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– By Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

It feels surreal to be writing my final Friday Focus message. This moment has offered me a chance to pause and reflect on the journey that led me to academic administration.

My Dream

Reflecting on my days as an undergraduate geology student, I vividly recall my first lab, where we were asked about our aspirations. In a program with only a handful of women, I confidently declared my dream of becoming a professor. The room rippled with giggles from my peers, but my professor silenced the smirks with a thoughtful question: "Why stop at being a professor?" At that moment, I thought to myself, "Who said I would stop?" Even then, the seed of academic leadership had quietly taken root—waiting to flourish in the years to come.

My Journey

My path into administration followed a fairly linear progression. I completed my Ph.D. in India, pursued postdoctoral research and held a lectureship in the Netherlands, and eventually came to Alaska, where I became a professor of geophysics. Over time, I embraced increasing leadership roles at the department, college, and university levels, culminating in my appointment as UAF's Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor in the summer of 2018.

My Reflections

Many factors contributed to my journey toward what I consider my dream job — hard work, open-mindedness, being in the right place at the right time, and above all, the support of my family and the guidance of strong mentors.

In the ascent to — and longevity in — my current position, Chancellor White has played a pivotal role. He recognized my potential, selected me to serve as provost and executive vice chancellor, invested in my professional growth, trusted me to do my job, offered timely feedback, and gave me the latitude to take risks and learn from mistakes. His decisive leadership and unwavering trust kept me inspired and motivated through the years.

Among the many professional relationships within an executive team, the one between the chief executive officer (chancellor) and the chief academic officer (provost) is perhaps the most critical to a university's success. At a time when the average tenure of a university chancellor is just 4–5 years and that of a provost is 3–4 years, I take great pride in noting that Chancellor White and I have worked together for seven years — providing steady, stable leadership to UAF.

In my role as Provost & EVC, the [36 Friday Focus messages](#) I've written feel like more than just updates; they are a collection of snapshots — moments that reflect my journey, share stories from my past, and capture the experiences that have shaped me.

As one might expect, people are curious about my executive role — what the ups and downs were, what my favorite moments have been, and what led me to the decision to retire. I wish I could answer them all, but here are a few of the big ones:

1. Is the job stressful?

The role of provost is one of immense breadth and depth, touching on nearly every aspect of university operations. That is precisely what I have loved about it. Every day, I felt like I had my finger on the pulse of the university — a privilege that comes with significant responsibility and the need to make tough decisions. Whether managing personnel and budgets, navigating political landscapes, or addressing expectations, each decision carries weight. Outcomes aren't always win-win scenarios. Leadership often demands resilience, and it's not uncommon to be the



Photo by Rudi Gens

Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

recipient of uninformed, bizarre, or untruthful comments.

So yes, parts of the work can be stressful. However, that stress is balanced by the fulfillment that comes from purposeful service – knowing that each effort contributes to the university’s growth and success.

2. What lessons have you learned, or advice would you offer?

Each day brings its own unique insights, but these are a few that stand out:

- *Everyone longs to be seen and heard.* Taking the time to connect meaningfully and build trusted relationships is invaluable.
- *Every issue has multiple perspectives.* Pausing to reflect, asking thoughtful questions, and thoroughly processing a situation before drawing conclusions or communicating decisions leads to better outcomes.
- *In conflict management, self-awareness is key.* By first assessing and calming your own emotions, you become better equipped to help others find balance and resolution.
- *Delegate responsibility.* You empower others when you give them the opportunity to step up – and accountability, for both yourself and your team, ensures progress.
- *Grace matters.* It's never too late to admit a mistake and make amends, and we should always strive to extend grace – not just to others, but also to ourselves.
- *Gratitude is powerful.* It shifts your perspective, helping you find joy in what you have instead of focusing on what's missing.

3. Why are you retiring?

This is probably the hardest question of all, because serving as UAF’s provost and executive vice chancellor has been a wild, rewarding, and incredibly fun journey.

It’s been *wild* because over the past seven years, we’ve navigated some serious challenges – curbing a financial exigency, weathering three compact budget years, managing operations through COVID, and constantly adapting to evolving regulations and compliance requirements.

It’s been *rewarding* because, despite all the external uncertainties, we accomplished so much. We listened to the needs of students and industry and created new academic programs – like the Earth System Science degrees. We grew enrollments, increased research revenues, and strengthened our communities. We launched initiatives like North Star College, the Student Success Center, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and AlaskaX, which brings free UAF courses to a global audience.

And it’s been *fun*. From Music in the Garden and the Art Department’s Thanksgiving potluck to cooking for Diwali in the Culinary Arts kitchen, science open houses, and cheering at blue and gold athletic events – these are memories I’ll always cherish.

After seven fulfilling years in this role, I feel that now is the right time – both professionally and personally – to pass the baton. I’m looking forward to new adventures and spending more time with family in Fairbanks, Germany, and India.

In Closing

I am deeply grateful for the countless opportunities UAF has given me – to learn, to grow, to serve, and to build a career that has been profoundly rewarding. I’m equally grateful for your friendship, support, and the many ways you’ve contributed to my learning along the way. My love for this university runs deep – steadfast and unwavering. Though I’m retiring from my role, I will always carry UAF in my heart, and yes, I will always bleed blue and gold!



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