To: Jim Johnsen, President
           University of Alaska

From: Dennis Jones
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Date: September 18, 2017

Subject: Review of Past UA Systemwide Studies

As part of our current engagement with the University of Alaska you asked that we review recent studies of the System with a particular eye to identifying those that are still relevant and have not been fully addressed. The previous studies to which we addressed our attention were:

> "Planning the Future: Streamlining Statewide Services in the University of Alaska System", by Terrence MacTaggart and Brian Rogers, February 2008

> "University of Alaska Review", by James, L. Fisher, Ltd., January 2011

In response to this request we carefully read the reports, categorized the recommendations and drew a set of Observations and Findings.

In summarizing the reports we found that some suggestions are done, others were not done and are irrelevant now, others were contradictory between reports, and others were not done and we have rolled relevant pieces into our own recommendations.

Our major observation is that the reports produced two very different kinds of recommendations. Some of the recommendations deal with issues that are strategic in nature and importance. A second group deals with topics that are very tactical/operational in nature (e.g., the types of photographs and number of colors to be used in University brochure and publications). The focus of this memo is on those of a strategic nature. This for two reasons. First, because of the importance and potential impact of those we categorized as being of a strategic nature. These are also the ones about which we are more likely to have current, personal knowledge. Second, with regard to the more detailed operational recommendations, we are not privy to sufficient information to support justifiable comments. A few of the MacTaggart recommendations and many in the Fisher report fall into this operational category. It is also the case that many of the operational issues are campus, not System, topics.

The findings with regard to those recommendations we deemed to be strategic in nature are summarized below. They are presented by topical area rather than recommendation by recommendation. Many of the comments reflect the framework for allocation of decision authority that we discussed with the Board at their June 1 meeting.

1. Strategic Planning

    Both reports encourage the development of a new UA System strategic plan. The Fisher report goes farther and makes a similar recommendation for each campus. This recommendation has been partially implemented.

    Each of the campuses developed plans shortly after the release of these reports. UAS developed a plan covering the period 2010-17; it is not clear that a new plan has been (is

being) formulated. UAF's plan covers the period 2012-19. UAA has released a plan for the period beginning in 2017. While each campus has goals, linkages to Systemwide goals that may have been in effect at the time are not as strong as we would recommend.

While the System has a stated set of goals (revealed in Strategic Pathways materials and in University Forum summaries), it is not clear that the System has taken steps to make the goals highly visible, build consensus around them, and managed to "gain public buy-in for the public agenda," especially the research and public service roles. There is not clear evidence that the general public is constantly reminded of these goals – for example, primary attention on the System website is drawn to Strategic Pathways, a program review and implementation initiative, not to the goals themselves. We had to do considerable digging to find references to the System goals; they are not embedded in a strategic plan or public agenda. We look forward to our work together in September when we will help you and the Board of Regents clarify your goals. The next step will be for you to articulate them clearly to the people of Alas555.m⊗32rly(of Ala)-690.00000912 0 612 792 reW*ñBT/F2 12 Tf1 0 0 1 49elp you and

academic preparation, recent high school graduates versus adults (with and without prior college), etc.

The programs of emphasis by field and level

Special features – land grant status, distance education infrastructure and capacity, etc.

This is an activity that is fundamental to improving many of the functions performed at the system level – for example, program approval, budgeting for new capacity, etc. We see good progress in defining missions being made in the Strategic Pathways process, and we look forward to addressing this issue directly during the upcoming work session with the Board.

3. Community Colleges

The Fisher report makes several recommendations regarding the provision of community college services within the System. Among the steps recommended were:

To accord vocational, technical, and community college activities much greater prominence in order to better serve the workforce development needs of the various regions.

Create formal, named community colleges in Anchorage and Fairbanks (without creating new campuses). The presence of community colleges in the two major cities would allow UAA and UAF to gradually increase their admissions standards.

Price community colleges such that tuition rates are below those for the senior institutions.

Report statistical results cial features

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The System develop the tools that let it plan for circumstances in which funding from the state is severely curtailed and do so in a way that prevents responses to this eventuality from creating a crisis for the university.

The budget be understood to be the device by which the recommended strategic plan is implemented and through which the institutions are given incentives to contribute to goal attainment. Use of incentives rather than centralized management of initiatives was stated as a clear preference.

The process by which the budget is developed be improved – "turn a highly directive process into a more collaborative one, with early campus engagement."

Develop a long-term strategy for dealing with the growing issue of deferred maintenance and for use of Indirect Cost Recovery funds.

Conclusions

These are all important and are currently being addressed, partially on your own and partially through the efforts in which NCHEMS is engaged. The items we'll talk about during our ongoing work with you will cover these points and more.

5. System/Campus Decision Authority and Responsibility

This general topic, too, was addressed in multiple ways by numerous different recommendations in the two reports. Again, we have chosen to take "reviewers license" and summarize the recommendations as follows:

Move away from System management to System leadership. MacTaggart recommended development of "a more precise and agreed upon understanding of apportionment of responsibility, accountability, and authority between the System and the campuses" going so far as to suggest development of a written statement of "modus operandi." Again the framework we presented at the Board meeting is a useful point of reference for this recommendation. We see that you have suggested such a model and we look forward to fleshing it out in September.

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- o Work with campus IT leadership to determine, on a service-by-service basis, which should remain at the OIT and which should devolve to campuses.

  OIT, IT Council and Project Executive Group should clearly articulate requirements for future projects and solicit ideas and practices from campuses before developing new solutions, PEG should clearly communicate priorities and timelines for IT system improvements – outsource when necessary to accomplish key improvements.

  IT Council should focus on strategic IT issues leaving decisions

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8. Curricula

The MacTaggart report is silent on this topic. Fisher recommends a common general education core across the campuses (and research on those curricula that are best at producing the kinds of general education outcomes desired). This report goes into some detail regarding specific general education requirements – e.g., require a laboratory science course and implement a writing competency exit exam.

Curriculum matters have been at the core of the Strategic Pathways initiative, although the focus appears to be on doing things more efficiently rather than on producing graduates with the requisite skills and knowledge. There is no evidence of a focus on competencies in what we could find.

Conclusions

Most curricular issues are campus-level matters that are best avoided at the System level. Some, however, are appropriately addressed at the System level; the issues being addressed by Strategic Pathways and the ongoing work of aligning GERs fall into this latter category. While many key academic questions are being addressed by the teams working on the various components of Strategic Pathways, we would note the failure of both reports to address the role of the System in providing academic policy leadership. This is an area in which campuses jealously guard their turf but in which there is a legitimate role for the System—in setting an agenda (for example, dealing with gen ed and transfer), in convening stakeholders to hammer out solutions, in working with K-12 in establishing standards for college readiness, and a myriad of other issues. We understand that you are moving in this direction through the Strategic Pathways process and we encourage you to keep pushing this agenda forward.

9. Retention and Graduation

Fisher recommends that "the President of the University of Alaska make the improvement of retention and graduation one of his very highest priorities." He also recommended studying the reasons for such low rates and the impact of certain services and practices on improvement. You have clearly drawn attention to the issue in your public pronouncements and the campuses have committed to improvement in their strategic plans. Less clear is the extent to which there is a concerted Systemwide effort being made in this arena. For example, we don't see traces of initiatives such as those being promoted by Complete College America – revised approaches to developmental education, for example. While to some extent hokey, these initiatives are also proving effective. These comments may well be

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