



Friday Focus: What does a provost do?



UAF photo by JR Ancheta

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— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

Four years back when I accepted the provost and executive vice chancellor position, the first question my father asked me was, “what does it mean to be a provost and what does a provost do?” In the universities in India, this title is typically not used. Though many academic institutions in the U.S. have a provost, I still get the same question quite frequently.

Just as I told my father, my position has a dual title. As provost, I serve as the chief academic officer and administer UAF’s 170 plus academic programs ranging from occupational endorsements to doctorates that are delivered in all modalities. I oversee all faculty matters and over a third of the [UAF budget](#). The [organizational chart](#) shows the 18 positions that directly report to me. These include the vice provost and accreditation liaison officer, leads of six academic colleges/schools, two research and extension units, graduate school, library, museum, summer session and lifelong learning, international programs, institutional research, eCampus, academic support programs, and

two staff members. Metaphorically, I steer the academic ship, though it takes the work of many dedicated students, staff, faculty, and deans and directors, to keep the ship strong and sailing forward.

As the executive vice chancellor (EVC), I serve as the second in command in the administrative hierarchy and act as UAF's executive-in-charge in the chancellor's absence. I also serve on the chancellor's [core cabinet](#) with the other vice chancellors, executive officer, and the executive director for advancement. The chancellor and the core cabinet together have the responsibility to ensure there is a balanced vision for advancing teaching, research and service, guided by a clear understanding of UAF's mission and [strategic goals](#). Amongst the vice-chancellors, the EVC position is akin to being the captain of a team where you are the first among equals. The EVC role has greater external facing responsibilities of representing the university to diverse constituencies, advocacy, and partaking in fundraising and development activities.

The university's chief academic officer works to inspire outstanding academic performance and professional advancement of faculty. At UAF, I established a [faculty development team](#) that has been very innovative in leading many of these opportunities through the [faculty accelerator](#) portal. I encourage and facilitate shared governance in all aspects of institutional planning and operations by working closely with the faculty senate to create, update, and improve academic policies and ensure the policies are effectively implemented. I often work with external entities as well to build relations and formalize collaborations through established academic agreements that provide expanded opportunities for our students to gain hands-on experience, pursue career pathways, or be exposed to a more diverse body of faculty and students who come to UAF for a short term. There are several annual processes that I oversee that include, but are not limited to, faculty tenure and promotion, sabbatical leave, awards and honors, program review, and institutional data reporting. With the vice chancellor for administrative services, Julie Queen, I prepare the annual institutional report that goes to the State Office of Management and Budget, and I co-chair the planning and budget committee which makes recommendations on the annual UAF budget request and internal reallocations to the Chancellor. With vice provost Fitts, who is also our accreditation liaison officer, I oversee our institutional accreditation, that is a formative peer-review process and a gold-standard affirmation that a college provides a quality of education that the general public has the right to expect and that the educational community recognizes. And finally, I also build, facilitate and implement new initiatives such as the North Star College that you will hear more about through my [academic newsletters](#).

There is a fast-paced rhythm to my multifaceted professional life that I really enjoy. There is the annual rhythm that is guided by the academic calendar with work ebbing and flowing as students come in at the start of the semester and leave during the break. Then, there is the monthly and weekly rhythm of routine meetings that are required for planning and running the academic machine. And, finally, there is the daily rhythm of activities where there is an opportunity to make a meaningful impact through my actions each day. It is amazing how much gets done in a day, just through a quick email or conversation between two meetings. Greeting a prospective student, engaging in a difficult dialog, or reviewing every course that goes into the catalog are all opportunities to exercise leadership. My job has both breadth and depth and I always say that if you really want to have your finger on the pulse of the university, consider the job of a provost.

As I explained all this to my father four years ago, he asked, "So you don't teach, you don't do research – do you still help students?" I said, "Yes, it is all about our students and their success." He was happy with my response. And I am grateful for the many opportunities my position provides to make a meaningful difference.



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