

*Commission on Colleges and Universities  
Northwest Association of Schools and of Colleges and Universities*

**A Focused Interim Visit Report**

**University of Alaska Anchorage  
Anchorage, Alaska  
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*A Confidential Report Prepared for the Commission on Colleges  
and Universities*

## **Introduction**

As noted in the 2000 full-scale evaluation report, the Alaska Higher Education system was reorganized in 1987 into three Major Administrative Units (MAU) in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. In this reorganization, the University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage Community College, Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak, and Matanuska-Susitna Community Colleges were incorporated into one MAU. The University offers associate, baccalaureate, and selected master's degrees. The last full-scale evaluation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities was conducted in October 2000.

The 2000 Evaluation Committee report contained seven general recommendations. A focused interim report was required on two of those recommendations. The purpose of this visit was to report on the progress of the University of Alaska Anchorage in addressing Recommendations 2 and 3 as stated in that report.

The evaluator would like to thank the members of the University of Alaska Anchorage faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community employers for their time and preparation for the focused interim visit. Campus personnel were well prepared for the visit and provided essential backup materials. The visit was conducted on the Anchorage, Alaska campus and downtown center only. Meetings were held with the Chancellor, Assessment Steering Committee, Deans and Directors, faculty leadership, the Community and Technical College faculty assessment team, the Assistant Provost, and Community Campus directors.

A special thanks is extended to Assistant Provost Tom Miller for his preparation of the Focused Interim Report and arrangements for relevant interviews and collating reports, background materials and websites. The Interim report was descriptive of actions taken since the 2000 full-scale evaluation visit. Materials reviewed in addition to the Focused Interim Report included Office of Planning, Research and Assessment website reports, Program Review summaries, Program Audits, Provost Report Card for Assessment, Strategic Map, Department and College Assessment Plans, course content guides, internal memoranda related to assessment, minutes and materials for the Assessment Steering Committee, Graduate Academic Board, and the Undergraduate Academic Board.

There is clear evidence the campus has undertaken a serious commitment to address Recommendations 2 and 3 since the 2000 full-scale evaluation visit.

### **Actions Taken regarding the recommendations:**

#### **Recommendation 2 of the 2000 Full Scale Visit Report**

*The University has made progress in the assessment of educational effectiveness, including the creation of a guidebook for college deans and the implementation of assessments in specific courses and programs, which have led to improvements. However, progress is uneven. The Committee recommends that the University ensure that*

*its educational program assessment process be comprehensive, systematic and institution-wide (Standard 2.B, Policy 2.2)*

The University of Alaska Anchorage has implemented a process of continuous improvement for its academic and administrative units. This process entitled PAAR, an acronym that stands for Plan, Act, Assess and Revise. It serves as the cornerstone for assuring that the institution is achieving its mission. Integral to this process is the implementation of an assessment process that measures UAA's educational effectiveness.

A year before the 2003 focused interim report was written, an internal memo to the UAA Provost from the Assistant Provost responsible for assessment stated that the phase-in implementation of institutional assessment processes and the decentralization of the processes was not working and that the assessment efforts of UAA were not yet in compliance with Northwest Commission on College and Universities standards and Policy 2.2. This memo, combined with changes in key administrative positions and the ongoing efforts of the Assessment Steering Committee, moved the UAA assessment program forward in important and significant ways.

During the past three years best practices have been identified, common definitions prepared, and tools and examples extensively shared. A website has been established that facilitates the reporting requirements for departments and colleges. Outside consultants and campus faculty have conducted workshops to assist in the definition and implementation of learning outcomes assessment. A template has been designed for department and college reporting. A review of plans demonstrated greater participation than in 2000, more consistency, but some continued variation in sophistication.

These activities, combined with collaborative efforts with institutional assessment and research, have resulted in a more systematic and consistent planning and implementation process for UAA. Faculty interviews clearly indicated an understanding of the importance of assessment and a willingness to use the information in improving operations, learning outcomes, curriculum, and overall institutional effectiveness.

There is in place a tracking mechanism of assessment plans and follow-up with departments and colleges on means to improve those plans. Greater infrastructure at the college and department level has enabled support for faculty in developing the assessment process within their units. There was clear evidence that the emphasis on improving and systematizing assessment has resulted in some excellent cross campus faculty dialogue. The General Education Subcommittee is in the process of looking at the campus General Education requirements and continuing to improve methods to evaluate their effectiveness. Program review and program audit practices are in place.

The Chancellor has laid out a strategic map for the future of UAA that incorporates not only state and system key performance indicators, but builds in a process for utilizing institution assessment data in a continuous improvement process. The full cycle of this process has not been achieved and will need to be monitored carefully to assure that the

commitment to assessment and measuring institutional effectiveness is in fact systematic, consistently applied, and utilized for the improvement of the campus.

The current chancellor has announced his retirement; institutional personnel are sensitive to the need to assure that the progress identified in the focused interim report is sustainable and the assessment cycles identified in the plans are in fact implemented and integrated into the fiber of institutional planning and improvement.

To quote a member of the Assessment Committee faculty, "There's a lot more to do but it's getting there!" That is an accurate observation.

### **Recommendation 3 of the 2000 Full Scale Visit Report**

*Through recent and continuing developments that include mergers of institutions, the University of Alaska Anchorage has become an institution with multiple and diverse sites for delivery of educational programming and services. These changes require on going attention to governance, budgeting, allocation of resources, and communication among geographically dispersed locations, The committee recommends specific and demonstrable attention to ensure that all educational units are integral components of the institution's organizations (Standard 2.G.4)*

In 1987 the Board of Regents of the Alaska System restructured the system to include three Major Administrative Units, one each in Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks. This restructuring merged the University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage Community College, Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak, and Matanuska-Susitna Community Colleges into the University of Alaska Anchorage. Thus, today the university offers associate, baccalaureate and master's degrees. This restructuring clearly came with major challenges in addressing planning, communications, resource allocations, and evaluation. The 2000 full scale evaluation committee highlighted this challenge in Recommendation 3 which recommended continued "attention to ensure all education units are integral components of the institution's organizations."

There is a university-wide commitment to the multifaceted nature of the University of Alaska Anchorage. The mission of the institution requires a strong and effective outreach responsibility to the citizens of the region. The focused interim report succinctly identifies the integration of planning, operations, resource allocation, and assessment functions. All college, school, and campus leaders are members of Provost's Council of Deans and Directors. Academic courses and programs at all locations incorporate the same review process as does the hiring, promotion, and evaluation of faculty. The Library Consortium provides library services, including an extensive electronic collection, for all campuses. Personnel are available to assist students in the utilization of library and resource materials at community campuses. Faculty academic and governance committees include representatives from campuses and colleges. The Provost meets separately with community campus leaders to specifically address their needs and/or concerns. Provost personnel travel to campus sites on a regular basis to address on-going issues that may be related to their unique environment or to conduct training around new initiatives or reporting needs. The budgeting model allows for flexibility to direct tuition

revenue to community campuses as well as some special allocations based on the economic or educational needs of the community. Capital improvements, facility planning and improvements, and student fees become particularly important to communities that desire to assure a direct relationship and advantage for their campus and students.

The use of electronics, video-conferencing, e-mail, and websites has enhanced communication and access to information. Interactive video and web-delivered or enhanced courses are increasing, providing increased access to some high demand programs.

Faculty leadership interviewed were keenly aware of their university-wide responsibility and the importance of involving the entire university community in their governance structure and academic planning. Faculty groups are diligent in making sure invitations to workshops on tenure, promotion, assessment, and other significant topics include University wide groups and locations.

However, the disproportionate burden frequently falls on the community campus personnel to travel more and initiate contacts. While the campus leadership acknowledges that this is the nature of being distant from the larger campus, it speaks to the need to continue to be attentive to the needs and interests of all campuses. Based on the history of these communities once having their own separate colleges, now changed to the current Major Administrative Unit model, the need to be attentive to community interests is high.

## **Commendations and Recommendations**

### **Commendations:**

1. The assessment process and commitment to continuous improvement has become visibly more systematized and integrated into campus culture and decision-making. The critical involvement of faculty at the department level, as well as through campus-wide committees, is commendable. The UAA has demonstrated significant progress in the past three years in achieving common definitions, sharing expertise and tools, and using assessment data to improve instruction, curriculum, and campus processes. There is an accountability system in place to assure continued commitment to the campus-defined continuous improvement process.
2. Faculty and academic leadership demonstrate a clear commitment to involvement of the entire university community in the governance, planning, and assessment processes. This is a challenge in light of the Major Administrative Unit structure. Nonetheless, technology, combined with this commitment to assure full participation of the university community, has netted significant communication and participation university-wide.

### **Recommendation:**

1. While the current assessment effort is substantially improved from the 2000 full-scale evaluation visit, the UAA defined PAAR process will continue to need attention and due

diligence in implementation through all planned cycles, ongoing review for consistency and sophistication in methodology, and continuous evaluation and improvement. The complexity and unique needs created by the Major Administrative Unit structure requires continued attention to communication, planning, and involvement of all campuses in these processes.