



UNIVERSITY *of* ALASKA
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University Response to Year Seven Evaluation Report

Submitted by
Cathy Sandeen, Chancellor

Submitted to
The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)
December 12, 2018



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Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
8060 165th Avenue NE
Suite 100
Redmond, WA 98052

Dear Dr. Ramaswamy,

The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) submitted its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report on August 14 and hosted an evaluation committee from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities on October 8-10. This letter is in response to the evaluation committee's final report, dated November 10 and received from the Commission on December 3, 2018.

We wish to thank the evaluation committee for their thorough, thoughtful, and perceptive review. During the site visit, the individuals and groups that met with the evaluators felt listened to and that their perspectives were valued. The UAA community appreciated the evaluators' high level of experience, expertise, and professionalism, and we are grateful, in particular, for the leadership of the Chair, Dr. Laura Woodworth-Ney.

As the new chancellor, I am inspired by the evaluators' findings and am proud to lead an institution that demonstrated to the evaluators that it is fully committed to its mission. The committee noted that UAA has the robust planning, assessment, and improvement processes in place to sustain its mission through fiscal and other challenges, and we have as our priority "to support student success and well-being, and to maintain an access mission that has provided identity to the institution since its inception" (p. 6).

The report acknowledges the unique characteristics of UAA, the "massive" region it serves, and the need to use a variety of approaches to serve UAA's many communities (p. 7). We are pleased that the report compliments several significant efforts underway at UAA: our inclusive planning processes, particularly the process that led to the development of the short-term strategic plan *UAA 2020*; our culture of diversity and inclusiveness, with a particular focus on Alaska Native communities; our commitment to community engagement and the Public Square; and our extensive efforts related to the assessment and improvement of student learning.

The report also identifies areas of opportunity, and UAA has already begun to respond to that guidance. Descriptions of some of those activities follow.

Recommendation #1: Expand efforts around institutional planning of graduate programs to demonstrate their academic quality and role in mission fulfillment. (Standard 2.C.12)

The institution has taken steps to address the findings of the self-study and the evaluation committee's recommendation around graduate program planning.

After consultation with governance groups, the institution will separate the role of Dean of Graduate Studies from the Vice Provost for Research position. This will allow greater focus on the strategic aspects of graduate program planning and implementation, and the new Dean will be charged to more explicitly articulate and demonstrate for our stakeholders the connection of graduate programming to the core themes and mission of the institution.

Also, UAA has engaged the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) to provide consultation on the strategic development of graduate programs. CGS worked with a small group at UAA, including the faculty chairs of the Faculty Senate Graduate Academic Board and the Graduate School's Graduate Council, on an initial evaluation, and CGS will conduct a consultation site visit this spring. Following the CGS site visit, a new working group will act on the recommendations of the consultants.

While UAA's graduate programs individually respond to state and industry needs and meet accepted standards of quality, guidance from the evaluation committee identifies the need to more clearly demonstrate strategic, cross-institutional planning as it relates to graduate programming and its overall contribution to mission fulfillment. UAA is taking this recommendation seriously, as demonstrated above.

Recommendation #2: Continue the focus on collaborative Student Success efforts to raise low graduation and retention rates and support Mission Fulfillment. (Standard 5.B.1)

As noted by the evaluators, this fall UAA showed a 6 percentage point increase in its First-Time Full-Time (FTFT) baccalaureate graduation rate. The institution is encouraged by this progress and continues to implement collaborative efforts to ensure the success of each individual student. Recent and planned actions include, among other things, the implementation of UAA's EAB Navigate Advising Platform Seawolf Tracks; a day-long mandatory orientation, advising, and registration onboarding event required for all new degree-seeking students; enhanced programming to support financially vulnerable students, including food and housing security and textbook affordability efforts; and the creation of Academic Pathways (meta-majors) to streamline the first year experience and integrate career exploration opportunities.

Enhancements in advising began with the hiring and training of a new cadre of first-year advisors and a director of first year advising. Next steps include developing a common framework and overarching structure to ensure consistency in training, implementation, and messaging, as well as clarity of roles.

Equally important, UAA continues to develop ways of disaggregating, visualizing, and presenting student success data to track success for all UAA students, not just the small percentage captured in the FTFT graduation rate. The new Vice Provost for Student Success has embarked on a major effort to inform faculty, staff, and students about areas of accomplishment and opportunity, as they relate to particular cohorts of students and their success.

The institution is committed to sustained collaboration across academic and student affairs to ensure the effective implementation of these and other student success efforts.

Other areas of opportunity noted by the evaluation committee: Since coming to UAA I have engaged existing as well as new approaches to regular and transparent internal and external communications from the Chancellor's office. These include ongoing updates about significant issues, such as the budget. Soon after the NWCCU site visit, I announced the creation of several search committees, task forces, and exploratory groups. Some of these groups, such as the Research Administration Task Force and the Training and Development Task Force, directly align with issues noted in the evaluation committee's

report. The announcement includes the timeline for eight important leadership searches, as I am particularly committed to providing greater leadership stability and to reducing interim fatigue.

On November 30, Southcentral Alaska was hit by a severe earthquake. In the aftermath, UAA fully demonstrated its emergency preparedness, resilience, and sustainability. Moving forward, we will build on our strengths, address areas that need attention, and continue to develop coordinated strategies around the shared goals of student success and mission fulfillment.

UAA wishes to express its gratitude to the evaluation committee, the NWCCU staff, and the Board of Commissioners. The self-study process, the site visit, and the evaluators' report will provide important guidance to further improvements at UAA and attest to the value, rigor, and importance of regional accreditation.

Most sincerely,



Cathy Sandeen, Chancellor

Cc: Members of the Chancellor's Cabinet
Susan Kalina, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Institutional Self Study Committee