



From the Save the Seawolf Committee

Save the Seawolf!

Ten Elevator Speeches About Decentralization.

While we're not home free yet, the fight to save the Seawolf (and the Nanook, and Spike the Whale) has moved into a new phase. Here are ten elevator speeches on why a decentralized system of higher education in Alaska will be better for everyone.

1, The current system is broken. Yes, the regents did decide on September 13 to look at “multiple options for university restructuring. But up until then “one UA” was *the plan!* How hard did we have to work to get them to commit to doing the due diligence they should have been exercising from the very beginning?

2, Local control is more effective. Because the three universities are rooted in their communities and the people in charge understand their complexities they can come up with far more nuanced, informed, targeted responses to the various challenges and opportunities that each is faced with. This includes dealing with budget cuts but also building strategic partnerships to grow programs.

3, Local control is more responsive. Seeing what needs to be done, local leadership can move quickly to take steps. There does not have to be the endless round of permissions or inquiries for further information that a centralized authority would insist upon. There also would not be the unrealistic dictates of a central authority which does not know local conditions.

4, Local control is more cost efficient. Having programs in three places is not the cost driver. It's the fourth highly paid administrator telling people at the three universities what they can do and how they should do it that bloats the system and adds cost. Higher education in Alaska was never too big, it was just too centrally run.

5, Adding new local boards is not administrative bloat. All three institutions already have chancellors' advisory boards. These local community members (who serve like the regents, unpaid) know their institution and their community and how to align the university's mission with local needs. They can easily be converted into local boards of trustees to whom chancellors would answer.

6, Decentralization is the nationwide trend. State university systems the length and breadth of the nation have been dealing with declining levels of state support. The response of choice has been to decentralize decision making and empower the universities to be as creative and entrepreneurial as possible in meeting community needs.

7, Unleash the Seawolf, the Nanook, Spike the Whale! We want local control for UAA, sure. But UAF and UAS will also benefit from this. Each university has already tailored itself and grown a distinct institutional culture in response to the demands of their communities. Imagine what they can become if they are truly freed to achieve their full potential!

8, We can still do things together. This doesn't mean that we each go our own way. There are still things the three universities can do better as a group, such as certain shared services, or

things that one university could do on behalf of the others. But the idea that the only way UAF, UAA, and UAS could cooperate is by having someone in Fairbanks *make them* do so is nonsense.

9, Competition will be healthier. Under the current system Statewide administration often pits the universities against each other. Insisting there can be only one engineering, or business, or education school encourages a “hunger games” mentality to be the surviving program standing at the end. On their own, similar programs will justify their existence by the value they return to their communities and their institutions.

10, Three are better than one. The sudden demise of the UAA School of Education was both highly unfortunate and utterly unnecessary. But at least there were two other accredited institutions left in Alaska which could at least try to pick up the pieces. If we attempt to put all of our accreditation eggs in a single basket, loss of accreditation can happen statewide. Three universities provide for a resilient system that can weather shocks and crises.