



UAF news and information

Friday Focus: The move to administration changes perception

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— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor



UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

Taking on the position of the UAF provost and executive vice chancellor is by far the most profound transition in my professional career. I want to thank all of you for placing your trust and confidence in my abilities to lead in this role. In this column I will share my early reflections on the perceptions and the reality of my administrative position.

UAF and the Fairbanks community are not new for me. I joined UAF in 2002 as a faculty member and progressed to the ranks of a tenured professor, associate dean, research director and interim dean before starting as the provost and executive vice chancellor in July 2018. The first change I felt was in the reception by peers. A few of them said lightheartedly, “I don’t know whether I should offer congratulations or condolences.” Genuine congratulations were mixed with sighs of losing a respected peer to the “other side.”

The first seven months on the job have only strengthened my conviction that there are no sides. We all work for a common goal — to provide a quality education to every student.

My own perception as a faculty member was that everything moves very slowly in administration. I now know that this perception couldn’t be farther away from the reality. The pace of the work in my job is amazingly fast. It is hard to fathom how much is achieved in the few emails that are sent between two meetings. There is a constant flow of thoughts, tasks, decisions, planning activities and external engagement. The variety of issues that need to be addressed in a given day keep me

on my learning edge. Academic oversight, conflict and crisis management, difficult dialogs, budget management, mentoring, advocacy, shared governance, compliance and reporting — all must be undertaken to ensure a smooth day-to-day operation of the university.

I am blessed in having the support of a diverse and dynamic leadership team, knowledgeable and kind staff, committed and hardworking faculty, engaged alumni and community members, and above all a body of creative and driven students.

The public nature of my position necessitated other personal adjustments. Earlier office hours, reduced flexibility for setting my own agenda, and greater scrutiny of every word and action came with the job. I quickly learned that my freestyle brainstorming and suggestions had the potential to be perceived as directives that could influence the task priorities of those directly or indirectly reporting to me. I now make it a point to clarify when I am requesting an action and when I am engaging in an academic think tank.

Last month I paced through familiar corridors that I walked through every day for more than a decade. There were a few unfamiliar faces. Tasks that I identified myself with were being carried out by new teams. The liveliness and activity brought a smile and sense of deep satisfaction that emanated from knowing that my successors were set up for success.

Building trust, empowering our teams and investing in their future is the best thing we can do as leaders. Our positions and titles change, and it is important to not conflate our titles with who we really are.