

DATE: February 6, 2017
TO: President Jim Johnsen
FROM: UAS Faculty Senate
RE: Strategic Pathways Phase I and II

With this letter I would like to share some of the thoughts and concerns put forth by UAS faculty members to the UAS Faculty Senate regarding the process associated with and implementation of your Strategic Pathways initiative. From the opening salvo of Strategic Pathways, there have been mixed feelings among those most impacted and a range of opinions have been communicated to me about your efforts to address the issues that the University of Alaska is facing. I will attempt to equitably represent the diversity of those opinions.

Some UAS faculty have expressed support for your efforts noting that the legislature has put you in a difficult position, i.e. dramatically reducing the UA budget in a very short period of time. Attempts to reduce administrative costs and overlap are cited as part of an effective strategy to meet budgetary constraints. Any meaningful cuts to administrative overhead, consolidation of IT services and any reduction of spending on athletics are interpreted as meaningful cost-saving measures that involve minimal impact to and preservation of academics at the three universities of the UA system. Even if there are no cost-savings from the Strategic Pathways initiative, notes one faculty member, it provides for input from key stakeholders as well as an increased understanding of where programs are or are not successful and a venue for collaborative efforts to address problems.

There is no question that cutting costs while still maintaining the scope and quality of academic programs that form the foundation of the university is a challenging endeavor and most faculty recognize that challenge. However, as the various phases of the initiative have rolled out many UAS faculty are becoming more and more troubled by what they see as missing or flawed aspects of Strategic Pathways, most notably its essential lack of an overarching vision for the UA system and lack of fiscal rigor. The latter is a recurring theme among comments, i.e. Strategic Pathways does not frame proposed goals and objectives in terms of cost and benefit, which is a critical component of any realistic effort to resolve budget issues. The plan's clearly stated tactic of addressing financial details post-implementation may indeed only postpone the university's fiscal instability. There is significant concern regarding transparency of process, as exemplified by the engagement of consultants at unspecified costs, the presentation of proposals to the Board of Regents prior to faculty consultation or vetting and seemingly behind-the-scene negotiations regarding proposal details and final outcomes. At worst, Strategic Pathways is seen as a vehicle for programmatic cuts, program elimination and increased administrative control over academics driven by activities that pit one campus against another and ultimately destroy collegiality. Decisions surrounding the College of Education are especially pertinent to the divisive environment resulting from the manner in which the initiative is unfolding.

While not a majority, there still exists a significant number of UAS faculty that support a vote of no confidence in the Strategic Pathways process and contend that it should be abandoned for an approach that is focused on strengthening academics, drastically minimizing existing administrative overhead and building on the pre-existing strengths of the three universities as centers of learning and research. Less drastic measures that were communicated to me include development and publication of anticipated, long-term outcomes (i.e. vision) as well as cost-

benefit analyses of the Strategic Pathways process and the implementation of its outcomes. Disclosing the external costs (e.g. Professional Growth Systems) and the internal costs (e.g. faculty, staff, administration travel) of Strategic Pathways as well as providing information on the estimated return on those investments would do well in restoring faculty support for efforts to address the critical budget issues that are facing the University of Alaska.

All faculty at UAS are dedicated to the success of the University of Alaska. Based on the feedback I've received from the faculty that I serve as UAS Faculty Senate President, a comprehensive vision for each of the UA campuses, full transparency in the decision-making processes and meaningful implementation of shared governance in future actions, particularly those that affect academic programs, is needed. The great faculty that make the foundation of this university are vested in its success and many are unable to rationalize your efforts in terms of the good of the whole. The UAS Faculty Senate strongly encourages the UA administration to fully exploit the collective will and expertise of faculty at all three universities as Strategic Pathways moves forward because this is what is best for the University of Alaska's students and the people of the State of Alaska.

For the UAS Faculty Senate,

Lisa Hoferkamp
UAS Faculty Senate President