

Final Report

A REPORT TO MARK HAMILTON, PRESIDENT UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SYSTEM

REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS: STUDENT SERVICES AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

A team of student affairs professionals visited the University of Alaska System during the last week in January and first week of February 2002.

The charges were to:

- Review current student services practices and organization at each UA campus as well as the system office.
- Identify strengths as well as opportunities for enhanced services and practices.
- Discover ways in which increased student enrollment and retention rates can be realized.
- Identify ways in which the President should support, enhance and strengthen student services at a system and campus level.
- Strengthen the interaction of student services professionals and programs between UA campuses and the President/SW office.

The first team was comprised of Dr. Doris Ching, Vice President for Student Affairs, University of Hawaii, Manoa and Dr. Shannon Ellis, Vice President for Student Services, University of Nevada, Reno who visited all three MAU's together, while Dr. Donald Hossler, Professor, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services, Indiana University, Bloomington made his visit alone. Each team is submitting a separate yet related report to the President with conclusions and recommendations.

We would like to thank Mike Sfraga and his many statewide colleagues for their assistance in allowing us to have open dialogue. We would also like to thank the administrative leadership, student service professionals, faculty and students on each campus we visited. Your hospitality, enthusiasm, and commitment were appreciated and noteworthy. Clearly, something special is brewing on **all** the campuses in Alaska.

OVERVIEW

It is obvious that many hard working and dedicated professionals work to serve students attending the University of Alaska. This standard held true on the rural and urban, small and large campuses in the Alaska system.

Two overarching observations overshadow the following recommendations for the President and system office in the area of student services:

1. The system office is maturing and in need of administrative development. This is necessary to provide expertise and leadership to ensure a successful future for higher education in Alaska. A similar maturation is occurring on all campuses as well. Thus, there is need for statewide policies, processes, timelines, deadlines and structures to support this.
2. There is a lack of coordination and facilitation at the system and campus level that prohibits expanded student services and strategic enrollment management efforts. As directives and targets are established regarding enrollment, curriculum development and degree-offerings, there is little context to give meaning. By this we mean that this has not linked enrollment targets to academic initiatives. Moreover, the necessary student services infrastructure (at the campus and system level) needed to assure critical retention and student success is lacking. There is also a general perception of a lack of institutional support for an overall student success model. As the team progressed in its travels and conversations with professionals there was much need expressed for a system-wide master plan. This plan should differentiate campus missions, allocate resources accordingly and provide focus and direction for all components of the University – including student affairs.

UA System Office Insights and Recommendations

Issue

The campuses were pleasantly surprised when we asked, “What can the system office do for you?” They had never been asked such a question. The consulting team even observed that such a question had not been posed to them at their own institutions. Individuals on all campuses quickly replied with a wide variety of suggestions. Many are set forth in this report. Every campus affirmed the need for a senior level system-wide administrator to coordinate, facilitate and lead the student services effort in the system office. This would be perceived as a visible commitment to students and student services and a powerful position “at the table” within the president’s senior staff. This position should meet regularly with the senior student affairs officers on each campus.

Recommendation 1

The System office should engage campuses and external constituencies in a statewide strategic plan for higher education in Alaska during the remainder of 2002. A plan should be in place January 2003 through the end of 2009.

Recommendation 2

The President should establish the University of Alaska Office of Student Services. The President already has at his disposal a small number of professional staff members engaged in a number of critical student services functions including enrollment management. However, these

individuals currently reside within UA Program Development and are tasked with a number of related and unrelated initiatives. Focusing this particular office on student services may provide critical support and leadership in the near future.

The team also recommends that the President establish, in the very near future, the position of Vice President for Student Services or Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management. This individual should direct the UA Office of Student Services and lead the system's efforts in expanding and enhancing student services throughout the university. The Vice President should serve as the University's Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO). Given the importance of this position, their office should be located near the President's office. This individual should possess a doctorate and campus-based experience in the field of student affairs. These credentials, along with others that should be developed, will assure success at both the system and campus level.

This individual should also be the statewide leader to ensure the rural campuses receive the recognition and support needed to be successful in educating an important population in Alaska. It should be noted that the site team found that the expertise currently exists at the system level to fill the identified staffing needs and structural changes recommended.

Recommendation 3

The Senior Student Affairs officers (SSAOs) on each campus should meet regularly with the Vice President to ensure effective collaboration, ongoing communication, planning and assessment. This body will formulate policy, ensure uniform processes, engage in professional development and in doing so, strengthen services to students on all campuses including the rural campuses. The current Student Services Council should be "institutionalized" by the President and Board of Regents (if necessary) to assume this role.

Issue

The awareness and support of the Board of Regents is critical to the success of strengthening student affairs on every campus and system-wide. It came to our attention that the Board frequently engages in important conversations and decisions regarding the academic component of higher education but rarely, if ever, dealt with student services issues. This is noted despite the fact that the Regents have a committee for Academic and Student Affairs. As more than a symbolic gesture, a Regents committee should exist to heighten knowledge of and action related to student services.

Recommendation 4

The Alaska Board of Regents should establish a student services committee that would be distinguished by its attention to supporting student services and, thus, improving student life on all UA campuses. The initial work of this Regents' committee should be an immersion into the data, assessment results and face-to-face visits with students and those who work to serve them at the three state universities and their rural campuses.

Issue

A strategic plan for higher education in Alaska, a system-wide Office of Student Services, a Vice President for Student Services, a Student Services Council, and a Regent's committee on student

services are critical components that must be in place to ensure successful enrollment management and student success. The challenges for the University and the state of Alaska are known and the necessity to proceed in a systematic and purposeful fashion are obvious to ensure best use of human and financial resources, directed and thoughtful growth, and consistent attention to recruitment and retention of new and traditional student populations.

Recommendation 5

The system office should lead the development of a statewide enrollment management plan for 2003-2009. Rural campuses and distance education should be integral parts of this plan along with traditional enrollment management strategies.

Recommendation 6

In order to ensure leadership and success there should be a statewide Director of Enrollment Services, within the proposed SW Office of Student Services. Recognizing that resources are scarce we would advise consideration of a reorganization of existing skilled staff with the personal style, experience, professional knowledge and technical skills. The Director will provide vision, coordination, and facilitation throughout the campuses in the implementation of critical enrollment management services necessary to realize any campus-based strategic plan.

Issue

Campus visits showed widely disparate structures for the enrollment management functions. Admission and recruitment efforts were housed in business affairs, student services or academic affairs. Related functions of registration and financial aid were also separated into various units at the institutions. No one model existed nor did an assessment of its effectiveness. In all instances there was a significant “disconnect” from the retention services of the university. Offices were at best, not communicating and at worst, working cross-wise which rendered all efforts less effective. This division of services or placement in a structure where time and understanding could not be devoted leads to less chances of success even with the best of strategic enrollment plans.

Recommendation 7

As the enrollment management plan is being developed, campus-based services should be aligned to carry out the planning and the action necessary to succeed. All recruitment and retention services ranging from admissions to financial services to counseling/advising should be centrally located in the division of student services.

Recommendation 8

The SSAO (Dean of Students) of each campus should be re-titled to Vice Chancellor for Student Services (VCSS). The VCSS hired must have a strong student services background and leadership skills in the area of resource allocation, student-centered planning and strategic implementation based on assessment as well as sensitivity to the importance of the rural campuses and clientele. On some campuses this may involve the elevation of dean of students or a new hire. The title and level afforded a dean is not appropriate for the importance of this person's role nor the demands and expectations that will be placed upon him or her. The title and background of the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) places them in a position to influence

and direct the vast issues of student services including but not limited to enrollment management.

Issue

Successful planning along with effective use of resources is heavily dependent upon ongoing assessment of students and student services. On a system and campus level there is very little assessment based on educational outcomes, satisfaction and effectiveness of programs.

Nationally, the field of student services has lagged in this regard until the past five years. There is now much available to the state and campuses in terms of tools and strategies for assessing a wide variety of student life outside the classroom.

Recommendation 9

The UA System should engage in a coordinated assessment plan to ensure satisfaction, use and appropriate outcomes from the many services and programs offered to assist students in rural, distance education and campus settings. Statewide and campus-based efforts will ensure an ongoing schedule of assessment activities that should range from pre-admissions/prospective students to graduating seniors and alumni. Application of the results should be noted in annual reviews as well as the budget process. As a culture of assessment evolves within student services it would be advisable to showcase efforts to the Regents and others.

Issue

We felt a very strong connection to our student services colleagues throughout the state. The conversations with rural student service professionals in person and on the phone indicated that the philosophy of removing barriers, providing support and linking to the academic mission are commonly shared beliefs throughout the state and nation. A variety of student service professionals on every campus we visited expressed a desire to gather with colleagues on an annual or every two-year basis for a statewide student services symposium. They expressed the problems of professional isolation that leads to negative insulation and commiseration.

Recommendation 10

The system office should work with campuses to coordinate a statewide symposium of student affairs. Showcase events of successes and failures, innovations and traditions could lessen the isolation and provide recognition. Time for counterparts on each of the campuses to meet and share issues, ideas and solutions would build collegiality. Keynoters could bring added emphasis to the priorities that arise from the strategic plan for higher education. The initial symposium should be keynoted by the President in a speech that sets clear expectations and strong support for the value and work of student services in Alaska. Similar messages from each of the campus chancellors would focus their attention and raise the spirits of professionals who often feel invisible in their contributions to learning.

Issue

As was expressed earlier, there was often surprise when we asked, “What can the system office do for you?” The power of that question was apparent. Student services staff thought carefully and answered with a wide range of ideas. This question combined with the sense of isolation from colleagues on other campuses led us to see the incredible value of having a team of outside

professionals visit with staff and students on the main campuses. There was noticeable appreciation for our interest, but even more so for the interest of the system office.

Recommendation 11

Statewide professionals should set aside time for an annual mid-winter daylong visit to each of the campuses following a format similar to ours. Connections with the rural educators are also important. The ability to listen, ask questions, visit with people face to face, provide feedback and recognition when warranted would have a very powerful impact of the hard working staff.

Issue

We observed that the salaries of UA Student Affairs professionals are not competitive with comparable positions and institutions nationwide. This is problematic in the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals who are critical to the advance of the UA system's plans and goals through 2009.

Recommendation 12

The UA System should follow national trends when determining the salary levels and structures of student affairs professionals. We recommend a joint review of salaries within the UA System by a task force comprised of Human Resources and Student Affairs personnel. The combination of these two professional areas is critical to the development of an accurate analysis. Both NASPA and NACUBO have developed salary surveys and structures that should prove helpful in this process.

Issue

The ability to talk with student services professionals on the rural campuses gave the visiting team insight into the special challenges they face. Their off site needs must be continuously acknowledged and addressed. Advocates on the campuses are vocal yet we noted that they could be viewed by colleagues with aloofness. This is an unnecessary situation that can be alleviated by system leadership on rural and native Alaskan issues that provide outreach and voice to these staff and students.

Recommendation 13

The Vice President for Student Services in the system office should act as the lead advocate and coordinator for rural and native Alaskan issues outside the classroom. The presence of a senior administrative officer on the President's staff is more than symbolic. While that symbolism is meaningful it is also important to empower this position with the ability to work at advocating and coordinating on behalf of and with this important population.

Issue

It is understandable that a great deal of focus in recent years has been on the campuses themselves and organizing around system-wide initiatives. Every campus was very appreciative of the President's Alaska Scholars Program. This clearly has made the most positive impact on higher education in Alaska. Several conversations with the system and campus professionals led to discussions of students in K-12. The issues mentioned were academic preparation for college-level study, expectations for attending college, linking school to careers and distance education

and related student services. The time appears to be perfect for a K-12 outreach effort in conjunction with the enrollment management plan and future marketing efforts.

Recommendation 14

A K-16 collaboration effort should be directed from the system office under the leadership of the Vice President for Student Affairs in collaboration with the State Board of Education and individual school districts. The sharing of data, tracking of students, college-bound outreach into the 6th grade, parental education and career linkages should all be considered when developing a plan to increase the number of high school graduates and those continuing on an Alaska higher education.

Recommendation 15

In conjunction with the K-16 collaboration and enrollment management strategies the Statewide Office should prepare a marketing plan for higher education. The statewide Office of Student Services under the Vice President for Student Services should lead this.

Issue

The visiting team learned a great deal about the value of the initiative process instituted by the system office. Campuses appreciated the opportunity to put forth proposals for funds to recruit and retain students. There was, however, frustration in not receiving feedback when initiatives were not funded. There was, in fact, a sense of rejection for the work of student services and their importance in the lives of students. While some campuses took the initiative to call the system office for feedback, others did not feel comfortable doing so.

Recommendation 16

Timely feedback from the system office to campuses on initiatives that were not funded would close an important loop in the process. Campuses believe they would learn a great deal from this feedback and could resubmit or decide on other initiatives in future requests.

Issue

Perhaps the greatest point of frustration for professionals on all campuses was in the lack of consistent consultation on campuses with regard to student issues. We frequently heard examples of student services working through many meetings and avenues with students to inform, discuss and eventually agree upon an increase to fees or a change in policy that directly impacted students. The story then turned to examples of how offices on their own campuses outside student services raised fees and made other monetary and student-related decisions without any form of consultation with students. This was pervasive on all campuses we visited and involved academic affairs as well as business affairs personnel. This weakens the entire institution and student services in particular. It should not be the culture Alaska higher education seeks to perpetuate at a time when campuses need to become more student-centered in attracting prospective students from in-state and around the nation and world.

Recommendation 17

The system will coordinate campuses to agree upon ONE consultative model for campuses on ALL issues even vaguely pertaining to students. All institutions will agree to follow this process in alerting students to possible changes, meeting with students to discuss the reasons for the change, and seeking consensus with students on the outcome.

Issue

If the system and its campuses truly believe that students are the lifeblood of institutions and Alaska's investment in a vital future then student issues should be given priority.

Every campus was extremely grateful for and impressed with the system leadership in bringing Banner Web for Students and Faculty and EMAS+ to fruition. The collaboration of campus representatives with the system leadership was praised on every campus. This demonstrated to us that the model exists for future initiatives. There was frustration, however, that student-centered priorities were not institutionalized within SW Information Technology as they relate to Banner programming. Therefore, the UA

system appears to be limited by its IT organizational structure. Conversely, both SW Human Resources and Finance enjoy the benefit of their own Banner programmers – making it possible to prioritize and execute critical functional changes and enhancements when they deem necessary. Frankly, student services users need to have the same, if not more, access to Banner programmers if the UA system is to realize its student enrollment and student-centered model.

Recommendation 18

If the system wants to “be nimble” and address pressing issues of students, programmers should be added to the student services side of statewide or programmers should be reallocated from IT to student services.

Campus-Based Insights and Recommendations

Recommendations on Student Services have been made earlier in this report, as related to all campuses in the University of Alaska System and to the Systemwide UA office. In addition to those recommendations, we present campus-specific issues existing at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Southeast, and Anchorage regarding recruitment, retention, resources, rural campuses, enrollment management, student life, and other Student Services areas of concern.

University of Alaska Anchorage

Issue

UAA has embraced its label as “The New American University” in its service to a wide variety of learners in the state. The student population has grown, diversified and changed during recent years, with half over the age of 30, at least half not pursuing a formal degree and a majority attending part-time. The recent growth in traditional-aged students is notable. Student life reflects this variety in programs and services that range from strong to weak or completely missing. A peculiar culture of UAA student services functions distributed, organizationally, across academic affairs, student affairs and administrative services creates a lack of coherence, weakens the mission and diminishes the delivery of services to students.

Recommendation 1

Student services should be concentrated under the Division of Student Affairs. This model allows for administrative oversight of student affairs by the Dean of Students serving as UAA’s Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO). The SSAO’s single most important role is in shaping the design and structure of effective student services. It will create new opportunities to influence institutional, educational, social and financial policy in times of growth and change. Student services and programs will have direct access to the SSAO and their level of participation in the decision-making process will result in better use of shared resources, coordination of efforts, no duplication and greater satisfaction to students.

Recommendation 2

The SSAO’s reporting relationship to the chancellor will continue to be a significant factor in increasing the effectiveness of recruitment and retention. In the interest of organizational symmetry, the SSAO should be physically located with other senior administrative staff who report to the chancellor. This in no way diminishes her contact with or commitment to students but rather strengthens her ability to perform the appropriate role of senior student affairs administrator.

Issue

As the urban campus of the University of Alaska with numerous smaller campuses and extension centers - they are geographically situated to take on many roles in serving the state’s higher education needs. This is perhaps their greatest problem. They articulated an “image problem” to us in that open enrollment presents demands to provide something for everyone to ensure the student’s success. UAA’s mission does not differentiate them from the other campuses and they have operated without recruiters for the past eight years. Their enrollment, therefore, has occurred through less obvious methods and in some non-targeted ways. Their current efforts to

educate themselves about strategic enrollment management and to develop and implement a plan are commendable. It is clearly a campus-wide effort. It is unclear, however, if their enrollment plan is in keeping with the desires of the system office.

Recommendation 3

System leadership on a statewide enrollment management plan must be coordinated with UAA immediately. The campus is in the initial stages of implementing a recruitment plan that is energetic and multi-faceted. This may not, however, further the specific objectives. Resulting cross-purposes and neglect of critical areas is sure to be the outcome. Swift communication and coordination can alleviate this.

Issue

UAA clearly has the message that it must include work force development as one of its enrollment objectives. The location and broad offerings of UAA make it highly capable of meeting this state need. It is likely that UAA has been meeting this need to some degree without as visible an effort as the Chancellor is seeking.

Recommendation 4

UAA should place workforce development as a high priority or at least equal to that of degree-seeking students or from other areas of the state especially from underrepresented populations. While this may already be the case it is not visible in their plans and publications.

Issue

The high number of non-degree seeking students is an area of interest and mystery to the institution. Efforts to “unpack” the demographics and motivations of this population are underway. Clearly there is an opportunity to convert many of these students to certificate and degree programs.

Recommendation 5

UAA should seriously consider limiting the number of credits a student may take without being admitted to a certificate or degree program. We recommend a number as low as 12 credits but certainly understand the need to adjust this number accordingly.

Issue

UAA has developed a “Big Rock Team” to coordinate and implement strategic enrollment management. The energy, cross-university involvement, and potential effectiveness of this effort were evident to the visiting team. A critical piece also apparent was the central role of institutional analysis personnel and data. While we know there are clearly differences of opinion and challenges yet to be resolved this collaborative effort should lead to resolution of such issues and success. Note: It is unclear from our meetings and the documents shared with us if the community campuses and extension centers are an active participant in this process. If not, we urge their integration despite the obvious communication obstacles.

Recommendation 6

Members of the “Big Rock Team” should present their model to the other University of Alaska campuses as a template for successful strategic enrollment management. A simplified form of

coordinated work on recruitment and retention could easily be applied to the other campuses with respect for their cultures AND their differentiated mission.

Issue

It is the team's sense that the good work of UAA is often lost amidst lengthy reports with a great deal of unnecessary information included. While this depth of information has its usefulness with certain campus groups we found it distracting from the real results.

Recommendation 7

UAA should focus on one to three page documents that present the issue, what was done to resolve it and how outcomes were measured. Bullets and concise paragraphs will not only be read but will be given credibility and support.

Issue

UAA is working to create a campus environment in support of the student's educational experience. Residence halls significantly contribute to this experience for the traditional-aged college student. However, this is not the current majority of their student population.

Recommendation 8

UAA must receive support for its diversified enrollment management plan that includes attracting high numbers of Alaska scholars and others in the 18-22 year-old age group. Current housing cannot be filled and operating expenses cannot be met without the ability to attract this population to UAA.

Issue

UAA's student affairs and academic affairs divisions work well together in attracting and retaining students from native populations. Exemplary efforts in this area exist. Programs such as RRANN and RAVEN recruit and support native students to nursing and social work majors should be modeled by other academic departments at UAA and by other Alaska campuses. KEEO and ALVA attract and retain native students to science and engineering. AHAINA, the campus-wide program for students of all ethnicities, has undergone staff turnover. It is unusual, however, to have such a critical retention program under Academic Affairs. Its isolation from student affairs efforts was obvious since Student Affairs has successfully embraced its commitment to enhance diversity on campus.

We also found duplication of services in student affairs and academic affairs. At a time of tight resources this seems unusual and unnecessary. Career services, ethnic student services, advising and counseling exist in both academic affairs and in student services.

Recommendation 9

Students would be better served through the placement of these services and programs under Student Affairs. Their connection to the mission and ongoing work of exemplary student affairs units such as Disability Support Services, Residence Life, Campus Life, Student Health Center and Student Leadership will strengthen them. The duplication can be integrated to create stronger services for students under one organizational umbrella. One example is the Office of Career

Services that is in great need of additional resources. This office would be greatly enhanced by this integration.

Issue

The opportunity to hire an orientation director will result in a fully developed program for the diversity of students attending UAA. Current charges for orientation also limit what is possible.

Recommendation 10

The orientation fee should be mandatory and increased to cover the cost of an effective program. Non-traditional students should be afforded specific orientation programs as well. We encourage you to provide more than a one-day orientation for native and rural students to include parents and family members. Timing must avoid fishing season and traditional campus schedules may need to be changed to accommodate this priority.

Issue

We often heard staff and students express frustration with a “depersonalization” of services at UAA. The most common examples given were frequent auto-voice mail, web pages that were not helpful and the expense of phone calls from external constituencies to the campus.

Recommendation 11

Student Affairs should be the leader in this effort given its mission and skilled staff. We recommend that the campus secure an 800 number for prospective students and others needing the services of UAA. Review of web pages for useful contact information should be the responsibility of each division within the institution. Student Affairs should provide the student perspective on what is needed and should be included to assist prospective and current students. In addition, staff coverage of phones needs to be reframed as more than a clerical function. Prioritizing this role as outreach and assistance should help in “humanizing” UAA.

Issue

UAA may be putting too much emphasis on attracting the traditional student population and should work with statewide to focus on the creation of a university that is supportive of all student populations. Student driven initiatives such as a new sports facility clearly call for such efforts where student groups can meet and individuals can interact.

Recommendation 12

UAA should continue to develop a commuter student program equal to the residential life program. Basic services such as carpooling and wireless connections should be a part of the program as well as affordable childcare and peer advising programs on health care and diversity issues. Student fees, state initiative dollars and existing staff expertise should be combined to pursue this important retention effort.

Issue

Hardworking and talented professionals work in student affairs and other units at UAA. While their commitment remains steadfast it appears to be on the verge of collapse if critical fiscal

issues are not addressed. First, we repeatedly heard that salaries are not competitive and make it difficult to recruit professionals. Second, dependence on student fees is a double-edged sword in that the process to increase fees is humiliating, demoralizing and unnecessary.

Recommendation 13

Visible and immediate changes in this area are necessary. If a study has not recently been completed we ask the system to work with UAA in a salary study to document the reality for use in legislative budget requests and negotiations.

Recommendation 14

Funding initiatives from the President's office should not only be continued but increased.

Recommendation 15

A complete revamping of the process to increase student fees should begin immediately. A process that focuses on consultation with students need not be unnecessarily lengthy or degrading to the hard working professionals who depend on these funds to provide critical and quality services. We recommend adopting an incremental increase policy for annual automatic increases to student fees such as the Health Center.

Conclusion

We felt very welcome at the UAA campus and met with a wide variety of professionals both inside and outside of the Division of Student Affairs. Exemplary strengths were numerous such as Native Alaskan and Native American recruitment and retention programs; the award-winning Disability Support Services office; a growing Student Leadership Program; commitment to creating a welcoming campus for students and staff of all ethnicities; the "small rocks, big rocks" strategic enrollment planning that is campus-wide; and enthusiastic, student-centered leadership from senior administrators, especially Linda Lazzell.

University of Alaska Fairbanks

As a land, sea and space grant institution, University of Alaska-Fairbanks (UAF) chooses to be known as Alaska's premiere university with world class programs and a reputation as one of the nation's best research schools, at an affordable tuition. UAF self-highlights its state-of-the-art classrooms, laboratories, and recreational facilities; other alluring environmental attractions are its natural background against majestic snow-capped mountains and the unique cultural heritage of the Pacific Northwest. UAF also underscores its belief that it has an ideal student body size for faculty-student contact and instruction.

During our visit at UAF, we met with dedicated administrators, faculty and staff. Although we heard from competent personnel and observed the good things that are happening in Student Services at UAF, it is not feasible to mention all of those positive aspects of the campus in this report. Absence of any topic or issue is not an indication of its lack of importance. Indeed, in some cases, omission of a program may be an indication of its effectiveness.

Issue

A basic and pervasive issue in Student Services at UAF is its void of leadership. The unit lacks a sense of "team," and the talented staff are very confused and often times stymied in their efforts to proceed with their work or where to seek direction. An overall sense of stress and frustration is evident. Yet, the staff welcomes the opportunity to share their insights and plans and crave feedback and direction. These are symptoms of a staff in need of inspiring leadership.

Recommendation 1

The current Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) of the campus is the Dean of Student Services. To place this position on a par with its counterparts in academic affairs and business affairs, the position should be re-titled to Vice Chancellor for Student Services, and the individual selected for the position should be a professional student affairs educator with a proven track record in student affairs leadership, a collaborative style of decision-making, and a sensitivity to diverse populations of the Fairbanks and rural campuses.

Issue

A major issue in Student Services at UAF is the organizational structure and perceived inability of student services staff to have a voice on the management team, including budgetary decisions.

Recommendation 2

Having a voice in decision-making on all administrative matters, especially budgetary, is essential to the effectiveness of any Student Services operation. This issue must be addressed by the administration. Satisfactory resolution of this concern, coupled with a previous recommendation to re-title the Dean of Student Services as Vice Chancellor for Student Services at all UA campuses, will help to address the matter.

Issue

The recent reorganization of enrollment management under the Academic Affairs Provost has addressed major concerns of program effectiveness, and the central focus on enrollment issues is

a very positive source of newly invigorated enthusiasm among the staff. The challenge now facing the campus is the coordination of enrollment management with other related areas.

Recommendation 3

The importance of coordinating enrollment services cooperatively by the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Services cannot be overemphasized. We recommend that a mechanism be established to assure continuous communication and collaborative decision-making, which are essential to a successful program. Relevant Academic Affairs and Student Services units should cooperatively address issues and planning.

Issue

UAF has had two unsuccessful searches for a Dean of Enrollment Management. Repeated searches for an administrative position in enrollment management are not unusual in recent years. These positions are now in sufficient demand that it exceeds the “supply” of available expertise. In recent years, many colleges and universities have needed to repeat searches for similar positions; in nearly all cases, the searches experienced success after the second or third effort. Competition for high-quality candidates should be a clear signal to UAF that stronger efforts to seek and attract a highly qualified enrollment leader are essential.

Recommendation 4

UAF should persist with its search for a Dean of Enrollment Management with new vigor and take steps to attract competent candidates with solid backgrounds and track records in enrollment management. UAF may find it beneficial to seek the assistance of enrollment management consultants who could be asked to solicit nominations or assist in identifying top-notch candidates who could be encouraged to apply.

Issue

The campus fears that its enrollment management will be in a “holding pattern” until a Dean is hired.

Recommendation 5

UAF need not be in a holding pattern in enrollment management. On an *interim basis*, a contractual arrangement with an enrollment management consultant, such as Noel-Levitz, Inc. might be considered to advance student recruitment. A highly respected leader, who interacts effectively with all academic and student services units, should be designated to interface with the consultant until a dean of enrollment management is hired.

Issue

UAF should, by no means, make the mistake of “settling” for an individual with less than a proven track record, to lead its enrollment management program for the reason of expediency. To do so could cause a setback. UAF should persevere in its search of a highly qualified dean of enrollment management, and not risk the possibility of being out-recruited by other campuses within Alaska and the “Lower 48” states.

Recommendation 6

The permanent Dean of Enrollment Management must demonstrate evidence of a good track record in enrollment management. To settle for anything less places the campus in a less advantageous situation in this “age” of aggressive, competitive student recruitment.

Issue

The campus is poised and needs to move ahead in student recruitment and retention. Although student enrollment was higher by a small percentage in fall 2001 than in previous years, retention also slightly decreased.

Recommendation 7

The Dean of Enrollment Management must be a leader in recruitment and retention. We recommend that the dean selected by the campus demonstrate expertise, knowledge and success. We further recommend that, because of the geographic isolation of UAF, the dean selected for this position also show evidence of connections with a national network of enrollment managers.

Issue

The rural campuses and their faculties and staffs should be a source of pride for UAF. They are also a source of opportunity for UAF to develop national models for rural Postsecondary education and pride. However, there is a tension between the desires and capabilities of the rural faculty and staff and their sense of being “a voice” in major discussions and decision-making.

Recommendation 8

UAF should make a more conscious effort to integrate and acknowledge the importance of the “rural voice” on major councils. More opportunities should be created for development of student services in the rural areas.

University of Alaska Southeast

This growing, open enrollment regional university located in Juneau, the capital city of Alaska, and its branch campuses in Ketchikan and Sitka emphasize the liberal arts and some vocational-technical areas of study. The large majority of students are from the Juneau area. The number of part-time students is nearly double the number of full-time students. The large majority of the students are very satisfied with the UAS faculty and generally satisfied with the quality of education they have received and the quality of their student life experience at UAS.

Recommendations on Student Services have been made earlier in this report, as related to all campuses in the University of Alaska System and to the Systemwide UA office. In addition to those recommendations, we present issues specifically related to the University of Alaska Southeast regarding retention, space, resources, financial aid, and other areas of concern.

During our visit to UAS, we met with many administrators, faculty, staff and students. We met with many dedicated and competent personnel and observed and heard of many good things happening there. We find that it is not possible to mention all of these positive aspects of the campus in this report. Therefore, the reader should be mindful that absence of any topic or issue is not an indication of its lack of importance and, in some cases, it may be an indication of its excellence.

Issue

Student retention and degree completion are major concerns at UAS. The Noel-Levitz Retention Opportunities Analysis (10/4/00) offers excellent recommendations as well as specific intervention goals and strategies. In an effort to provide other means of incentives for encouraging students to continue and complete their education, this consultant team offers other recommendations below.

Recommendation 1

Inasmuch as a large percentage of the students surveyed in a recent study indicated that course availability and financial assistance were barriers to their ability to finish their education in a timely fashion, greater emphasis and focus should be given to these two areas in the draft Retention Plan (1/14/02). UAS may consider submitting a proposal to the SW office for funding of a pilot project to address these two areas.

Issue

A significant number UAS students indicated temporary stop-out and a large percentage indicate their intent to return and complete their degrees. Creative means to encourage students to persist, including more financial aid and other incentives, are needed.

Recommendation 2

UAS might develop a UA Distinguished Achievement Grant program for juniors/seniors, parallel to the UA Scholars program, which has become very popular as a recruitment program of academically talented freshmen. The UA Distinguished Achievement Grant may be a financial need-based scholarship to retain students who entered as transfer students and were not awarded a UA Scholarship; it may also be a travel award used in the junior year for UAS students who

may--or may not--be recipients of UA Scholarships and who show academic success in the first two years and high potential for degree completion. The recipients must agree to return to UAS to complete their degrees.

Issue

Students indicate a struggle to stay in school for financial reasons. A program to assist students in scholarship searches, possibly electronic, is desirable.

Recommendation 3

With a talented technology staff, UAS is in a position to develop a comprehensive scholarship website that can be accessed on-line by UAS students and faculty, K-12 counselors and teachers, parents and others in the community.

Issue

“At-risk” students are in need of tutoring and mentoring to continue their studies and not dropout or stop-out.

Recommendation 4

Retired faculty from UAS and K-12 schools may be recruited as volunteer tutors.

Issue

UAS students are proud of their dedicated and caring “real” faculty (as opposed to teaching assistants), great colleagues, one-on-one faculty access, close-knit campus community, and ideal student-faculty ratio. A good number, though, lament that required courses get filled quickly, courses are not readily available, and the lack of variety of courses and programs result in students leaving to take courses elsewhere. UAS needs to find a way to stimulate and infuse the curriculum with a greater variety and breadth of courses taught by a wider group of faculty.

Recommendation 5

An invigorating visiting faculty program, perhaps on a short-term schedule, may attract prominent national leaders to spend a few weeks or months offering accelerated courses for current students, alumni and K-12 educators. This would be a unique opportunity for prominent educators to work both on a small campus in a beautiful capital city environment, as well as with rural campuses and indigenous peoples.

Issue

Staffing and other resources are increasing as issues on a rapidly growing campus. Responsibilities have broadened and increased, while the “thin” staffing has remained the same.

Recommendation 6

Rather than simply requesting additional staff, UAS should design unique programs that meet the criteria for the SW initiative grants and include staff positions that would be required to develop the programs.

Issue

Funding is a challenge for student activity programs and campus transportation. While there is a general reluctance by the administration and staff to increase fees, this is definitely an avenue that should be considered. The fees for activities and other services are relatively low at UAS, while student fees at most other universities have increased significantly over the past decade.

Recommendation 7

An increase in student fees should not deter student recruitment or retention; in fact, fees could enhance the number, types, and quality of services—such as a campus shuttle system--and, in this way, may make UAS more attractive to prospective students to enroll and current students to remain and complete their degree programs. A study and campus-wide dialog should be initiated, followed by the development of a comprehensive proposal for a new fee structure that is purposeful in enhancing the campus, acceptable to students, and supported by the administration.

Issue

There is a sense that some kind of intercollegiate athletics program would be a benefit to student life and a boost to student retention. Riflery, skiing and synchronized swimming were suggested as possibilities.

Recommendation 8

The campus has, obviously, had many discussions on the topic. Budget is, undoubtedly, the major challenge. Nonetheless, campus and community support of the proposal to the system office may result in a creative solution and is worth an effort.

Issue

True collaboration of Student Services and Academic Affairs is a challenge at most universities across the country. Yet, there appears to be unique opportunities at UAS to integrate the two areas in outdoor leadership education and other programs because of existing expertise, interest, and the natural environment. Such opportunities are worth pursuing and, if successful, could become national models for success.

Recommendation 9

UAS should take advantage of opportunities to develop excellent programs that are fully collaborative between Student Services and Academic Affairs in areas where qualified faculty and staff expertise are available, such as in outdoor leadership education.

Issue

The Sitka campus cites the need for speedier evaluation of their students' transcripts; a recruitment, marketing and publications program that is coordinated with the Southeast campus; and a permanent staff for student recruitment. Although the consultant team did not have the time and opportunity to look further into the matter, the request deserves a response.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the needs of the Sitka campus be reviewed, discussed and appropriately addressed.

Issue

Several staff members commented on the inordinate amount of responsibilities required of the Dean of Student Services. While supportive of the Dean, the staff expressed the need for additional administrative and support staff in the Office of the Dean.

Recommendation 11

We have recommended a re-titling of the position of Dean of Student Services to Vice Chancellor for Student Services at all UA campuses. We further recommend that a staff audit be conducted of the Office of the UAS Dean of Student Services and Enrollment Management and, if required, additional staff be allocated to accommodate the growing enrollment of the campus and the increasing responsibilities of the office.

Issue

UAS is blessed with a talented technology staff who willingly assist with recruitment and other web support systems and are eager to develop a full-fledged e-recruitment program. Is this desirable? Can it be accomplished without a "print v. electronic" clash?

Recommendation 12

A full discussion on this topic among relevant administrators, faculty, staff and students would clarify the questions and take UAS to a higher level in electronic, web-based recruitment.

Issue

Student body and program growth on the UAS campus is already becoming a serious issue. There is obvious need for more space. Many alternatives have been explored without success. While we, too, have no solution; we feel compelled to mention the important need.

Recommendation 13

The campus has commendably pursued many creative concepts and has found no real solution to address the need for more space to accommodate the growing numbers of students and programs. We simply encourage the administration and staff to continue the search and seek models of university campuses in similar situations in other states. The campus might also assure flexibility in the Campus Master Plan to allow the acquisition of new and unanticipated opportunities through purchase or gift of nearby properties that may possibly appear in the near future.

Issue

Our visit included an opportunity to speak with student services representatives from Sitka and Ketchikan. While earlier reforms in higher education designated these sites as extended campuses at UA make tremendous efforts to reach out and connect, it appears that they have never fully integrated into the mission of the Juneau campus and often feel “mismatched.” Missions, student population, and use of technology create different campus cultures whose needs are not met with “one policy for all.” One example of this is Sitka’s fear of the move to web registration since students will no longer have the personal touch that leads to additional connections to campus services.

Recommendation 14

Campus leadership with an interest in the extended campuses should seek to acknowledge and embrace the differences. Finding areas of special need and meeting them is just as important as acknowledging common ground with the campuses. A system led effort coordinating the campuses will lead to effective student services for rural, Native Alaskan population as well as the more traditional campuses. UAS should prepare to benefit from this effort by conducting a thorough self study of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities that will lead to a plan for future wants and needs that are well documented.

Issue

The UAS residence halls make an exemplary contribution to campus life by offering first-rate facilities with a sense of strong community. Staff are dedicated professionals ready to take on additional challenges.

Recommendation 15

Housing will continue to play a critical role in recruitment and retention. Future student growth will not only require additional housing but also a variety of housing options for a wide range of students – not just the traditional undergraduate populations. Marketing efforts should set a clear expectation to prospective students that living on campus is “the thing to do.” A UAS student who does so is retained at a higher rate and has a better university experience. For local students it is definitely their chance to have a “real university” experience.