

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY OVERSIGHT

February 7, 2006

11:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Ralph Seekins, Vice-Chair
Senator Con Bunde
Senator Thomas Wagoner
Senator Ben Stevens
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Kim Elton

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Gary Wilken
Representative Berta Gardner

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Overview - University of Alaska

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

Mark R. Hamilton, President
University of Alaska System
P.O. Box 755000
Fairbanks, AK 99775

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented University of Alaska Overview

Wendy Redman
University of Alaska
P.O. Box 755000
Fairbanks, AK 99775

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information on the University of Alaska Overview

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Special Committee on University Oversight meeting to order at [11:05:47 AM](#). Present were Senators Con Bunde, Kim Elton, Lyman Hoffman, Ben Stevens, Thomas Wagoner, and Chair Gary Stevens. Other legislators present were Senator Gary Wilken and Representative Berta Gardner.

Overview - University of Alaska

CHAIR GARY STEVENS announced that this was the first meeting of the Special Committee on University Oversight. He invited President Hamilton to come forward and speak on the state of the University of Alaska.

[11:06:22 AM](#)

MARK HAMILTON, President, University of Alaska System (UA), opened his remarks saying that he was looking for guidance from the committee and that legislative scrutiny is welcomed and warranted because UA constitutes a significant expenditure for the state.

He briefly reviewed information included in members' packets including: The Commonwealth North report; the legislative audit for FY07; Missions and Measures set forth in HB 250; and the draft report from the McDowell Group.

[11:18:22 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS advised that the Legislature is tremendously supportive of the university and that the committee objective is to honestly review areas of achievement as well as areas that require further attention.

He informed President Hamilton of his request that the National Council on State Legislatures compare UA with other universities throughout the nation, which could result in some work with the National Report Card on Higher Education issued by the National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education. In particular, he said he is interested in discussing affordability, degree completion statistics, how the university benefits the state, and the expansion of the Scholars Program.

[11:19:57 AM](#)

SENATOR CON BUNDE asked him to comment on recent articles about "dumbing down" a university degree.

MR. HAMILTON responded he evaluates how the university is doing by comparing UA student scores on national standardized accreditation tests against national averages. Twenty-one nationally comparable tests are administered at UA and students exceed the national average on 18 of the tests. UA also administers tests for 39 certifications that don't have national comparisons. On those certifications UA students have a 100 percent pass rate on 24. External indications, such as acceptance to graduate school, show that University of Alaska students are competing very well.

SENATOR BUNDE raised several personnel issues and said he would like more information in some other venue.

PRESIDENT HAMILTON agreed.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS mentioned the appeal process.

SENATOR THOMAS WAGONER asked if more students are attending the university now because it costs so much more to go elsewhere.

PRESIDENT HAMILTON replied he'd be guessing if he were to state the cause and effect, but he would generally suggest that more people believe in the worth of going to college.

In 1950 20 percent of the jobs in America required a four-year degree and in 2006 that number increased to just 23 percent. He interpreted that to mean that a tremendous number of jobs require some sort of postsecondary education but not necessarily a four-year degree. He emphasized that the university is the place to get that postsecondary education.

SENATOR BUNDE asked how many students take remedial classes and what that costs.

PRESIDENT HAMILTON replied the national average is about 40 percent and the University of Alaska falls in that range. The difference is that while the national average involves a semester or two in a single course, University of Alaska students often require several years of remediation.

He suggested that college level remediation oftentimes returns unacceptable results but the GED program, which he described as a mischaracterized remediation program, is quite successful.

That test is much more exacting than the current state exit exam yet the students taking it succeed remarkably well. This has been ascribed to a number of reasons, but what hasn't been considered is that particular remediation is more similar to high school classes than the typical university pedagogy.

He proposed that the university explore an "academic red-shirt" program. "Red-shirting" athletes allows them to grow into strong and mature athletes and remediation should provide the same academic result. He emphasized that this is a job for the university and if it hasn't been particularly successful to date, then it's time to change the approach.

SENATOR BUNDE remarked that would indicate more teachers rather than more researchers, which he would support. Furthermore, he'd like to see if the Alaska Scholars Program couldn't be of some help. Allowing that he isn't a fan of the traditional "red-shirt," he asked how academic scholarships compare to athletic scholarships.

PRESIDENT HAMILTON explained that as a Division II school, UA athletic scholarships are dwarfed by academic scholarships.

He described the Scholars Program as extraordinarily successful in getting Alaska youth interested in going to college. Since inception, the number of high school seniors who go to college has increased from 40 to 50 percent. Knowing that the top 10 percent from each high school are going to college has served as a real catalyst for students. Indications are that 98 percent of those graduates still live in Alaska, which demonstrates a very powerful and successful program.

The proposed increase in the Scholars Program and the needs-based scholarship are very timely and the right way to go because it will provide increased access to postsecondary education/workforce development. He reemphasized that that is where the bulk of the university growth has been in the last several years.

[11:43:42 AM](#)

SENATOR BUNDE remarked this will require that university professors teach more than one or two classes a week.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS stated that the committee would look forward to further discussions of how the university will prepare for and relate to the gas line.

11:45:04 AM

SENATOR LYMAN HOFFMAN observed that rural campuses are never mentioned in any university reports. He asked President Hamilton to comment on their role in the university system, how he sees them growing and whether or not they may figure into any capital budget requests.

PRESIDENT HAMILTON responded they are tracked as an important component of the institution. The 12 community campuses receive about 11 percent of the state appropriations, produce approximately 25 percent of the student credit hours, and serve 28 percent of the student body.

He mentioned the new facilities in Kotzebue, Bethel, Homer, Kenai, and Mat-Su then explained that a tremendous amount of money was spent to increase the capacity for distance delivery. That made it possible to export nursing and other health care programs to the rural campuses.

Community campuses are observed constantly and administrative reports are submitted on a bi-annual basis. Those reports indicate that a great deal has been accomplished.

11:49:53 AM

SENATOR WAGONER asked which faculty members would teach remedial classes and how much it would cost.

PRESIDENT HAMILTON admitted it is a significant amount of money, but asserted that it's a worthwhile expenditure. Exact figures would be made available. He clarified that students are already in remediation courses; he would simply like to change the delivery style.

SENATOR WAGONER said he brought the topic up because at the community college level part-time faculty used to teach remedial courses because full-time teachers weren't interested.

11:52:04 AM

WENDY REDMAN, Vice-President, University of Alaska, explained that ABE programs [work retention skills training] are the primary source for developmental education, but they have been chronically under-funded. What that means, she said, is that the students who can't get into the ABE program end up on our

doorstep. Developmental education is handled differently at each campus, but the greatest success comes when partnered with adult basic education programs. Those community programs take a load off the university and are more successful because the pedagogy is different.

SENATOR KIM ELTON stated that he would like future discussions to include the following:

- The web of contacts the university might have with different communities.
 - Decision making process: Webs to the business and labor community
 - Preparation: Contacts with K-12 community or DOE
- What role does research play in attracting good faculty
- How does the university research effort support the academic effort

PRESIDENT HAMILTON agreed.

SENATOR RALPH SEEKINS observed that the university is not only an outstanding educational institution it is also a huge economic engine to the state. He suggested that those two features dovetail very well.

He related a story about unsuccessful transfer of credits between UAA and UAF and asked President Hamilton how he might address the issue.

He mentioned that in his business no one is required to have a four-year degree, but he does prefer that his employees have an associate degree.

[12:00:08 PM](#)

PRESIDENT HAMILTON responded he couldn't wait to supply the data on credit portability because it's an absolute edict that all courses are transferable across the university. When he first came to the university he looked into this issue and in 19 out of 20 cases he found that the individual was pursuing a slightly different degree. The difference is between receiving credit for having taken the course and having the credit count toward a degree. If someone says transferring within the system would cause them to take an additional year to pursue a degree then perhaps all the data isn't known.

Credit portability is precisely the kind of thing the committee should be involved in because it relates to efficiency and service to Alaska citizens, he emphasized. In a state university, credits absolutely have to be transferable.

[12:03:35 PM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS thanked President Hamilton for his comments and reiterated that he would arrange a meeting with staff from the National Council of State Legislatures to discuss national trends and the "report card process." He then summarized the issues that were brought up related to vocational education, the Scholars Program, research, economic development and how it impacts communities, affordability, completion of degree programs and the various benefits to the state.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Gary Stevens adjourned the meeting at [12:05:17 PM](#).