finalized, the Act calls for all fishers operating beyond 3 miles to pass "a training program covering certain competencies...the training must include seamanship, navigation, stability, firefighting, damage control, safety and survival, emergency drills, and more" (46 U.S.C. 4502(g)). UAS faculty and staff are gearing up for these new regulations to take effect in 2017 and expecting a significant increase in the number of mariners seeking training.

Beyond this, the *Alaska Maritime Workforce Development Plan* forecasts a growing need for educated mariners due to the "graying of the fleet" (p. 1). This includes vessel operations and shore-side positions that increasingly require a broader array of knowledge and skills typically gained in a university environment: an ability to communicate well in writing and orally, critical thinking and analytical skills, computational abilities, teamwork and leadership skills, ability to work with diverse ethnic and cultural groups, and an understanding of history, economics, and global affairs. These knowledge areas are what are commonly found in academic degrees, including the AAS Marine Transportation.

A significant point about the new AAS in Marine Transportation is that there was little additional cost to the university in implementing it. Nearly all of the classes and instructors were in place—both in the Marine Transportation program itself and for the general education requirements. The time was right to bundle these academic and professional courses into an associate degree program for the benefit of our students. As a result, students can now receive federal financial aid when enrolling in the degree, as can recipients of the Alaska Performance Scholarship.

- **Consultation with Alaska Department of Labor and AVTEC**

You asked about the extent to which the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development—including the Commissioner—and AVTEC were consulted as the University of Alaska Southeast developed this new AAS degree.

As noted above, a chief factor in moving forward with this degree were the recommendations of the *Alaska Maritime Workforce Development Plan*. In 2015 DOLWD Commissioner Dianne Blumer commented about her agency's involvement and the benefits of the Plan: "Seafood harvesters, seafood processors, marine occupations, support industry jobs, and research, enhancement, and management all recognize the need to address our critical and growing workforce shortages together. That's why these groups, joined by five state agencies — Labor and Workforce Development; Fish and Game; Transportation and Public Facilities; Education

and Early Development; and Commerce, Community and Economic Development — and the University of Alaska worked hand-in-hand to develop a strategic plan to recruit, train, and support this important workforce. The plan identifies 23 priority occupations across the four maritime subsectors. It also includes strategies to create a seamless workforce development system that will prepare Alaskans for these opportunities.”⁴

More specifically, DOLWD representative Ms. Wanetta Ayers served as her agency’s staff representative in developing priorities and recommendations.⁵ In an interview about her involvement in crafting the Plan’s recommendations, Ms. Ayers noted the engagement of AVTEC marine training director Terry Federer and also the role of the state’s university system in preparing Alaskans for future employment.⁶ UAS Marine Transportation faculty member Dale Miller and AVTEC program director Federer co-chaired the working group on maritime occupations that contributed to the Plan recommendations.

As for consultation with DOLWD, Commissioner Blumer visited the UAS Ketchikan Campus in July 2014, which included a tour of the UAS Ketchikan Regional Maritime and Career Center. She met with Campus Director Priscilla Schulte and Professor Dale Miller of the Marine Transportation program. They gave the Commissioner a tour of the facility and discussed UAS’ plan to seek approval of the AAS Marine Transportation in the near future. Professor Miller has also traveled to AVTEC in Seward to tour the facility and to consult with maritime professionals involved in workforce training.

I trust that this information responds to the questions raised by members of the Legislature. We welcome the opportunity to respond to any further questions.

Attachments: Letters from Employers

⁴ <http://labor.state.ak.us/trends/nov14.pdf>

⁵ https://www.alaska.edu/fsmi/AKMaritimeWFDPlan_HighRes_5-22-14.pdf, p. 49

⁶ <http://sewardcitynews.com/2014/11/public-and-private-sectors-plan-to-develop-maritime-workforce/>