Implications of the Priority Industries on the University of Alaska System

The University of Alaska over the years has been keenly aware and attempted to be responsive to the needs of the State as identified by the Priority List of Industries. Referencing the list of priority industries has been leveraged to acquire federal, state, and internal funding to start-up, expand and enhance programs for years.

The challenge for using this list has created challenges and opportunities to either support or discredit proposals based on the application of the list.

Hypothetically, to support a culinary arts program for funding would have to leverage the Hospitality and Tourism priority industry to be recognized as a priority for the state; likewise Maritime programs would have to be linked to Seafood Processing to make it a priority; and although every business has people performing accounting and H.R. functions, they don't make the priority industry list.

However, the University's mission is much broader than a few priority industries when it comes to providing educational and technical programs to students. Limiting our focus on priority industries places many economic and social education and training opportunities to be unaddressed in many communities where we have campuses.

Another area that we have implemented an initiative to capture the broader needs of the state through industry categorizing is through our Career Clusters. The Career Cluster program was originally developed by the federal Dept. of Education and adopted, though not implemented in almost all 50 states. Career Clusters provided secondary education systems with Knowledge, Skills, and other Attributes specific to groupings or clusters of occupations in a combination of like industries, along with some specific curriculum to help high school students prepare for jobs after high school.   Although endorsed, the Career Cluster model wasn't implemented in Alaska.

UAA's Community and Technical College modified the Career Cluster model to create a Career Pathways initiative that has been adopted throughout the UA system of campuses to communicate the educational pathways available through the UA that provides students, teachers, counselors, and family members with the programmatic options for informing where programs are available.

The University of Alaska used this model to develop our own clusters based on the federal model using the programs recognized within our university system. We reorganized the clusters to include 13 areas, and have since identified associated every program to a cluster for investment and student data gathering purposes. For example, our proposed FY13 TVEP investments will go toward the following clusters: Health Sciences, Mining-Manufacturing & Process Technology, Education & Training, Architecture & Construction, Transportation-Distribution & Logistics, Business-Management & Administration, Fisheries-Agriculture & Natural Resources, Information & Technology, Energy-Environmental Science & Green Jobs, Science-Technology-Engineering & Research

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To address the greater mission of the UA system, we have developed priorities and guidelines for Workforce Development Investment to include the needs of the State as identified by this board, but also the regional and local economic opportunities.

To implement this strategy for investing the UA system has adopted as criteria for accepting proposals for TVEP funding:

1. Local Economic and Workforce Needs;
2. Campus Mission and Priorities;
3. State Identified Workforce Priorities.

Identifying specific and regional occupational priorities would be considered a positive alternative to the wide spectrum of occupations currently encompassed by the priority industries. There can be more focused and greater impact from investments by having priority occupations driven by local and state economic drivers that will also create greater effectiveness in our advocacy efforts within the state and at the federal level.