Strategic Plan, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Goal 4: Transform UAF’s intellectual property development and commercialization

There is an inherent entrepreneurial spirit in all of us who work or study at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, as we pursue the answers to some of the major challenges of today’s society to build the Alaska and Arctic of tomorrow. UAF’s aim is to drive Alaska’s innovation economy and be a leadership voice for U.S. Arctic innovation and entrepreneurship. UAF’s drive is to produce graduates with an entrepreneurial mindset and skilled in the processes necessary to bring research to commercialization and grow viable businesses. UAF will deliver economic, societal, cultural and educational impact to Fairbanks, Alaska, and people of the circumpolar North. The vision is to develop and support a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship through reciprocal partnerships; provide the resources to foster creative, social, and technological entrepreneurship; build innovative communities to develop solutions to focused challenges and needs; and create opportunities to grow today’s and tomorrow’s innovators and entrepreneurs. The UAF academic community, along with its partners and collaborations, will drive the university to be the U.S. Arctic’s top innovative and entrepreneurial university. UAF will work with Fairbanks, Interior Alaska and the state to drive Alaska’s innovation economy, produce skilled graduates to bring research to commercialization and deliver an impact to Alaska and the people of the circumpolar North. UAF’s strategy will sustain and grow its innovation culture while continuing to educate, prepare and engage its students, connecting with the local community and flourishing as the leading U.S. Arctic university. UAF’s sustainability and future growth is driven by the creativity and passion of its faculty, staff and students. In building outcomes with metrics for success, UAF can adapt to the needs of society and its students, as well as the capabilities of its community members, while integrating new targets for future growth sectors and opportunities. UAF will foster and support all innovation activities and entrepreneurship and build interdisciplinary teams to work with the local community to provide solutions to their greatest challenges. As students engage with tomorrow’s technologies, they will become the innovators of tomorrow and build the Alaska economy as the state and the university look to 2025 and beyond.

Innovative culture across the university

UAF will build its existing culture and foster new passions to integrate into the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Alaska and the Arctic. UAF will develop a new philosophy to support today’s entrepreneurs and build the next generation of Alaska’s innovators. UAF’s innovative researchers will be supported to grow and prosper. This includes:

- Integrating faculty with significant experience in innovation and entrepreneurship into the academic review process, supporting students pursuing innovative research and rapidly responding to commercialization opportunities commensurate to the speed of business.
- Fostering ideation and entrepreneurship across its academics. UAF will recognize its entrepreneurs through yearly awards and at national and international programs and events.
- Building social, creative, cultural and technological entrepreneurs, including those who focus on greater well-being, and developing diverse entrepreneurship programs such as, but not limited to, those that support Alaska and Indigenous entrepreneurs and first-generation college student entrepreneurs.
- Evaluating the impact of entrepreneurial activities with dynamic metrics to measure innovative broader impacts on society and entrepreneurial and innovation success.
• Supporting the next generation of innovators through embedding entrepreneurship as an integral part of the Alaska school system, from K-12 to the university, and into a statewide entrepreneur/innovation ecosystem.

Engage local communities, Alaska and the circumpolar North to develop solutions to focused challenges and needs
Developing partnerships with community organizations across Alaska and the Arctic will foster new ideas and projects centered on the critical challenges and needs of today. UAF academic capabilities will be applied to develop solutions for direct integration and demonstrate to its students how their research and innovations can have an impact on community development and growth. The university will:
• Integrate more community needs and challenge projects into academic programs, where students follow the design-and-build process from a prototype to a minimum viable product and the final solution.
• Further engagement with local communities through reciprocal agreements that address their challenges in mutually beneficial ways.
• Engage in open innovation to build solutions through rapid ideation sprints, as well as diversify entrepreneurial funding to expand the innovation community and opportunity for success to connect its academics with the leading entrepreneurs across the country.
• Build an industry liaison program using existing relationships, and build future connections, including growth in internships and intra-preneurships in and out of the state.
• The university will develop a business brand to promote the newest UAF technologies and discoveries that will go hand in hand with academic teaching, research and engagement missions.

Resources to foster innovative, creative culture and entrepreneurship
In supporting knowledge transfer and co-creation of solutions, UAF will mentor the next generation of innovators, highlight capabilities developed by its academics and ensure that its academics have the best tools at their disposal. This will provide an opportunity to promote UAF innovations and opportunities for collaboration so that a wider audience can become advocates for UAF’s entrepreneurial capabilities. The university will:
• Develop an innovation and entrepreneurship mentorship program. The university will sustain and grow its ambassador program to represent its breadth of teaching, research and service with a larger fellows’ program.
• Create a stronger and robust online portal to promote and market available discoveries and UAF-based startup companies. UAF will focus on building a generation of research-minded entrepreneurs to support a more sustainable Alaska economic base through a broad-minded design thinking approach.
• Continue growing tools that support academics in disclosing their inventions and submitting patent applications, along with training on pitching to businesses and customer discovery.

Interdisciplinary, innovative communities across the university, Alaska and the Arctic
Colleges, schools and institutes are the academic heartbeat of the university. There are academics whose innovative research and entrepreneurial activities cross those environments. Building interdisciplinary teams and themes can bring together a wide range of perspectives and skills to tackle the grand challenges that we face today. These themes will complement the academic
programs at UAF in the colleges and schools, while integrating those academics within its institutes across common research topics.

- Building UAF-wide design challenges with teams from across its colleges, schools and institutes will drive its academics to focus on the interdisciplinary challenges that incorporate all aspects of the university.
- Developing interdisciplinary research themes will foster transdisciplinary collaborations by aligning like-minded researchers under a similar theme that can meet the grand challenges for today and tomorrow while highlighting the broader impact on society of UAF’s innovative research.
- Promoting these new themes as opportunities for the community to connect with the university will build new partnerships and funding opportunities and support collaborations across its academic environment.

Adaptable to the Alaska and Arctic of tomorrow

As society develops and adapts, new opportunities arise and new growth sectors emerge. Being agile and nimble to adjust to these changes makes UAF an innovative academic institution and will produce graduates with the skills needed for the workforce of today and tomorrow.

- A dedicated technology transfer office will support UAF academics to transition their innovation research from the academic environment and work with industry to understand their needs and challenges.
- Support for an innovation space for startup companies and budding entrepreneurs allows innovative academics to work directly with like-minded industry partners.
- Developing focused activities with local community members and organizations to work on the big ideas and major challenges for Alaska will build a community to develop solutions for a direct impact.
- UAF will evaluate the major economic growth sectors for Alaska and the Arctic to ensure research and technology transfer is at the leading edge, ready for integration and societal benefits. UAF will support training and capacity building for its graduating students to be the innovators of tomorrow to benefit Alaska and the U.S. Arctic.