I want to thank all of you for the time and feedback provided during the Facilities Services' employee interviews in December. I appreciated the opportunity to meet many dedicated people working to make UAF an outstanding university. The attached report provides detail on the common themes identified in the interviews, and specifically the issues identified that together we can solve. Some solutions can be accomplished in the next few months while others will be longer term.

As you read the attached report please keep in mind UAF’s mission:

_The University of Alaska Fairbanks, the nation's northernmost Land, Sea and Space Grant university and international research center, advances and disseminates knowledge through teaching, research and public service with an emphasis on Alaska, the circumpolar North and their diverse peoples. UAF—America's arctic university—promotes academic excellence, student success and lifelong learning._

And, our corresponding division mission:

_The Division of Administrative Services inclusive of facilities services, grants and contracts, finance and auxiliary services, procurement, environmental health, safety and risk management, human resources, police, and fire is a team that collaboratively provides safe and effective services for students, faculty, staff and other constituents to achieve the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ mission._

**Common Themes**

**Like the Job:**

Nearly everyone interviewed reported that they really liked their job and especially appreciated the people they worked with. It is interesting to note that these two areas also had significantly high ratings in the division employee survey conducted in April and May 2009 (if you are interested in the survey results see Employee Survey on [http://www.uaf.edu/adminsvc/about/](http://www.uaf.edu/adminsvc/about/). This is very positive for employees as well as UAF.

**Value the Benefits:**

Many valued that the jobs provided consistent work with corresponding consistency in pay and benefits as compared to similar jobs in the private sector.
Value Training Opportunity:

Many appreciated the training opportunities and the ability to learn a new trade or skilled craft. There were many who complimented supervisors for supporting employee training and skill development. At the same time, many noted that there could be more done in the area of job training. This will be an area for short-term and long-term attention.

Communication Can Improve:

Communication issues surfaced in many interviews. The dissatisfaction expressed included:

- Limited and/or filtered upper administration communication (What was the Kouji meeting about? What happened with the Maddox interviews? Why do we need to do benchmarking? Where did the benchmarking information come from? Why didn’t we get to hire the candidate I rated highest?);
- Poor supervisor communication (Why am I doing this task? Why was that customer dissatisfied with the job?); and
- Inconsistent cross-departmental communication (Why can’t the other shop finish so we can do our part? Why can’t I get that part quicker?).

These interviews and this report are important steps to improving communication. Communication, however, is an area that requires our collective effort. We must all commit to constant improvement, but also to understanding that it will never be perfect. I am committed to creating an open and collaborative work environment and good communication is a key to that goal. The solution sections below on communication, supervisor training, and organizational clarity are all directed toward improving communication.

Pride, Ownership, and Accountability:

Several employees, each from a unique point of view, expressed the desire that co-workers have a shared expectation of personal accountability and job performance. The individuals expressed significant pride in their work, the work of their department/shop, and its reflections on UAF as a whole. They noted that when others don’t have that same level of pride and expectation, or when supervisors don’t enforce a consistent expectation, it reflects poorly on them as part of the organization. Examples of this included: level of daily work commitment, time spent driving from one task to another, use and care of university vehicles and equipment, people watching verses working on a task, timely completion of tasks, and high quality work products.

Organizational Certainty:

Another area frequently commented on was: organizational uncertainty due to retirements, vacancies, and interim positions within Facilities Services; and new leadership at the campus and division level. This uncertainty has been real, and relative to the Facilities Services organization, seemingly slow to resolve. I will ask your patience for a few more months before all Facilities Services organization decisions and placements are complete. I will go in-depth into this topic in the solution section below.
Short and Long Term Solutions

Budgetary Reality:

In light of the UAF’s current budget status which highlights the need to exercise a much higher degree of budgetary constraint there are near-term actions that may be required including: additional soft or hard closure days; postponing rehires; and postponing equipment/vehicle purchases. Position vacancies (unless absolutely critical) will be filled only after a prescribed delay, and in some cases not filled at all. In isolated instances layoffs may be required. Every effort will be made to find other positions for those in layoff status. Auxiliary (business) operations such as the bookstore, ice arena, and parking - are required to be revenue generating and self-sustaining. These units will be closely scrutinized to avoid deficits. Recharge operations, which have constraints similar to those of auxiliary units and encompass a significant share of Facilities Services' operation, must also be closely scrutinized to avoid future deficits. Priority functions needing additional staff resources will require reallocation of vacancies, reassignment of existing positions, or specifically directed new revenue. Long-term actions will include many of the ideas that surfaced during interviews focused on increasing efficiency, such as: warehouse and expediting improvements; fewer and smaller more fuel efficient vehicles; training and performance feedback; benchmarking; and improved work order system management.

Organizational Clarity and Alignment:

To limit the uncertainty and to improve effectiveness, organizational issues are on my short-term list. In addressing these and future Facilities Services' organizational issues, keep in mind, my primary guiding principle is that facilities maintenance, operations, and utilities are the core business functions and all other areas are in support of these functions.

From the interviews and through analyzing the organization, I have identified the need to limit supervisory layers within the organization, assess which departments support the core functions, and identify which functions might be better aligned elsewhere in the organization. I am comfortable with the organizational alignment of the maintenance shops and therefore the recruitment of the maintenance superintendent has started.

At the same time, I believe some departments and functions in operations and FS administration require different reporting lines to make the core functions most productive. Changes in departmental/functional reporting lines in the operation and support areas will be resolved in the next 4-8 weeks, at which time the operation superintendent position with a redefined job description will be recruited. Facilities Services' leaders and I will be working with supervisors and will seek input from employees of affected departments to evaluate the most effective reporting lines. Reporting line changes will result in modified and redefined positions. Although internal recruitments are most likely, depending on the circumstance, some direct appointments and external recruitments may be used.

Regarding the leadership position at Facilities Services, a determination whether UAF will replace the Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Services will not occur until June 2010. This is consistent with my communication of October 30, 2009 announcing Director Linda Zanazzo’s Facilities Services leadership role.
Additionally, over the next year Facilities Services’ management (with support from human resources) will review and update all job descriptions, clarify supervisory lines, and strengthen performance reporting. Performance reporting will include shop and departmental reviews integrating work order, cost, and human resource information.

**Non-traditional Schedule Requests:**

Flexible schedules, “four-ten” work weeks, and “nine-nine” biweekly schedules were common requests among employees interviewed. Not every job accommodates such schedules, however, in jobs that can accommodate such arrangement, and for employees that have demonstrated the ability to self manage, these alternative schedules may serve both the employee and the organization. Over the next three months a small work group including supervisors, Human Resources, Labor Relations, and union representatives will be assigned the task of identifying issues, recommending options, and developing guidelines for supervisors to evaluate, award and monitor non-traditional work schedule requests. Guidelines developed are with the understanding that such arrangements are viewed as a privilege.

**Improve Communication:**

Communication is always an issue. This was brought up on multiple occasions from various points of view; vice chancellor and chancellor to employees, supervisors to employees, facilities leadership to employees, and employee to employee. From the vice chancellor level, I will continue my efforts to improve communications. The “bus barn briefings,” the holiday report/employee awards, the interviews, and this report are a few examples of that effort. I plan to provide a regular short report on key issues starting in March 2010. Additionally, Facilities Services’ leaders will provide a regular report detailing facilities’ budget status, work order completions, and employee changes (including promotions, retirements, and moves).

**Supervisor Training:**

Supervisor training, including contract training, was mentioned on several occasions as an area needing attention. The Chancellor has made supervisor training a priority throughout UAF. I will be placing an even greater emphasis on this area within Administrative Services. A small task group has been assigned to develop a list of training courses, above and beyond those required by the Chancellor, which will be available and expected of supervisors reporting through the Vice Chancellor of Administrative Services. The training courses will be tailored to various supervisory levels, functions, and will build on past experience. The task group recommendation is expected by March 1, 2010. Please feel free to contact Brad Lobland or Darrin Edson with your input.

**Utilities and Human Resources Support:**

UAF Utilities is a significantly different operation than other departments at UAF. It is a 7 x 24 hour operation on which the entire campus is fully dependent. The age of the facility and the Human Resources' policies add a level of complexity in assuring smooth operations. UAF is actively seeking funding for upgrading the power plant. Recently Charles (Chilkoot) Ward, with other leaders on campus, formed a workgroup to fully analyze and communicate necessary upgrades for UAF’s 1960’s combined heat and power plant. It is among UAF’s and the Board of Regents’ highest priority requests for state capital deferred maintenance funding. If the Governor’s funding proposal is approved this legislative session, it would be a very significant step in the process of upgrading the power plant.
Hiring, training, shift coverage, supervisor training, and shift work issues were all noted on several occasions during the interviews. I have asked that UAF’s Human Resources Department work with utilities management on developing a list of significant issues and recommendations for solutions. The list of HR related issues to be addressed will be provided to me jointly from directors Charles Ward and Kris Racina by February 20, 2010 with recommended solutions and next steps available by April 30, 2010. I am pleased to report that meetings have already begun.

Several people suggested that utilities should report directly to the Vice Chancellor. After a decision is made regarding the Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities (expected in June 2010) a determination will be made regarding whether or not utilities will report separately or be maintained within Facilities Services.

**Apprentice Program Needed:**

Employee career and skills training opportunities and specifically apprentice program availability were topics mentioned in the interviews. Action is being taken regarding the apprentice program, however there are several externally controlled steps that must be taken before we’ll be confident in securing such an option at UAF for asbestos abatement, plumbers, boiler operations, painters and electricians. I want to thank John Quebbemann for his work to date on this issue. I will provide a status report monthly to those interested, listing actions taken and next steps required. If you want the status reports email Mary Parsons at mkparsons@alaska.edu to be added to the distribution list.

**Employee Training:**

Employee career and skills training opportunities benefit both the employee and the organization. UAF is very dependent on training and promoting employees from within; this puts further emphasis on the importance of training opportunities. Many training opportunities currently exist, and we need to take advantage of them. Some include: working with skilled individuals, reading manuals, and taking related classes on your own time and in some cases during work hours. An especially good resource is to have people utilize the programs offered at TVCC, like process technology, auto mechanics, and welding. Employees willing to improve their own skill through existing opportunities are most likely to position themselves to take advantage of advanced training opportunities that might become available. Although many opportunities exist, more can be done to provide incentives for individuals to improve their skills. In the next two months a small work group of employees and supervisors in Facilities Services will be formed and asked to provide recommendations on how best to encourage employees to make good use of the tuition waiver benefit, the university’s Skill Soft training program, TVCC courses and other training options. If you are interested in participating in the group, please contact Mary Parsons at mkparsons@alaska.edu.

**Succession Planning:**

There are key skilled individuals within Facilities Services that are excellent at what they do and are nearing retirement age, but the skill set that they hold is not otherwise available within UAF Facilities Services. This issue exists among many shops and departments: electricians, electrical and mechanical engineers, and plumbers to name a few. Looking at training existing employees to fill these positions as they become available is a priority. However, at this time we are in a position where finding replacements for some of these individuals may not occur from within. There is a group of supervisors
at Facilities Services discussing options to assure the ability to replace these individuals with qualified candidates. I am looking forward to receiving their recommendations within the next six-weeks.

**Other Areas for Improvements:**

Although, I have specifically addressed many of the suggestions employees brought for improvement, there were several others that will also be assessed including: improving warehouse process and costing, analyzing vehicle and large equipment needs and utilization, developing a deliberate process to improve cross-shop communications, fully utilize the work order system and provide benchmark information for costs and timeliness.

Again, thank you for the time and feedback provided during these interviews. Feel free to contact me if you have questions. My phone number is 474-6500 or email pat.pitney@alaska.edu. You may also contact Kris Racina (6112) or Brad Lobland (5653) with questions.