

Debriefing Report: Review of the Land Grant Mission
University of Alaska - Fairbanks
Based on a site visit conducted
October 21-26, 2007

Overview

The men and women of the Alaskan Cooperative Extension Service (CES) are extremely dedicated and passionate about the programs they deliver to improve the quality of life of Alaskans, especially in the face of geographic challenges and budgetary constraints. Extension is highly valued and found relevant by its stakeholders and clientele groups throughout the state.

However, a strong concern of the Review Team is the “isolation” in which Extension finds itself in relationship to the learning and discovery aspects of the University. Although this separation appears to be preferred by Extension faculty and staff, it hinders the ability of Extension to insure the best research-based information for its clientele. As learning and discovery are connected to each other, the third leg of the land grant mission, outreach and service, must also be integrated within the University’s land grant mission. Towards this end, the Review Team recommends that the leadership of Extension be positioned within the Provost’s Office with the title of “Vice Provost of Extension and Outreach.” This position also serves as the Director of CES. Positioning the leadership of Extension in this way removes it from the constraints of being within a single college and elevates Extension administration to an administrative level that will allow the leadership to grow Extension and Outreach across the land grant campus, bringing all that the land grant university has to offer to the citizens of Alaska.

Review Process

This land grant mission review of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks (UAF) was requested by the Chancellor, Dr. Steve Jones, on behalf of Dr. Carol Lewis, Dean of the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences and Director of the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, and Mr. Peter Pinney, Interim Director, Cooperative Extension Service. It was requested as a partnership effort between UAF and the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). The review is intended to provide an objective assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the land grant mission, which then serves as the basis for recommendations to enable UAF to achieve more effectively its land grant university mission for learning, discovery, and engagement.

More specifically, the review request asked that the Review Team address the value and effectiveness of UAF Extension and outreach, the internal structure and alignment of Extension and research for the land grant mission, and the overall accomplishment of the land grant mission.

The Review Team was assembled based on their professional, managerial and administrative experience, credibility, vision, and knowledge of the land grant university system and its institutions. The Review Team was selected in part from individuals recommended by UAF and in part by the Review Team leader working in consultation with UAF Vice Provost Jake Poole. Review Team members are: Dr. Dan Kugler, Review Team leader and Deputy Administrator for Natural Resources and Environment with USDA-CSREES; Dr. Nancy Bull, Associate Dean for Outreach and Public Service, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Connecticut; Dr. Andrew

Hashimoto, Dean and Director for the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Dr. Marc Johnson, Dean for the College of Agriculture Sciences, Colorado State University; and Dr. Jack Payne, Vice President for Extension & Outreach, Iowa State University.

Organization/Structure

The Review Team is aware of the UAF Vision Task Force recommendation to incorporate community engagement into every pathway of the UAF Strategic Plan 2017. We note that to achieve the Carnegie Community Engagement Elective Classification and to aspire to the vision of The Engaged Institution by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of the State and Land-Grant Universities, the integration of teaching, learning, and scholarship with community-identified needs is essential. This suggests a close alignment of Extension with the academic core of the University. Extension is a process of community engagement that crosses all disciplines related to community and economic development, including areas related to public health, nutrition, food safety, food security, and youth development. This complements the existing tripartite appointments of faculty. Extension educators are faculty extending the learning and discovery missions of the University to its stakeholders, and should report to the chief academic officer.

The Review Team recognizes that this change may not be viewed favorably by some in the University. In order to accomplish this, the University must invest in professional development addressing the areas of measuring impacts, grantsmanship, and engaged scholarship. These metrics should then be incorporated into the performance review process of faculty holding Extension appointments. Other universities have gone through these types of transition, and their input should be sought. A suggested model is for Extension specialists to be housed in academic departments across the institution with split appointments as appropriate; that Extension agents report to the Vice Provost or designee, perhaps with a district director model; and that program and clerical staff report to the local Extension agent.

A quality and multifaceted organizational structure that will clarify communications within the organization and with stakeholders is essential. The vice provost position must strengthen and seek out partnerships with the College of Rural and Community Development and with all University of Alaska System locations across the state. Strong leadership across campus and around the state is needed to advocate for a vital organization of the future. The allocation and leverage of resources and sound fiscal management will be critical to the future health of CES.

Based on meetings with faculty in the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station (AFES) and School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences (SNRAS), the Review Team found that faculty in these units are committed to the research and outreach missions of a land grant institution. Creative ways need to be found to strengthen the involvement of current CES field faculty with the on-campus faculty. Current AFES faculty members appear to welcome and desire Extension specialists to be involved in integrated research and Extension collaborations. Based on the Review Team's limited interaction with only these faculty, we would expect similar relationships across all schools and colleges. One example might be an incentive program that provides seed funding of graduate students for integrated research-Extension projects as a first step. This would require a faculty member in a department and a field faculty member in CES to jointly submit a proposal that will increase team interactions.

CES must focus on two or three strategic priorities for which additional fiscal resources might be invested. These should align closely with the priorities of the University and the State. CES can and does add value to the work of UAF. Both Texas A&M University and The Ohio State University have

developed models for the economic analysis of the “value added” of Extension. These data provide university administration and state legislatures valuable information for fiscal decisions. Engaged and supportive stakeholders will be excellent ambassadors and will help in recruiting students and support for the University.

Greater integration of outreach and extension across the institution will lead to a greater resource base. NSF and NIH now require integrated research and outreach (translational research) proposals. The recent increase of CSREES National Research Initiative funding allows 30% for integrated research and extension. Strong working relationships will lead to successful proposals. Grantsmanship, engaged scholarship, and an appreciation of the value of Extension will generate greater fund development opportunities. Success in grantsmanship will be looked upon favorably by donors as Extension seeks to increase their private fund-raising capacity.

There are clientele needs in Alaska that are beyond the existing knowledge base, but not of sufficient duration to warrant a faculty position. In these cases, agreements could be developed with other states or countries, such as Canada, to “purchase” time of staff and individuals at other institutions to provide temporary and/or targeted service to UAF. Another option is to pursue greater involvement with eXtension to expand resources and scholarship opportunities.

The new Land Grant University Engagement Operations Council (Chancellor's Musings 5/3/07) concept should be embraced. North Carolina State University offers a model for consideration. This effort should be led by the vice provost for extension and outreach.

A concerted marketing effort is critical. Consistent branding across all programs as well as regular news releases to media will raise the visibility of the University and demonstrate the many way the University contributes to the well-being of Alaska.

Next Steps

The recommendations presented in this report are based on written material provided to the team and five days of intensive interviews and visits. The team focused its recommendations on a structural framework and avoided prescriptive solutions. These recommendations, and potential implementation scenarios, should be fully vetted by stakeholders within and external to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. After the vetting process, implementation decisions should be announced on a timely basis and the rationale for the decisions should be shared with all concerned stakeholders.

Conclusion

The potential for CES in Alaska is great. The challenges are many. Strong visionary leadership will make a difference. Change must occur on many levels in the university and within CES.

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