

February 24, 2014

Greetings governance leaders,

I wanted to reach out to you with information on a project SAA would like to initiate, with your help and input, from a grassroots governance level: the formation of a “Commitment to Values, Statement of Principles or Commitment to Excellence” (exact label is up for debate). I’d like to take a moment to explain what we intended to accomplish, why we think it’s important, how we think the process for evolving the statements may work and how everyone may be involved along the way.

First I’d like to start with what this isn’t. It is not a punitive code of conduct listing behaviors that anyone with common sense knows are unacceptable in a professional organization. It is not a limit on academic freedom, free speech, self-expression, or the quirks and personalities that distinguish us as Alaskans. It is not a set of values or principles based on any faith or belief system. It is not a replacement for the mission and value statements developed on each campus. Nor is it an edict from Statewide being forced upon the other campuses.

Right now it is a goal established by the Statewide Administration Assembly to unify staff and faculty throughout the system; clarify expectations for conduct; improve our image within and outside this institution; and foremost, improve the culture of the university so that we provide excellent service to our students and ultimately the state. We are but one staff group and will only progress with the participation and support of governance at all levels. We ask that you join this effort and designate individuals interested in sharing this common purpose of self-creating the standards by which we ourselves are to be held.

Improving student outcomes is the focus of many initiatives throughout the system. As funding becomes more dependent on student success (graduation rate, high demand job placement, access) many initiatives have been developed. Advancements in advising, program support and more are already making a difference in student success. This is fantastic. But there is one more step that can be made to improve the student experience: improve the working culture of the university on a systemwide level so that staff and faculty are in a position to provide their highest level of service. As we are all being asked to do more with less, to collaborate more, to share resources, and come together for the common good, we ought to establish a common set of tools for our success.

We are a system, but we have silos within and between individuals, departments, schools and universities. If there is one sure thing that the process of gathering feedback for the strategic direction initiative showed, it’s that our students and public expect us to be working together. Through the process of coming together to create a common statement of shared values we hope to enhance collaboration and help remove barriers between us. By identifying what we stand for – student commitment, quality, integrity, teamwork, respect, good citizenship, a will to win,

personal accountability etc. and living by those standards, we can create and restore trust with students, employees and the general public.

That brings us to the process. The Board of Regents has established the UA Values for the system in their UA LEADS statements. Each campus within their own strategic plans address the unique mission and values of their institution. There are many common themes and terms among all of them. What we would like to do is to collaborate to spell out what behaviors and attitudes are necessary to put those values into practice; to elaborate on the common terms to present a comprehensive set of practices and ethical principles that all of us can commit to in the process of achieving our institutional goals. We want to make sure that these statements reflect the culture and values of our institutions. We cannot simply adopt the core values of some other university and expect it to resonate within our system. It has to “fit” us, which is why we so strongly feel it needs to be written by us in the first place.

When President Gamble presented his Code of Conduct he missed that important mark. There was negativity, absurdity and rigidity that didn’t at all resonate with us. That doesn’t mean it isn’t a good idea to have some ‘code of something’, it just needs a different approach. Rather than wait for another draft to come down to us, we wanted to try and build it from the ground up and then try to sell it to the top.

We would draft “it” collaboratively, with input from governance at all levels. Only once we are happy with what it says and means will we move it to the administration and ultimately the Board of Regents for approval. We know this will take time, and we know that we may be facing some resistance to the whole process. That is why before starting to draft anything, we want to gather the concerns, input, suggestions, and feedback of all of you, and to sincerely invite your participation.

Thank you,
Monique Musick

Statewide Administration Assembly