



UAF news and information

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UAF photo by Alyssa Enriquez

Provost Anupma Prakash takes a moment to pause next to a poster from the 4th International Polar Year that commenced in 2007 when she was a faculty member at UAF.

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— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

Earlier this week, I walked up to the Butrovich building for meetings at the University of Alaska System Office. I smiled as I paused at the poster near the entrance of the President's office suite. On the bottom left of the poster was a photo of a younger me. It was a poster from the 4th International Polar Year (IPY4) that commenced in 2007 when I was a faculty member at UAF. I had IPY4 memories flashing back. Our university was abuzz with local, national, and international researchers visiting our campuses, working on collaborative proposals, and conducting field research. UAF hosted international workshops and conferences and served as a global research hub. Media coverage brought awareness about polar issues and their global impacts, which drove curiosity and attracted new research talent to Alaska, some of whom continued to work in Alaska and now call it home.

UAF researchers were deeply involved in shaping the [vision for IPY4](#) and we are still surrounded by many colleagues who were integral in making IPY4 a success. They will tell you stories about the slow beginnings of IPY4, how it gained momentum, and how it finally resulted in heightened polar research. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's [Polar Research Board](#) served as the U.S. National Committee for IPY4, helped to initiate this global program, and continued to synthesize and disseminate information generated by IPY activities. [Lessons and legacies of International Polar Year 2007-2008](#) is a PRB publication that continues to guide us today as we ramp up the planning for the next IPY.

Yes, you heard me right! Planning is underway for the 5th International Polar Year to be held in 2032-2033. PRB is again taking steps to play a key role. PRB serves as the U.S. National Committee for both the International Arctic Science Committee and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, two international groups that are deeply involved in the preparatory work and released the [Initial IPY5 concept note and timeline](#).

In October 2023, I was appointed as a member to PRB and what an exciting time to step into this role! The PRB has many familiar faces ([see member bios](#)), including UAF International Arctic Research Center postdoctoral fellow Adelheid Herrmann who is known for her work on the [landscape of tribal communities](#), IARC affiliate Jenny Baeseman, and PRB Chair Matin Jeffries, a former research professor at the Geophysical Institute. Earlier this month I participated in the PRB Spring 2024 meeting that included an overview of IPY5, reports from delegates to IASC and SCAR, and flash talks from U.S representatives to working groups and standing committees that were very informative. There were also panel discussions on lessons and legacies from IPY4, U.S. Indigenous leadership and engagement in IPY5, and federal agencies' role in international research coordination. The [meeting materials](#) are a valuable reference resource and freely available on the PRB site.

IPY5 holds promise to bolster polar research in new ways. There will be new opportunities to engage, and I am committed to sharing those opportunities broadly. Planning, building partnerships and engagement, garnering and leveraging resources, and implementing research plans takes concerted effort and time – a valuable lesson learned from IPY4. Fortunately, this time we have nearly twice the amount of lead time as we had in preparing for IPY4. We also know that time flies by fast. So, let's keep ourselves abreast and engaged in IPY5 planning efforts and position ourselves to amplify the impact of the research that we are globally known for.

Friday Focus is written by a different member of UAF's leadership team every week.