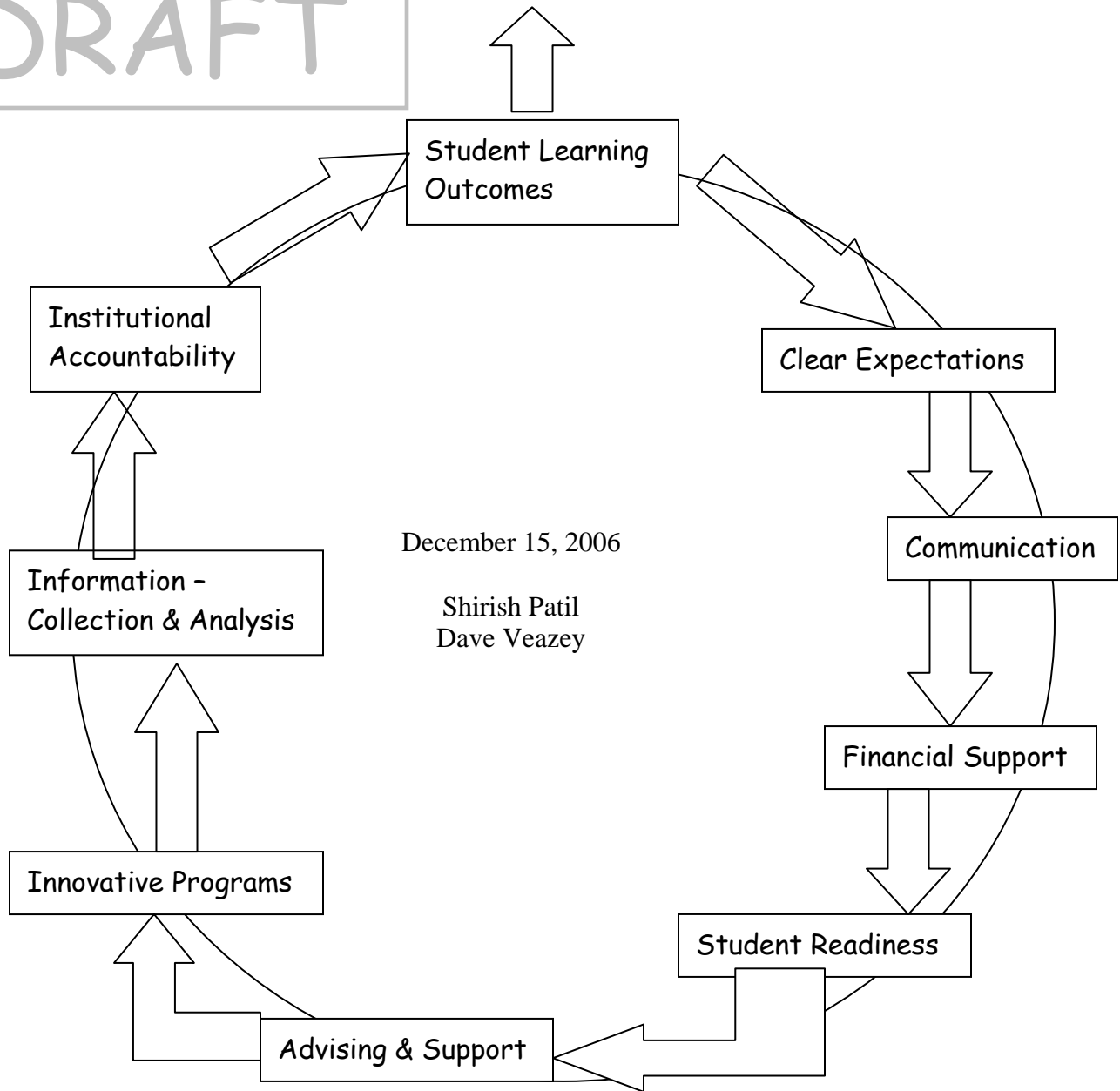


REPORT TO PRESIDENT HAMILTON  
&  
UA FACULTY ALLIANCE

**UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA**  
**STUDENT SUCCESS**

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## The Challenge

Across the nation questions are being asked of higher education regarding the effectiveness of the educational services being provided relative to the associated costs. While much of the discussion and concern currently exists at the governance and policy level at present, it appears inevitable such forces will impact activities of faculty and staff engaged in the activities of student learning and success. Waiting for the accountability fad to subside is not an option. This leaves higher education with two options.

1. Await mandated legislation dictating to the academy desired outcomes and the process to achieve them or;
2. Create systems and information to improve student success while also responding to external demands to the extent possible.

If the inevitability of the accountability push is to be believed, option 2 is clearly the preferred choice. Alaska is well positioned to respond. Being geographically isolated from the lower 48 and having liberal legislative control, we are in the enviable position to learn from other states and create the policy and programs that would be of most benefit to UA students.

Several conditions are operating at present to continue the momentum for change in higher education with regard to cost, value and student learning outcomes.

- The job landscape has changed such that success in some form of post secondary education is required for most citizens to attain economic opportunity. A high school diploma, while sufficient 30 years ago, is no longer a ticket to the American dream.
- Given the educational needs for students to participate economically, the successful transition to, and experience in, post secondary education is being viewed as an entitlement rather than the purview of the intellectual elite. In 1900, 14% of Americans went to high school and 4% went on to college. Today, over 80% of students receive a high school diploma and 25% get a college degree. Almost 60% of HS graduates attend some form of post secondary education and 90% of high school sophomores believe they will go to college. Higher education will need to respond to these pressures in the coming years.
- Since high school is viewed as an entitlement, much of the accountability for student success is, rightly or wrongly, placed with the school. Higher education has been immune to this but may no longer have that luxury.
- The United States is rapidly changing demographically. Many of the diverse students of the future are in ethnic categories that have typically not been successful in the current higher education environment and/or will be first generation college students.
- Given the entitlement nature some view of higher education and the broader population base needing to be served, concerns are being raised about cost, forcing institutions to find ways to justify the expense.

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- Public concerns about cost lead to public calls for increased financial aid from legislators who then need to justify increased expenditures relative to other priorities. This requires higher education to deliver a compelling argument to obtain the resources needed to respond. Solid data demonstrating student learning and success will be needed.

Higher education can, in general, speak to the value it provides for individuals and society. Increased income, reduced crime, reduced health care costs, more volunteerism, economic development and less dependence on social welfare are just some of the quantifiable benefits of a well supported higher education system. However, these general benefits are no longer sufficient. Neither are proxies for success such as tuition revenue, research funding or enrollment. Graduation and retention rates, while a better approximation of student success will still not suffice in the current environment. Rather, policy makers and the public want to know the value of an education at the institutional level with regard to learning outcomes. Why might a student go to one institution as opposed to another? What is different as it relates to student learning and student outcomes?

These are questions higher education has difficulty answering. Faculty autonomy and ownership of the curriculum make standardized definitions of outcomes and success difficult to compare across institutions. Nevertheless, the pressures to supply such information will not subside nor will the expectation of more students desiring to transition to, and succeed in, post-secondary education without the need for remediation and at a reasonable cost.

It is in this environment that the UA faculty alliance wishes to begin a dialogue with the President's Office; a dialogue we believe should never cease. What is more important to the future of the University of Alaska that student learning and student success?

It is our hope that the framework we have laid out in this report will serve as a guide for future conversations regarding strategic choices UA Presidents will make. Each area identified is complex, requiring input and information from faculty, staff and external constituencies. The report by no means represents the totality of what we should focus on but rather, a start. The primary focus of this report begins with the student transition into UA and ends with an assessment of growth after 60 credit hours. The Alliance proposes that we collaboratively explore these issues as a start and identify together critical priorities to better serve students.

The steps outlined below only represent the chronological order a student might experience each realm. It is not meant to be the order UA prioritizes them nor is it representative of campus level needs. The Alliance intends to explore each of the issues below to better understand current strengths and gaps across the system. We hope, in collaboration with the President's Office, to bring experts in these areas to UA to meet with the Alliance and appropriate faculty groups to inform best practice and guide our agenda for the future.

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## 1. Student Learning Outcomes

**Issue:** Define what it is students should know and be able to do upon graduation from UA at the Certificate, Associate and Baccalaureate level.

**Context:** Defining the measurable competencies outside of a specific discipline that we expect students to have through a general education experience at UA should be clearly understood and articulated throughout the curriculum. Ultimately, everything faculty and staff do should be to develop future participants in a democratic society that can think critically, write competently, and analyze numeric and graphical information, irrespective of major.

**Actions:**

- Agree upon student learning outcomes in the area of critical reading, writing and computation at the certificate, associate and baccalaureate level
- Discuss methods for assessment of above outcomes

## 2. Clear Expectations

**Issue:** Students, families and K12 are not given clear expectations regarding the skills and knowledge students must attain to succeed at UA.

**Context:** For K12 to create and implement curriculum that properly prepares students for college, UA has a responsibility to define and communicate the competencies that describe college readiness for UA. These competencies must be aligned with K12 standards and competencies or it is a non-starter. Dialogue between K12 and UA faculty exploring student work together is needed to communicate these expectations at a level that will be meaningful for change.

**Actions:**

- UA faculty agrees on college readiness standards in reading, writing and math.
- Joint committees of UA faculty and K12 teachers convene to evaluate and align standards and competencies in reading, writing and math

- Joint committees of UA faculty and K12 teachers convene to collaboratively evaluate student work in reading, writing and math to clarify agreements on alignment
- UA Regents and State Board of Education adopt collaboratively developed college readiness standards with specified review schedule

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### 3. Communication

**Issue:** Future students, families, K12 teachers and counselors need to understand what is required to be admitted to UA

**Context:** Understanding and navigating the college admissions process is complex. Research has shown that the K12 teacher is often the source of information for many students regarding higher education decisions. Clearly communicating college level readiness expectations, financial aid and admissions processes and the true cost of attendance at UA needs to be available and easy to understand for all.

**Actions:**

- Communicate college readiness standards to schools
- Faculty assist in collaboratively developing curriculum with K12 teachers

### 4. Financial Support

**Issue:** Many low-income students may not have the resources to support their education.

**Context:** Alaska is unique in that it lacks a state supported system of needs-based financial aid. Qualified students require financial support.

**Actions:**

- Explore needs-based financial aid opportunities

### 5. Readiness

**Issue:** Over 2/3 of students come to UA unprepared for college level English, math or both. This includes adults and HS students who do not have the academic skills and knowledge to succeed at the freshmen college level, some of whom may never even try given the lack of any apparent pathway.

**Context:** Readiness applies to young and old alike. As an open admissions institution serving the state, UA must be prepared to provide easy to access programs that bring students to the level of college readiness. In addition, HS students across Alaska should

be provided with an early awareness of their college readiness while still in high school so curricular adjustments can be made prior to entry into UA. UA should also expand dual enrollment, tech-prep or other strategies to provide college prep curriculum to the high school classroom.

**Actions:**

- Create/use standardized assessment of college readiness
- Mandatory placement exams given to all degree seeking students across the system and students enrolled in selected academic courses
- Students are categorized based on academic and social needs to develop programs meeting unique characteristics

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## 6. Advising & Support

**Issue:** Students must create academic plans and have the advising and academic support needed to meet them.

**Context:** Placement is not enough. Students must create a plan to get from non-proficient to college ready. It is not reasonable to expect unprepared students to, on average, navigate the system to reach success without individual and meaningful support. This includes individual attention in the creation of an academic path and the learning resources needed. Lastly, it requires responsibility on the part of the student to follow through on a commitment.

**Actions:**

- Examine and understand current advising practice
- Examine and understand current learning labs and resources
- Identify needs

## 7. Innovative Programs

**Issue:** A variety of students require remedial education. As such, a variety of methods should be utilized in modes of delivery and pedagogy.

**Context:** Programs, especially those associated with remedial education, must have very clear educational outcomes defined such that innovative modes of delivery might be utilized. With these clear standards in place to climb to college readiness, faculty could be highly innovative in the delivery of curriculum to meet student needs.

**Actions:**

- Inventory and understand current developmental education course offering modes

- Identify student needs and constraints
- Identify and fund innovative curriculum ideas, either through technology or through modular modes of delivery

## **8. Information – Collection & Analysis**

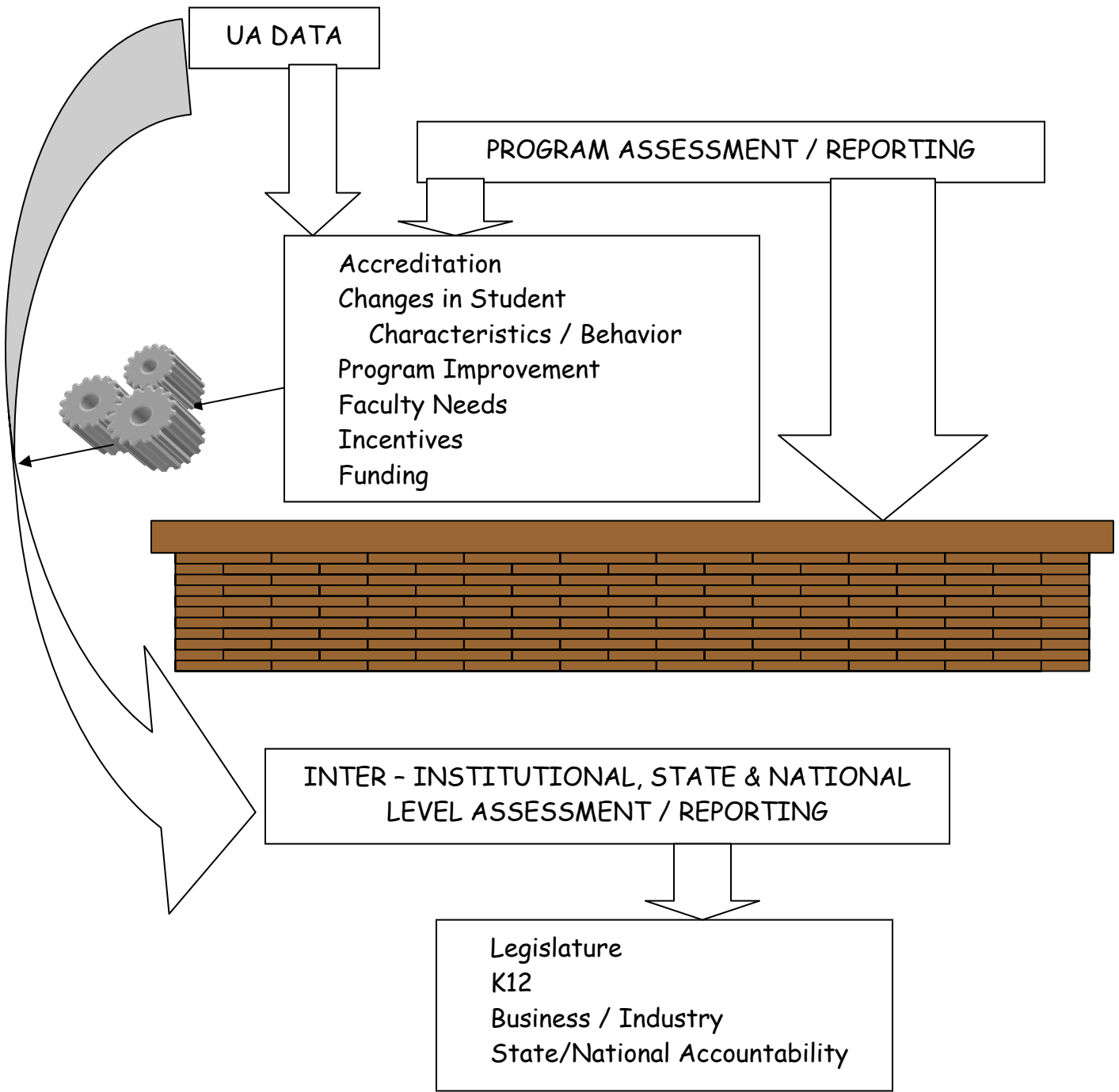
**Issue:** Measure what you value and you will value what you measure.

**Context:** Outcomes regarding success need to be defined such that information is useful for improvement purposes. In addition, information needs to be obtained for the purposes of public reporting. There are times when these two outcomes may not be aligned (see figure). It is important to recognize and appreciate the audience and purpose of various reporting requests such that the appropriate constituency is engaged to provide the information. One possible measure is the “value-added” regarding critical thinking, reading, writing and computation given the student experience at UA. Providing data that is comparable across institutions may prove to be an important action given the recent development of the Voluntary System of Accountability being collaboratively developed by NASULGC and AASC&U. UA should consider participating in such an endeavor.

**Actions:**

- Track progress of the Voluntary System of Accountability and engage when appropriate with faculty senates
- Ensure funded initiatives define outcomes and measure success

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UA DATA

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT / REPORTING

Accreditation  
Changes in Student  
Characteristics / Behavior  
Program Improvement  
Faculty Needs  
Incentives  
Funding

INTER - INSTITUTIONAL, STATE & NATIONAL  
LEVEL ASSESSMENT / REPORTING

Legislature  
K12  
Business / Industry  
State/National Accountability

## **9. Institutional Accountability**

**Issue:** UA must stay alert and responsive to trends in institutional accountability, particularly those coming from association leadership

**Context:** The Spellings Commission report has made clear a need for more transparency regarding student learning outcomes. In particular, the “value-added” provided to a student based on their experience at a particular institution is being discussed at length. Governors and legislators will not be far behind in requesting this clarity of purpose and outcomes. The Faculty Alliance recognizes and appreciates the external pressures UA might be subjected to and desires to find a solution in partnership with the President.

**Actions:**

- Track national trends and state demands regarding accountability
- Where practicable, endorse and support initiatives that support inter-institution comparability regarding student outcomes

## **10. Student Learning Outcomes**

**Issue:** Measure and report what it is students should know and be able to do upon graduation from UA at the Certificate, Associate and Baccalaureate level.

**Context:** Measuring and reporting the competencies outside of a specific discipline that we expect students to have upon exiting UA must be openly and transparently reported to all constituencies. We are here to support the future participants of our democratic society to read, write, compute and think critically and competently and we should not be afraid to measure and report on that noble objective.

**Actions:** Measure, report, learn.