

University of Alaska Fairbanks Outreach and Engagement Plan

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Outreach and Engagement Plan Working Group University of Alaska Fairbanks

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Recent History

Historically, the land-grant university system has included responding to societal issues as part of its core mission. In recent decades, renewing that commitment and assuming a leadership role in addressing those needs have sounded across the country. Since the mid- 1980's with the creation of the Campus Compact, followed by work through the 1990's on higher education's role in nurturing civic responsibility and the 1999 Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Institutions, there has been a call to land-grant universities to advance their public purpose by connecting the intellectual and physical assets of higher education to improving the life of communities and individuals, educating students for civic responsibility and preparing students for active citizenship in their state, the country and the global community. The premise is that the university can put knowledge to work and be an agent of positive change and renewal if we think of our work in broader, more public-oriented, terms.

Adding imperative to the above is the importance critical funding sources are putting on proposers to define, in measurable ways, the broader impact, value or applicability their research may have on society and to communicate their results to the public at large. The 1997 formulation by the National Science Foundation of two generic merit review criteria; one for intellectual merit and the second for broader impacts are forcing the research community to come to grips with the relation between science and society. The desired linkage between public investments in science with societal benefits may push the institution to engage beyond the sanctuary of academia with public, government, business or international partnerships.

UAF

The University of Alaska Fairbanks, as a land, sea and space grant institution, has responded to these responsibilities in the formulation of its vision, strategic, and academic plans. University of Alaska system wide plans echo the commitment to increased participation with the people and economic future of Alaska. UAF with the combination of the main campus, the Fairbanks-based UAF Career and Technical College and the five rural campuses strategically located within western Alaska communities is well set-up to turn those words into reality; but we need to understand the degree to which engagement is truly an integral component of our academic mission and to what degree our activities reflect that mission.

What We Have Done

Over this year we have been focusing on the patient work of gathering information, building relationships across the campus and organizing a constituency that will help us sustain a cohesive outreach and engagement presence over time. We have also been studying the research literature on broader impacts, service learning, engagement, barriers, best-practices and lessons-learned from those who have pioneered the process and implementation strategies for developing successful engagement enterprises.

We formed a growing Outreach Managers Group (leadership, faculty and staff) and created an inventory of people involved in outreach activities. We have held several group meetings that have allowed people to meet and share information about their activities. The group has had substantive discussions on the importance of UAF pursuing a more active engagement agenda, talked about known hurdles and imagined what it might take to accomplish that goal.

We met with the deans of all the colleges and schools, director of the UA Museum of the North and the president (beginning May 2, 2011) of the UAF Faculty Senate. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce what the Vice

Provost for Outreach is trying to accomplish in the near term, explain what we have been doing over the last year and what we have learned so far, discuss the importance of engaging with their faculty, listen to their ideas and take their input and have them identify key personnel within their unit who will work with us as we move forward. We will continue to meet with directors and other key personnel in the future. Keeping the academic leadership informed and positive about our goals and activities is essential to our ultimate success.

We connected with a subset of key outreach and/or engagement personnel and programs including the office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, The GLOBE Program, Alaska INBRE BioPREP, Alaska NSF EPSCoR, the Institute of Arctic Biology, and the UA Alaska Teacher Placement Program. Each of these meetings has provided us with deeper insight into the needs and frustrations of securing funding, connecting with audiences, managing logistics and risk management, enhancing the impact of the programs beyond the current collaborators and sustaining hard-won connections with external communities. We will learn more as we interact with additional program leaders.

We reviewed and evaluated the current implementation of the Science Education Outreach Network (SEON) website hosted by UAF. The goal of the original SEON development was to provide a dynamic portal to connect UAF scientists with schools and the community.

We have had several interactions with the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD). We met with the superintendent and the program evaluator and research analyst to clarify changes in school district policy regarding research in schools and provide appropriate contact information at the FNSBSD for the UAF research community. UAF also met with a representative of the FNSBSD planning committee for the Fall 2011 Alaska Math Science Conference. Several members of the Outreach Group worked with Vice Provost Dana Thomas to find, select and support the keynote speaker for a public presentation at the Charles Davis Concert Hall.

We are also mindful of the campus identity and branding project UAF has recently initiated under the direction of Marketing and Communications. The Vice Provost for Outreach is serving on the Strategic Marketing Committee. Once we are able to define clearly and concisely the essence of UAF, we then need to offer programs, services and outreach that consistently communicate that essence.

What We Have Found

Most of what UAF offers is outreach but not engagement. Outreach implies the flow of information *from* UAF to an audience. The knowledge may be insightful, exciting and useful but it is a one-way flow of information from us to them. We have relatively little engagement. Engagement is defined by reciprocity; mutual respect for the expertise alive among the university and the external partners and strengthened by shared direction, governance and responsibility. The combination of active outreach and purposeful engagement can make for a vibrant connection between UAF and our communities but there is much for us to do to realize this promise.

There are MANY definitions of outreach at UAF. They span press releases, public information offices, recruitment efforts, marketing, and service activities, as well as defined projects like, The GLOBE Program and INBRE BioPREP. Considering these multifarious activities; there is a lot of outreach emanating from UAF.

There are also many people involved in outreach at UAF. We have identified about 150 individuals across the campus, mainly in staff positions, who self-describe themselves as being involved with outreach as part of their job. Their job titles and where they are embedded within their units are even more varied than the diverse definitions of outreach.

Although there are some notable exceptions, the preponderance of outreach is focused on pre-college education in grades kindergarten through twelve (K12) and is offered within the Fairbanks North Star Borough. The focus on K12 is often a reflection of funding opportunities, experience and funder priority, as is the emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The ease of connecting with the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, which is eager to participate with the university, has a large K12 population and is convenient, makes it an obvious focal point.

In the May, 2010 *Nature* news feature, 'Science for the masses', Corie Lok wrote, "The US National Science Foundation's insistence that every research project addresses 'broader impacts' leaves many researchers baffled." In our conversations across the campus we have heard this sentiment echoed. As one leading UAF faculty member put it, writing the Broader Impacts Criteria and outreach portion of the grant application is the "hair-pulling" moment. There is also nearly universal agreement that the outreach plan is the last requirement of a proposal to be written and once the award has been made, the part of the proposal to be given the least attention. Outreach is perceived as the "add-on" to what is really a discipline-driven proposal. Often this is not for lack of good intention but lack of background in understanding what good outreach is, what the best practices are, what resources are required. Discipline-based scientists are usually inexperienced in outreach and some may be ill-suited to carry out the outreach tasks they are required to include. There may also be a lack of skilled staff to implement the outreach plan or to know how to maximize the impact of outreach beyond their immediate connections. Not surprising is a conflicted interest arising from resources "lost" to researching the investigator's science in order to work in outreach with individuals and communities. Hovering over these impediments is the lack of institutional incentive and reward – or worse, punitive treatment – in the promotion and tenure process to participate in outreach and engagement to any meaningful extent.

Currently, there is no "portal" to UAF's outreach efforts and partnerships that is up-to-date or reasonably functional. The initial development of SEON offered a searchable website driven by a relational database that promoted the discovery of outreach programs and resources available at UAF. Although the present-day site is pleasing to look at and there is useful information, the dynamic data system that allowed the site to function as originally designed could not be maintained when the site was transferred to management under the Roxen content management solution as built at UAF. The site is also limited to "science" outreach which does not encompass the far richer suite of outreach activities UAF is pursuing. Related to this is the view from outside the university that there is no single point-of-contact to help connect them with outreach resources and engagement opportunities.

Throughout our meetings as a group and conversations with deans, directors, faculty and outreach program leads a number of ideas surfaced repeatedly that we believe need to be considered in a formal planning process and will likely need to be developed further. These fall into two basic categories: a set of ideas related to internal resources, linkages, strengthening institutional capacity and student service-learning and a class of activities that speak to reaching out to the external community. The first set includes the concept of a "center", addressing faculty concerns, service learning, technology issues and internal organization. The second class is composed of an online "clearinghouse" and the development of campus-community "councils".

- ♦ A "center" could provide a number of services to the UAF research community: inform on best practices in outreach for proposals, education and communication; provide survey design and management; track metrics for measuring effectiveness and impact of institutional progress, develop and support faculty, student and staff development opportunities; develop partnerships and look for matches in needs and resources between the community and UAF and promote service-learning opportunities; coordinate lists and inventories, recognize successful efforts, support a mentorship program. Such a center also recognizes

and takes advantage of the diversity and specialization of human talents and expertise that could be focused across the campus.

- ♦ There are a number of concerns that face the faculty and must be addressed though faculty channels if enhanced outreach and engagement are to be successful at UAF. These include broadening the definition of scholarship that can embrace the scholarship of engagement, revisiting criteria for promotion and tenure and developing ways to reward and incentivize faculty to participate.
- ♦ Student development and community development work hand-in-hand. Many institutions have embraced service-learning as a powerful tool for enabling their students to become better citizens, for the institution to connect actively with its communities and to distinguish itself among other universities. It is unclear at UAF the extent to which service-learning is accepted or extends beyond a small subset of faculty and students.
- ♦ Technology - Distance education is seen as a powerful resource for outreach to local and, importantly, to rural Alaska. Distance education, while not a technology issue itself, relies increasingly on delivery mechanisms that are technology-driven. The broader use of social media and the requirement for web instances that accommodate dynamic data feeds, dynamic data systems and the ability to connect to the SunGard Banner system are imperative.
- ♦ A “clearinghouse” that serves as an outreach and engagement portal, an education outreach network and a searchable, dynamic resource for the community is needed. It could serve as a point-of-contact, provide information on partnerships, advise the public on programs, aid the community in locating experts and be the image of outreach and engagement at UAF.
- ♦ There are few true partnerships between UAF and external communities in which there is real reciprocity. As the Carnegie Foundation noted in January, 2011, “institutions continue to operate in the ‘charity model’ with one way application of resources, expertise, student and faculty support to the community without acknowledging community assets, expertise, knowledge and resources.”

So, there is a lot of activity but there is not a cohesive approach to outreach and engagement nor are outreach and engagement rooted in the heart of UAF. The current course of UAF’s outreach is not unlike what Wortis *et al* found with the University of California San Francisco’s approach, “not always well coordinated, there was not always good follow-through, duplication of programs often occurred, and successful partnership programs were not always maintained.” Research shows that for lasting impact on our communities we need to support a system that moves beyond a series of disparate projects. Projects and programs are good things but they are not built on a solid constituency that can help sustain our engagement with the community over time. As one researcher put it, “they are just nice things done by nice people for nice reasons, but they are not sustained for very long.” Students are also quick to question the university’s commitment to engagement if they do not view UAF as engaged in addressing the needs of Alaska as well as in national and global issues. Such partnerships require institutional infrastructure and resources that allow the community to engage with the institution as a whole rather than only with individuals or marginalized programs.

Our Plan for 2011-2012

We have six major recommendations to help move UAF along the path from outreach to an engaged institution. The recommendations reflect our knowledge of the culture of our campus as well as build upon the experience of other universities and colleges.

Goal: Strengthen Institutional Capacity for and Commitment to an Active Outreach and Engagement Enterprise at UAF

Recommendation One: Undertake and complete a formal strategic planning process leading to a campus wide outreach and engagement plan

We formed an Outreach Plan Development working group to begin to craft a plan for UAF outreach and engagement over the next year. Using a summary of ideas generated through our group and individual meetings as a starting point, we discussed various strategies and methodologies for generating a plan for the coming year that will significantly advance the sustainable, long term impact of the university on individuals, groups, communities, government and the state and eventually to contribute to the global community. As tempting as it is to just do something, the group decided to propose undertaking a formal strategic planning process that will lead to a comprehensive, long term plan for outreach and engagement at UAF as our highest recommendation.

Outreach and engagement are intrinsically linked to the research enterprise at UAF. The Vice Chancellor for Research (VCR) has launched a strategic planning process to review the current research model at UAF and chart a course for the future. The complexity of research questions, the growing need for integration and cross-discipline collaboration, the interface between basic and applied research and the need to interact more fruitfully with potential external users have been mentioned as possible topics by Vice Chancellor Myers. It is our understanding that the VCR is contemplating using an expert facilitator to help in the research strategic planning process. The Outreach Plan Development committee would like to use the same facilitator since that individual will be familiar with the direction the VCR group is heading.

Things We Will Need to Consider

We expect that in the process of developing an UAF Outreach Plan, we can take advantage of lessons learned from other universities that have successfully transformed themselves into institutions recognized for commitment to civic engagement. Ostrander in her 2004 article, "Democracy, Civic Participation, and the University: A Comparative Study of Civic Engagement on Five Campuses," points out four crucial elements to consider:

- ♦ Distinctive emphasis – diversity of strategies for engagement; not a universal best practice
- ♦ Incentives for change – grounded in the unique culture of the institution; not handed down
- ♦ Intellectual and educational rationale – "The work has to make sense intellectually. If senior faculty members are not involved in the process – if it isn't integral to the work of knowledge-production as well as other activities – it's not going to engage people. This point is key to the successful integration of civic engagement into the larger educational and intellectual mission and culture of the university."
- ♦ New organizational structures – creating new structures that align and integrate the institution's various parts while at the same time addressing the power dynamics between the university and the surrounding community. "Institutions have to be willing to share resources and share power with their communities. I believe this is the most challenging part."

What seems to be key to moving forward successfully is defining what the distinctive emphasis will be based on the strengths of the campus and culture of the institution. This is echoed by others who have found that there is also not a universal "best practice" for defining a strategy for creating a successful engagement plan. Linking engagement to institutional priorities and finding areas of common interest with the user-community are also a critical element to success. Dimensions of engagement that are often considered for incorporation include:

- ♦ Access to learning
- ♦ Enhanced diversity
- ♦ Service learning
- ♦ Civic learning
- ♦ Public scholarship
- ♦ Social well-being
- ♦ Trusted voice
- ♦ Public spaces
- ♦ Community partnership
- ♦ Self-governance
- ♦ Public accountability

The creation of a campus unit or “center” to provide leadership and assistance is seen as a powerful force necessary to a sustained or expanded effort in engagement. In her study on institutional commitment to service, Holland found, “Among the case study institutions, the presence of a campus-wide unit supporting service learning was cited as a facilitating factor in that it not only provided practical assistance, but also raised visibility, offered legitimacy conferred by a formal unit, and offered a venue for building interdisciplinary partnerships across departments.” In formulating our long term plan, discussions on this concept, including staffing and required resources will be a necessary part of the planning effort.

Recommendation Two: Continue engagement with the UAF community

Outreach Group

We recommend continuing periodic meetings of the entire group to exchange information discuss issues of general concern and keep connected. Since the group is so large, we envision one general meeting in each of the Fall and Spring semesters. We will establish sub-committees to work on specific projects as required.

Deans and Directors

We will continue periodic meetings with deans and directors to keep them informed of our progress, answer their question and follow up on ideas or concerns. The deans and directors are crucial to championing the concepts of outreach and engagement as institutional goals and supporting faculty and staff participation. Over the coming year we will be meeting with individual faculties at either the college/school level or departmental as requested to broaden the discussion.

Faculty

The success of outreach and engagement is inextricably linked to its acceptance by and the responsiveness of the faculty. Much faculty work lies beyond the purview of our group. We will engage with the faculty through:

Faculty Senate

We hope that the Faculty Senate will begin a conversation on what it means to be and what it takes to become an engaged university. Dr. Cathy Cahill, new president of the UAF Faculty Senate, has encouraged the Vice Provost for Outreach to make a presentation to the Senate in early Fall 2011. We look forward to the prospect that the Senate will take on several questions such as, What is the difference between service, outreach and engagement? To what degree are service and service-learning accepted as academic activities and priorities? What is the nature of university scholarship and how is it interpreted at UAF? As scholars from Penn State University articulated in 2008, “The current system for recognizing and rewarding

University scholarship is characterized by an academic culture that shows preference for rewarding basic research and teaching over other forms of scholarship...We believe that many faculty and administrators need to develop a creative understanding of other forms of scholarship and how they can be effectively integrated into the promotion and tenure process. Others need to expand their perspective to recognize the value of outreach scholarship to the University and to society. If the University is to continue to lead the way in outreach, faculty must have a clearer understanding of its value as scholarship.” In addition to the discussion above, growing emphasis on interdisciplinary science is foretelling the need to consider the value such integrative approaches have in reference to promotion and tenure. Stanton in, *New Times Demand New Scholarship 2*, points out, “In most universities, particularly research institutions, engaged scholarship, through which faculty apply their academic expertise to public purposes often in an interdisciplinary framework, is not valued as highly as traditional discipline-based research. “

New Faculty Orientation

We will update incoming faculty on the current status of outreach at UAF, directions we are investigating and our plan for the coming year.

Faculty Development

We will work with The Office of Faculty Development to provide workshop opportunities on topics related to outreach, engagement, partnership building, and the scholarship of engagement as requested.

Recommendation Three: Establish a baseline of outreach and engagement people and projects

Tracking the people and projects involved in outreach and engagement is an on-going process. We have a reasonable start on the people, but less is known of the projects and to what extent they cross the continuum from outreach to engagement. The inventory on outreach to schools and youth that was conducted by Melissa Hill, Director of Alaska Teacher Placement, in Fall 2010, is an excellent start for establishing a baseline. We recommend enhancing this inventory to include all outreach and engagement efforts existing across the campus.

Recommendation Four: Build a Data Resource

If the value of the baseline information described above and other information that will be collected is to be realized, it must be easily updated, searchable and accessible. We recommend undertaking a formal database design procedure led by a professional design consultant who will assist us to identify the objectives and goals of a data system, key in on issues, problems and constraints, and provide alternatives. It is imperative that the implementation of the database is compatible with deployment to the Internet. Although there are many procedures for ascertaining this information, most processes include some sort of user needs assessment, an analysis and evaluation of existing source data, a conceptual/logical design, a physical design, implementation and pilot. Since much outreach and engagement are tied to extramurally-funded projects, it is easy to envision a future where successfully funded projects have the outreach component entered into a data system upon notification of funding.

Goal: Welcome the Community to Participate with UAF

Recommendation Five: Working with the Community

It is time to begin creating more university-community *partnerships* in which there is a meaningful, empowered role for community members in the governance of the program. Building reciprocity into a partnership with a community requires intensive development of mechanisms for mutual understanding, ongoing feedback, and time and attention to a relationship of respect. Fairbanks North Star Borough School District Superintendent Pete Lewis expressed interest in working on such an initiative, as an example.

We need to begin the process of designing a web portal that will provide the venue for articulating the vision of outreach and engagement at UAF, make information and contacts easy and quick to find and be interesting to explore. Several years ago, the SEON team undertook a process for defining the purpose and functions of the original website. That work is an excellent resource for us to build upon by enhancing and enlarging the original vision and augmenting capabilities. We recommend the creation of a campus-community team to partner with us in refining the goals and audiences, identifying new content and function requirements and recommending a modern organization.

Goal: Add UAF to a Nationally-Relevant Cadre of Institutions that have Significant Commitment to and Demonstrate Community Engagement

Recommendation Six: Begin preparation to apply for Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching Community Engagement Classification

“Through a classification that acknowledges significant commitment to and demonstration of community engagement, the Foundation encourages colleges and universities to become more deeply engaged, to improve teaching and learning and to generate socially responsive knowledge to benefit communities.” (Anthony Bryk, Carnegie President). In order to be successful, institutions have to provide descriptions and examples of institutionalized practices of community engagement that show significant alignment among mission, culture, leadership, resources and practices. Areas that have been cited for continued development include the need for better assessment and tracking, more attention to the intentional practices of developing reciprocal relationships between higher education and the community and challenges in regard to faculty reward for roles in community engagement and community-based achievements. The next application to the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification is due in 2015.

It is a Challenge

Much of what is written above presumes that UAF wants to move towards engagement. It is a complex and multifaceted initiative:

- ♦ By raising basic questions about the nature and purpose of academic inquiry and its place in a democratic society, it has a crucial *intellectual* dimension.
- ♦ It has *structural* components, integrating a range of programs and partnerships, faculty incentives and rewards and a central body charged with leadership.

- ♦ It incorporates a *political* process aimed at involving key stakeholders and constituencies in the engagement effort.
- ♦ It seeks *cultural* change by focusing on core value and principles of the institution.

As other universities have found this is a slow process that requires much patience on everyone's part, but it is doable. It requires a transformational change from a focus on service and outreach to a culture of engagement. Since universities put a premium on individual effort and entrepreneurial activity, collective efforts are not the norm. As civic engagement and community partnerships become more valued and visible it is hoped that a steady shift in institutional culture will take place. We feel that our recommendations that promote integration and coordination within the campus will make it easier to effect positive changes for the faculty and research success while steps to enhance UAF in the eyes of our various communities will be positively received. Our goal is to turn UAF into *the* model of engagement for small land grant institutions; we are started on that path.

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