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**Proposal to the Senate Educational Policy Committee  
for the Formation of New Units  
(including Permanent Centers and Institutes)**

1. **SPONSOR NAME AND EMAIL:** Anna Ball, aball@illinois.edu
  
2. **COLLEGE CONTACT NAME AND EMAIL** (for units housed within a College):  
Germán Bollero, gbollero@illinois.edu
  
3. **TITLE OF PROPOSAL** (e.g., Establish the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment as a Permanent Center in the College of Education; Establish the Department of Comparative and World Literature in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences):  
  
Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
  
4. **DESIRED EFFECTIVE DATE:**  
  
August 16, 2026 or Upon Approval
  
5. **BRIEF DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION** (If this is a for a change in status from Temporary to Permanent, include an explanation as to why the funding, staffing, mission, etc. are stabilized such that the move to permanent make sense at this time):

The Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program seeks elevation from program status to a formal department with the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Established in 2017 through the integration of two previously distinct academic areas – Agricultural Education and Leadership and Agricultural Communications – ALEC has grown significantly in scope and institutional importance. The program serves approximately 122 undergraduate students and 35 graduate students. Departmental status would position ALEC for sustainable growth, greater administrative efficiency, and stronger alignment with its

strategic contributions to the university's land-grant mission, while also elevating the research profile of the unit and the College of ACES.

## 6. GOVERNANCE PROCESS:

- a. Describe the internal (unit/school/college/etc.) governance process applied to this proposal.

This proposal was drafted by the senior tenured faculty in the ALEC program along with the Executive Officer. The departmental structure proposed here emerged as a result of a formal external review process and numerous discussions with the Office of the Dean and Department Heads within the College of ACES.

The Bylaws were drafted, discussed, revised and ultimately voted on by the entire unit including faculty and staff. The vote was unanimous in favor of acceptance. A public hearing was scheduled and conducted on March 5, 2026. The purpose of the hearing was to inform the public of the proposal and to solicit feedback. Participants were able to provide feedback until March 9, 2026. A College of ACES faculty meeting was held on March 5, 2026 to share the proposal with the faculty of the College of ACES. All faculty were provided the opportunity to vote on the proposal. The voting period ended on March 9, 2026.

- b. Describe any consultation with stakeholders (e.g., other units, units with similar or related programs, students, etc.). As part of this, reach out to the Dean of Libraries as early as possible and attach a University Library Impact letter in the addendum.

Several units closely related to the academic purview of ALEC were consulted during the proposal process. These units include the following:

The University Library

The College of Media

Council on Teacher Education (COTE)

The Department of Communication in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Letters of support and acknowledgment are attached as addenda including the University Library Impact letter.

- c. The university statutes require secret-ballot votes of the faculty to be taken at the level of the unit being formed and all higher units (e.g., school and college), in accordance with the bylaws of each unit. Describe any such

votes (e.g., question posed, electorate, timing) and the results. See [Statutes, Article VIII, Section III](#) and [Senate Bylaws, Part D., Section 8](#).

A secret ballot vote was conducted among the full faculty of the College of ACES. Voting opened on March 5, 2026 and closed on March 9, 2026. The ballot question was as follows: Do you approve converting the ALEC Program to the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications within the College of ACES? The final vote was 106 in favor of converting ALEC to a department and 2 not in favor.

- d. Arrangements for a public hearing on a new unit should be made in consultation with the EPC chair and a description of and minutes from the hearing should be attached as an addendum to the proposal.

A public hearing was held on March 5, 2026. The meeting was led by the Office of the Dean with the Dean of the College ACES providing introductory remarks. A description of the hearing and minutes are attached as an Addenda C and D.

7. **BYLAWS** (attach the proposed bylaws for the unit)

See attached

8. **ADDENDUM** (List all addenda for this proposal that will be attached to this proposal, e.g. public hearing announcements and meeting minutes, FAQ public document, letters of support from campus affiliates and those that might be impacted, including the University Library. Any unit engaged in teaching or research **must** document consultation with the University Library):

Addendum A - Bylaws

Addendum B - Budget Table

Addendum C - Public Hearing Documentation and Feedback

Addendum D - Minutes from the Public Hearing

Addendum E - Minutes of the College of ACES faculty meeting

Addendum F - FAQ Public Document

Addendum G - Letters

The University Library

College of Media

Council on Teacher Education (COTE)

9. **STATEMENT FOR THE ACADEMIC CATALOG** (if there is text in the [Academic Catalog](#) that will need to be added or updated as a result of this request, please list the URL(s) of the page(s) and the text to update):

The academic structure of ALEC is not changing as a result of this proposal. Therefore, no updates to the Academic Catalog are needed. The URL for ALEC is [alec.illinois.edu](http://alec.illinois.edu)

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## CAMPUS WORKFLOW NOTIFICATION

Anna Ball  March 10, 2026

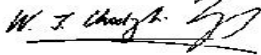
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Sponsor Name and Signature Date

Germán Bollero  March 10, 2026

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College Contact Name and Signature (if applicable) Date

Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko  March 10, 2026

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Graduate College Contact Name and Signature (if applicable) Date  
Kathryn A. Martensen  March 10, 2026

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Provost Office Contact Name and Signature Date

### 1. Unit Objectives and Contributions

Describe specific objectives and measurable contributions the unit will make to the university's mission, paying particular attention to the unit's consistency with the university's focus statement and priorities. Is the unit to be involved in instruction and, if so, to what extent?

## **Overview**

This proposal seeks to establish the ALEC program to become an ALEC department in the College of ACES. The document will outline the current program structure, map how ALEC functionally operates like a department, and requests that the current structure match the operational function through a formal department without developing any new programs or asking for additional resources.

Since 2017, the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program has engaged the key missions of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with distinction, establishing itself as a vital component of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES). Currently, ALEC is a distinct program in the College of ACES under the Office of Academic Programs. It includes 6 tenure-track faculty, 3 specialized faculty, and 1 visiting academic professional. ALEC faculty deliver instruction across three undergraduate concentrations: Organizational and Community Leadership, Agricultural Education, and Agricultural Communications. In addition, they teach graduate-level courses within an interdisciplinary Master's program that serves both residential and online students. The program currently enrolls 122 undergraduates and 35 graduate students, reflecting its significant academic footprint and growing demand.

Peer institutions at land grant universities across the nation have departments of varying acronyms similar to ALEC. National and regional conferences, journal publication outlets, and long standing professional and tenure and promotion norms for departments of this kind have long existed. As a brief example, the Department of ALEC at Texas A&M University has roughly 40 faculty, 1300 undergraduate students and 150 graduate students. Ohio State's ACEL department as a nearer peer, has roughly 12 faculty, 150 undergraduate students and 50 graduate students.

The University of Illinois' Boldly Illinois strategic plan sets forth a vision to strengthen the institution's impact through four overarching goals: fostering scholarship, discovery, and innovation; providing transformative learning experiences; making a significant and visible societal impact; and stewarding current resources while generating additional support. These priorities guide the university's commitment to excellence in education, research, and public engagement. The Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program embodies this vision by integrating leadership, education, and communication into a dynamic academic unit that advances innovation, prepares students for global challenges, and strengthens Illinois' agricultural and educational systems.

## **Foster Scholarship, Discovery, and Innovation**

ALEC faculty advance research in agricultural communication, leadership development, and education, generating new knowledge that strengthens workforce preparation and informs best practices across the agricultural, environmental, food, and natural resource sector. This scholarship contributes to innovation in teaching, leadership, and outreach, ensuring Illinois remains a leader in agricultural leadership, education, and communication. Specifically, faculty engage in regional and national conferences embedded in the American Association for Agricultural Education, the Association for Leadership Educators, the International Leadership Association, and the National Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Life and Human Sciences. Faculty publish in the Journal of Agricultural Education, the Advancements in Ag Development Journal, the NACTA Journal, the Journal of International Extension Education, the Journal of Leadership Education, the Journal of Leadership Studies, and the Journal of Applied Communications to name a few.

### **Provide Transformative Learning Experiences**

ALEC offers an interdisciplinary curriculum that prioritizes experiential learning, active engagement, and global perspectives. Students participate in hands-on projects, leadership development activities, and real-world problem-solving exercises that prepare them for dynamic careers. Specifically, students studying to be public school agriscience teachers engage in a series of 3 intensive, cohort based clinical experiences situated in schools across Illinois for the purpose of learning to be practicing teachers. Students in agricultural leadership and agricultural communications engage in intensive internship courses similar to the student teachers, but within the context of the companies and community organizations of their future employment. ALEC also provides study abroad opportunities that expose students to international agricultural systems and cross-cultural communication, broadening their global competency. Currently faculty lead a freshman oriented new student study abroad for agricultural systems in Panama and a Food and Wine writing study abroad in France. These experiences are complemented by involvement in student organizations such as Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow, Emerging Illini Leaders, and Alpha Tau Alpha/the Agricultural Education Club, as well as events like the Greenhand Conference and FFA (formerly the Future Farmers of America) competitions, which immerse students in authentic leadership and communication contexts. Approximately 600 high school freshmen from across the state of Illinois attend this annual conference.

### **Make a Significant and Visible Societal Impact**

ALEC serves as a teacher certification unit for aspiring Career and Technical Education teachers broadly and more specifically in the realm of Agriscience Education, ensuring Illinois schools have qualified educators who inspire future leaders in food, agriculture, and natural resources. Through statewide outreach—including FFA (formerly the Future Farmers of America) events and conferences that bring hundreds

of high school students to campus—ALEC strengthens educational pipelines and reinforces the land-grant mission of serving communities across Illinois. Moreover, many employees in the Office of Extension positioned throughout the state of Illinois hold undergraduate and/or graduate degrees in ALEC, as skills of planning, delivering, and assessing the effectiveness of educational programs taught in the context of in public school settings in turn translate to developing educators in community-based settings at large.

### **Steward Current Resources and Generate Additional Support**

ALEC demonstrates responsible stewardship of resources through strategic integration of agricultural education, leadership, and communication into a single unit, maximizing efficiency and impact. The program actively seeks additional support through partnerships, grant-seeking initiatives, and innovative program delivery. A key example of this commitment is the founding of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, which serves as a hub for advancing research, professional development, and industry collaboration in agricultural communications worldwide. This center not only elevates ALEC’s visibility and impact but also creates new opportunities for external funding and partnerships. Additionally, ALEC’s hybrid master’s program expands access to advanced education for working professionals, ensuring operational excellence while meeting the evolving needs of Illinois’ workforce.

<b>2. Need</b>
Explain how the unit will meet regional and state needs and priorities. What is the demand for the unit’s services? What clients or population will the unit serve? Identify similar units of administration, research, or public service in the state, at both public and private colleges and universities. Compare the proposed unit with these units and discuss potential impact upon them.

### **Program Impact and Need**

The Agricultural Education concentration in ALEC currently prepares both undergraduates and graduate students seeking a grade 5-12 teacher license in food and agriculture. With over 550 food and agriculture teacher positions in Illinois alone, preparing students for this professional sector is a high priority and Agricultural Education in ALEC is instrumental in developing the public school teacher pipeline in this discipline area. The ALEC program at the University of Illinois is one of four institutions in the state who certify teachers in this area yet historically produce nearly half of the graduates in Agricultural Education for the state. The ALEC Master’s degree program makes a further impact through providing high quality online education to fulfill the need for a highly qualified extension educator pipeline in Illinois. Currently, there

are approximately 150 full time Extension educators across Illinois with Master's degrees and nearly half of whom need training in educational programs, delivery and design, provided by the ALEC online Master's degree. Further, there are nearly 250 Extension program coordinators who lack a Master's degree but would be eligible to become an Extension educator if fully credentialed. Roughly two-thirds the students enrolled in the ALEC online Master's degree program are pursuing the degree in order to enhance their skills in educational program design, delivery and assessment, and to become fully credentialed Extension educators.

The need for a highly skilled workforce around the human sciences of teaching and learning and program design and evaluation extends beyond the public school teachers and extension professionals in the state. Chicago as the epicenter for food, boasts over 3,500 companies in food and agricultural systems. According to the ACES first destination survey data, over 700 unique companies hire ACES graduates. Currently, just over 10% of the total workforce in the nation is working in a food and agricultural system related position. There is a growing need to upskill the existing workforce in the food and agricultural systems industries, fill the gaps in existing soft skills training, and fulfill the need for well-trained professionals to be the future leaders at large in food and agricultural disciplines. In 2025 alone, there were nearly 23,000 more jobs in food and agricultural companies than individuals to fill those positions. ALEC concentrations in Agricultural Communications and Organizational and Community Leadership form the underpinnings of the durable skills needed for current graduates, as well as upskilling the existing workforce, in food systems careers across the Illinois food systems sectors.

With a growing gap between consumer and producer knowledge of the grand challenges of food, agricultural and environmental systems disciplines, the Agricultural Communications concentration in ALEC prepares disciplinary experts in the science of effective food systems communication. The growing concerns around those who produce and those who consume food seem to illustrate the need to expand our human capacity for communicating the innovations in food and agricultural disciplines. Misinformation around climate change, genetically modified organisms, hormones, and basic nutritional information, among other topics continues to persist and create larger knowledge gaps in and about our food system, leading to a largely uninformed population of consumers. As it stands, the need for a better-informed consumer base and a better trained swath of communications professionals to educate said consumer base on the sciences in and of food and agricultural systems topics is a global issue as well. The International Federation of Agricultural Journalists is the disciplinary home for over 5,000 food and agricultural systems communications professionals representing over 50 countries across the globe. The Agricultural Communications concentration of ALEC is highly connected with this global federation of Agricultural Journalists and through the newly formed James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, is developing a global certificate in food and agricultural systems communication to educate the experts in the science of various food systems topics to better communicate, design educational campaigns, and utilize digital communication

as a tool for educating the public to be more engaged participants and savvy consumers of food.

### **Comparison to other Units**

Several universities in Illinois offer programs that share elements with ALEC, including Southern Illinois University, Illinois State University, and Western Illinois University, which provide coursework or concentrations in agricultural education, and/or communication. However, these offerings are typically housed within broader agricultural or education departments and do not integrate all three areas into a single, comprehensive unit. ALEC at the University of Illinois is unique in combining agricultural leadership, education, and communications under one program and further distinguishes itself by offering a robust team of tenure-track faculty seeking external grant funding. Because ALEC already exists as a recognized program and serves a distinct niche, its continuation and growth are not expected to negatively impact similar units at other universities. Instead, ALEC complements statewide efforts by providing advanced training and interdisciplinary expertise meshing the three sub-areas of agricultural education, agricultural communications and agricultural leadership that other institutions do not currently offer.

### **3. Organization**

Describe the proposed unit's organizational structure. Explain how the unit is organized to meet its stated objectives. Attach the unit's bylaws (or equivalent governing document) and briefly outline the process used to establish them.

Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) is an academic program housed within the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, operating under the auspices of the Office of Academic Programs. Established in 2017, ALEC represents the strategic integration of three previously distinct academic areas—Agricultural Education, Agricultural Leadership Education, and Agricultural Communications—into a single, interdisciplinary unit. The unit comprises six tenure-track faculty members, three specialized faculty members, and one visiting academic professional. Executive leadership is provided by the Executive Officer, Dr. Anna Ball, who serves in a dual role as the Associate Dean of Academic Programs. The college has approved the hire for a future head to lead the unit moving forward. The program currently operates as a stand-alone unit managing its own budget, hiring new faculty and staff, governing the operations of the undergraduate and graduate programs, determining program quality through regular program evaluation processes and annual faculty and staff evaluation processes, and engaging in strategic planning and budgeting processes every summer. Since tenure decisions currently occur at the department level, and this program is not a department, all new faculty hires must be approved by an existing department in ACES. The result is that all faculty tenure and promotions are governed by MOUs between each individual faculty and an ACES "tenure-home" department.

For example, of the 3 recent Assistant Professor hires in ALEC, two have established tenure homes with governing MOU's around promotion and tenure in the department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS), while the third individual's tenure home is in the department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (NRES). To further extend this example, the two Associate Professors in ALEC are under P&T MOU's, one in HDFS and one in NRES. The current proposal to establish ALEC as a department, in addition to aligning the current function with a governance structure that matches its function, also seeks to establish a consistent system for P&T for all faculty that will align its structure under one singular unit and will eliminate the need for a series of MOUs. The attached unit bylaws specifically outline governance around regular faculty meetings, faculty tenure and promotion, advisory committee structures, and governance around undergraduate and graduate programs. In summary, the ALEC program currently informs itself through an advisory committee structure, conducts monthly faculty meetings, and has operational committees for its college and campus operations. Faculty and staff are evaluated annually, and the program reports its strategic priorities annually to the dean's office for informing budget appropriations. The proposed structure does not change the operations of ALEC but rather formalizes the unit into a department to more adequately match the current operation of ALEC.

#### **4. Unit Outcomes**

Identify what targets have been set to assess the proposed unit's success in achieving its objectives. Among others, specific performance measures might include: expected research and/or public service products; ratio of external to internal funding for unit; impact of this unit on national, state, regional, and local area organizations, businesses, or communities; and collaborative research product that promotes the Illinois economy.

The ALEC program regularly undergoes unit evaluations required by campus, the state accrediting bodies, and the college strategic planning and goal setting processes. Annually, ALEC meets its requirements for the Higher Learning Commission through a careful review of the program's learning outcomes and developing systematic ways to assess learning outcomes. Undergraduate students in the program engage in a capstone class where they develop authentic products that measure learning throughout the 4 years in the program and then faculty make course level adjustments to the gap areas in student learning. Students in the Agricultural Education concentration of the program are evaluated through state teacher accreditation requirements, passing content tests and performance-based teaching evaluations in order to be fully licensed teachers. The program also undergoes a 5-year review process with an external review team. The most recent external review was conducted in the spring of 2025 and was a two-part process where a team of department chairs from peer institutions in the nation spent time on campus interviewing faculty, staff, students and administrators across the college and examining internal and external

documents about the program. Further, a consulting firm was hired to collect data from alumni regarding the strengths and challenges of the program in developing graduates. Results of that recent external review resoundingly asserted the need for ALEC to seek official department status. Further, the teams suggested some minor curricular streamlining to make the content more seamless between the three academic concentrations.

Performance metrics for ALEC include the number of graduates it continues to produce in sectors across IL and beyond, the number of high enrollment classes taught serving the learning needs in the durable skills areas of leadership and communications across the college and university, and the success of faculty in their academic associations. With approximately 122 undergraduate and 35 graduate students enrolled in the program, ALEC will continue to focus on increasing total enrollment. Further ALEC offers some high enrollment courses in the arena of individual leadership, team leadership, and collaborative and community leadership as a part of the campus Leadership minor. ALEC will continue to promote the minor as well as expanding enrollment in those courses to continue to develop the durable leadership and communication skills needed for graduates of all majors in ACES.

Finally, ALEC faculty have been recognized in their disciplines for outstanding research and practice. The Agricultural Education concentration was recognized in 2024 by the National Association of Agricultural Educators as an outstanding teacher education program. Past faculty have been recipients of outstanding research poster and papers by the American Association of Agricultural Educators, and leadership faculty have been recognized via outstanding leadership research and educator awards by the Association of Leadership Educators.

## **5. Quality Assurance Processes**

Briefly describe the processes that will yield evidence to demonstrate the quality of the unit. Address the following elements: evidence that the unit supports the university's mission and statewide goals; evidence that the unit's product or outcomes achieve stated objectives; determination of organizational effectiveness; faculty and staff qualifications and reward structures; determination of adequate support staff, equipment, and other resources; and use of results from evaluations to improve the unit's effectiveness.

As mentioned in the prior section, the ALEC program currently engages in annual and multi-year processes to review the program at the individual faculty and student levels, to the overall program levels and will continue to do so in a similar fashion once it achieves department status. Faculty and staff undergo an annual review process where they submit a CV and accomplishments for the year and meet with the director annually to review needs, goals and areas of improvement. The program annually reviews its overall learning outcomes and makes curricular adjustments based on student performance in the capstone courses. Faculty meet once a month to engage in

governance and decision making for the unit as a whole, and they also meet once a week for regular program quality review and share out on the day to day work and success of the unit. Finally, the ALEC director submits an annual review and presents the results of the program success and challenges for the year based on metrics associated to enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs, instructional units generated across the program, metrics from paid online enrollment, and program success in indirect cost recovery generation from external grants. The director meets with the faculty annually to assess strengths and areas of improvement in the metrics of enrollment, instructional units, online revenue generated and indirect cost recovery generated. The team uses that information to develop a strategic plan for the year including the major goals, the strengths and weaknesses of the unit, and the hiring plans needed to achieve the annual goals. The director then presents the plan to the dean and associate deans in the college and is given feedback on college level metrics and where the unit must improve each year in meeting its overarching goals. This current proposal does not propose to change any of the existing quality assurance processes as the ALEC program currently undergoes the same quality assurance processes of all the departments in ACES. Rather, the program seeks to formalize the current processes as a stand-alone department, rather than as a program that reports to the office of Academic Programs in the college.

#### **6. Facilities (space, equipment, instructional materials)**

Describe the available facilities and equipment to develop and maintain high quality in this unit of administration, research, or public service including buildings, classrooms, office space, laboratories and equipment, and other instructional technologies. Summarize information about library resources including a list of key academic journals and other publications that will support this unit and be used by faculty, students, and staff.

No new resources will be needed for the current ALEC program to become an official department. ALEC already occupies office spaces on the first and 5th floors of Bevier Hall. A suite of faculty offices and a conference room and storage room exist in 174 Bevier. The graduate student office suites are on the first and fifth floors of Bevier. Additionally, 4 individual faculty offices are on the first floor, and 3 individual faculty offices are located on the 5th floor of Bevier respectively. ALEC operates a departmentally controlled classroom in 122 Bevier Hall that was originated from and is maintained by gift funds. Finally, the newly formed James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications lecture Hall maintained by ALEC is in the basement of the ACES Library Alumni and Information Center, along with an office for the Evans Center Director. As a social sciences unit, the laboratory needs in terms of accomplishing the research mission, exist with individual faculty and graduate students in computing, software and research travel needs already being supported by the unit through start-up funds, internal, and external grant award support. The unit uses existing library resources that subsequently won't change if converted from a program to a department as well. The major journals for ALEC disciplines include: the Journal of

Extension, the Journal of Agricultural Education, the Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research, the NACTA Journal published by the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agricultural, the Advancements in Agricultural Development journal, the Journal of Leadership Education, the Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, and the Journal of Applied Communications. Furthermore, ALEC shares a unique relationship with the University Libraries with the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC). The ACDC is a specialized library collection housed in the Funk ACES Library established nearly 50 years ago to house documents and publications specific to agricultural communications. Agricultural Communications faculty in ALEC serve in an advisory and resource capacity to the ACDC and in turn, the ACDC provides unique library infrastructure to Agricultural Communications faculty and students.

## **7. Resources**

Indicate the number of students, businesses, industries, and/or other clients to be served by this unit. Include a description of faculty participation and student involvement in the unit if applicable. Provide a narrative budget statement explaining the data in the associated Budget Table. Include detail describing revenues from governmental grants and contracts private gifts and grants, endowment/investment income, sales and services, and other sources; and expenditures including salaries of faculty, administrative staff, benefits, and other personnel related expenses for the proposed unit; library resources, services, equipment, and facilities.

As discussed in prior sections, ALEC has maintained a consistent number of undergraduate and graduate students, with potential to increase revenue by expanding enrollment and growing online education offerings. Resources for ALEC are primarily based on undergraduate enrollment and instructional units taught by ALEC faculty and specialized faculty. Additional program support is provided by the College of ACES, as well as through partnerships with the University of Illinois Extension and faculty engaged in applied research programs. ALEC also benefits from a strong network of alumni and stakeholders committed to agricultural leadership and outreach, who support programmatic opportunities and student scholarships through endowments. Leveraging the diverse expertise of ALEC faculty, the program's grant portfolio has expanded to include private, federal, and foundation funding, generating facilities and administrative returns that support program overhead costs.

## 8. A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth

IBHE is charged to develop a strategic plan to address the present and future aims and needs and requirements of higher education in Illinois (110 ILCS 205/6) (from Ch. 144, par. 186) Sec. 6).

Illinois Administrative Code: 1050.30(a)(6): A) *The unit of instruction, research or public service is educationally and economically justified based on the educational priorities and needs of the citizens of Illinois*

Respond to the following questions about how the proposed unit will support the three goals of **A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth Strategic Plan**.

- Equity: Close the equity gaps for students who have historically been left behind
- Sustainability: Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions
- Growth: Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth

**Responses to each question in this section should be separate and reference the question number to which the response pertains.**

### **Equity**

1. Describe plans to implement systemic solutions that will increase access and opportunities for service to underserved communities and the implications for the proposed unit of administration. Explain how progress will be monitored. [See Equity Strategy #1 and #2]
2. Explain institutional strategies being implemented to increase and retain faculty, staff, and administrators of color and the implications for the proposed unit. Explain how progress will be monitored. [See Equity Strategy #3]

### **Sustainability**

3. For this new unit of administration, describe how the institution plans to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies in its administrative structure and operations while avoiding unnecessary or existing duplication.
4. Explain further how the new unit will capitalize and build collaborative synergies on campus and within and outside of the state; support future-ready learning, research, or public service approaches; and ensure that the unit is a good steward of its financial resources.

## **Growth**

5. As one of the Core Principles, demonstrate how the proposed unit will reinforce and promote public good in the state (e.g., civic engagement, exposure to arts and humanities, and solutions to society's challenges).
6. Describe how the unit plans to contribute to research, innovation, and economic development by leveraging the Illinois Innovation Network. [See Growth Strategy #1]
7. Explain how the new unit engaged with business and industry in its development and how it will spur the state's economy by leveraging partnerships with local, regional, and state industry, business leaders and employers. [See Growth Strategy #3]
8. Describe how the proposed unit will expand access and opportunities for students regarding high- impact practices including research opportunities, internships, apprenticeships, career pathways, and other field experiences. [See Growth Strategy #6]
9. Explain how the proposed unit of administration will expand its models of teaching and learning, research, and/or public service and outreach that provide opportunity for students to succeed in the work of the future. [See Growth Strategy #6]

For more information about each of the three goals of the A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth Strategic Plan, go to the [IBHE website](#).

**Question 1 - Equity: Describe plans to implement systemic solutions that will increase access and opportunities for service to underserved communities and the implications for the proposed unit of administration. Explain how progress will be monitored.**

The Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program is committed to implementing systemic solutions that increase access and opportunities for underserved communities, particularly rural students, first-generation students, and students from low-income backgrounds who have historically had limited exposure to agricultural education, leadership development, and agricultural communications.

ALEC's curriculum emphasizes service learning, internships, and field experiences that engage students from underrepresented minority backgrounds. Research shows these high-impact practices contribute significantly to student success and retention. ALEC intentionally designs capstone projects and student teaching experiences to address real-world challenges in rural and underserved communities. ALEC's online Master of Science program specifically removes geographic and economic barriers that prevent

working professionals from accessing advanced education. By continuing to expand flexible learning modalities, the department ensures that students throughout Illinois and beyond can pursue agricultural leadership, education, and communications credentials without relocating or abandoning employment. This directly addresses the equity strategy focus on extending learning opportunities to mitigate barriers for underserved populations.

Through the annual Greenhand Conference and state FFA programming, ALEC actively engages high school students from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly rural youth in agricultural regions. These outreach events create early exposure to agricultural careers and education pathways, encouraging students who might otherwise not consider postsecondary education in agriculture to explore these opportunities. ALEC provides advising and support for first-generation and low-income students. The department will continue to ensure that students have access to mental health resources, basic needs support, and mentoring that helps them navigate both academic and professional challenges.

Finally, ALEC monitors progress through: (1) disaggregated enrollment and retention data by demographic groups; (2) tracking persistence rates for first-generation, low-income, and rural students; (3) assessment of graduation rates and time-to-degree for underrepresented students; (4) evaluation of internship and career placement outcomes across demographic groups; and (5) annual review of departmental climate surveys and student feedback to identify and address equity gaps.

**Question 2 - Equity: Explain institutional strategies being implemented to increase and retain faculty, staff, and administrators of color and the implications for the proposed unit. Explain how progress will be monitored.**

ALEC recognizes the critical importance of building a diverse faculty, staff, and administrative team that reflects and serves the diverse student population across Illinois and beyond. ALEC is guided by the ACES office of Human Resources (HR) as well as the ACES office for Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to implement institutional equity strategies to increase recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and administrators of color. All hiring must go through quality control checks with a committee in ACES HR and ACES DEI to determine that the program meets guidelines, ensures inclusive recruitment and retention practices.

Through ACES HR and ACES DEI offices, ALEC receives training on equitable faculty hiring practices, including awareness of microaggression and bias in interviews and CV review. ALEC works with graduate programs and professional networks to identify promising scholars from diverse backgrounds and leverages state initiatives such as the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program. Through campus and ACES HR resources, all ALEC faculty and staff have access to professional development

programs that build skills in cultural communication, awareness of implicit bias, and capacity to mentor and support students from underrepresented backgrounds. The progress of the ALEC program in all of these efforts is currently monitored by and will continue to be checked by the ACES HR and ACES DEI offices via: (1) annual tracking of faculty and staff diversity metrics by demographic category; (2) exit interviews and retention studies to understand challenges faced by faculty and staff of color; (3) review of hiring practices and search committee outcomes; (4) assessment of departmental climate surveys regarding diversity and inclusion; and (5) evaluation of professional development participation and impact on cultural awareness and mentoring capacity.

**Question 3 - Sustainability: For this new unit of administration, describe how the institution plans to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies in its administrative structure and operations while avoiding unnecessary or existing duplication.**

The elevation of ALEC from a program to a department represents an intentional strategy to maximize institutional effectiveness and eliminate inefficiencies that constrain the unit's ability to serve students and advance the university's mission. Currently, ALEC operates as a program within the College of ACES structure, which creates organizational fragmentation and administrative complexity.

Departmental status allows for more strategic allocation of faculty expertise. Currently, faculty contributions are distributed across different departments creating inequities in scheduling and workload distribution. As a cohesive department, ALEC will be poised to optimize and align faculty research and teaching portfolios more effectively to minimize unnecessary costs, particularly concerning grant support. This is important given that currently four of the six tenure/tenure-track faculty retain tenure 'homes' in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, while the other two are 'housed' in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Science. This structural division creates inequity by fragmenting the faculty into separate collegial communities and subjecting them to disparate tenure and promotion standards and procedures, undermining the consistency, fairness, and transparency that should govern how all seven faculty members are evaluated and promoted.

Furthermore, attainment of departmental status will consolidate ALEC's administrative functions (budget management, personnel coordination, facilities management, etc.) under a single, streamlined structure. This eliminates redundant reporting lines and administrative overhead currently distributed across multiple departmental entities (HDFS, NRES, and the College of ACES Office of Academic Programs).

The disciplines that comprise ALEC at Illinois are specialized and focused areas. No other academic unit at the university offers the integrated combination of agricultural leadership, education, and communication found in ALEC. By consolidating these

three previously separate areas into a single department, ALEC eliminates redundancy and concentrates expertise, ensuring better resource stewardship.

**Question 4 - Sustainability: Explain further how the new unit will capitalize and build collaborative synergies on campus and within and outside of the state; support future-ready learning, research, or public service approaches; and ensure that the unit is a good steward of its financial resources.**

ALEC is positioned as a key connector and collaborator across the College of ACES, the University of Illinois campus and throughout Illinois' food, agricultural, environmental, and education sectors. As a department, the unit will leverage these strategic partnerships to maximize institutional and regional impact while ensuring exemplary stewardship of financial resources. Collaborations with other departments in ACES have the potential to expand course offerings without duplicating resources and will prepare students for complex, multidisciplinary challenges in food and agricultural systems and environmental sustainability. Cross-listed courses allow students to develop expertise in complementary areas while optimizing faculty efficiency.

ALEC actively engages with University of Illinois Extension, various agricultural commodity groups. For example, one of the upper level undergraduate courses engages with the Jackie Joyner Kersee Foundation to in a youth participatory action research initiative, where college students work with youth in an after school program to develop mechanisms for designing, delivering and evaluating effective youth programming in the underserved communities in East St. Louis. This partnership as well as others across ALEC creates authentic learning opportunities for students through internships and field projects while advancing applied research that addresses real-world agricultural and educational challenges. Such collaborations enhance program quality without requiring proportional increases in departmental resources. ALEC demonstrates responsible financial stewardship through strategic resource allocation that prioritizes student-facing services, evidence-based expenditures, and revenue generation. The department actively pursues external funding through grants and partnerships and will explore revenue-generating activities such as professional development workshops and certificate programs for working professionals. ALEC is currently developing online graduate-level certificates as a revamp of their existing online courses, aimed to scale the delivery of high value durable skills coursework. Departmental status provides greater autonomy and accountability in budget management, enabling more responsive and efficient financial decision-making.

**Question 5 - Growth: As one of the Core Principles, demonstrate how the proposed unit will reinforce and promote public good in the state (e.g., civic engagement, exposure to arts and humanities, and solutions to society's challenges).**

ALEC embodies the University of Illinois' land-grant mission by directly advancing public good through civic engagement, knowledge dissemination, and solutions to consequential state challenges. The department prepares professionals who strengthen democratic participation, build agricultural and science literacy, and address critical gaps in agricultural education and environmental decision-making.

Illinois faces a severe shortage of qualified agriscience educators, creating a pipeline crisis that undermines both agricultural workforce development and science education in rural communities. ALEC's teacher certification program directly serves the public good by preparing innovative educators who fill this gap. These graduates teach agricultural science, environmental literacy, and career awareness to thousands of secondary students annually, many in underserved regions. By strengthening K-12 agricultural education, ALEC ensures that all Illinois students—regardless of zip code—have access to quality instruction in food systems, sustainability, and STEM careers.

ALEC graduates work as communicators, educators, and advocates throughout Extension services, nonprofits, government agencies, and the private sector. They translate complex agricultural and environmental science into accessible information for diverse audiences—farmers, policymakers, consumers, and diverse communities. This work directly addresses critical public challenges including food security, climate adaptation, sustainable resource management, and economic resilience. By improving food and agricultural literacy and environmental understanding, ALEC graduates enable informed civic participation on decisions that affect Illinois' agricultural future and environmental health.

ALEC's leadership development programs prepare students for community-facing roles in Extension, civic organizations, and nonprofit institutions. Through service-learning projects, students engage directly with community challenges—from watershed management to agricultural policy—while developing skills to facilitate inclusive, democratic decision-making. These experiences ground students in authentic civic engagement and position them as leaders capable of fostering collaborative problem-solving across diverse stakeholder groups in agricultural and environmental contexts.

ALEC extends its reach far beyond campus through the Greenhand Conference, FFA state competitions, and partnership programs that engage hundreds of high school students annually. These initiatives expose young people to agricultural careers and educational pathways, strengthen the talent pipeline for agricultural professions, and demonstrate the university's tangible commitment to serving students throughout

Illinois—particularly in rural areas where agricultural education opportunities may be limited.

ALEC faculty conduct research in agricultural education, leadership development, and communication that generates evidence-based insights to improve teaching effectiveness, organizational practice, and public engagement about food, agriculture, environment, and natural resources. This scholarship bridges disciplinary knowledge and practical application, ensuring that improvements in agricultural education reach classrooms and communities across Illinois.

**Question 6 - Growth: Describe how the unit plans to contribute to research, innovation, and economic development by leveraging the Illinois Innovation Network.**

ALEC actively leverages the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) and related regional economic development initiatives to advance innovation in agricultural education, leadership, and communications and to support economic vitality across Illinois and the Midwest.

ALEC faculty conduct applied and basic research in agricultural communication, leadership development, and education that generates innovations in teaching methods, professional development approaches, and strategic communication practices. This research is disseminated through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and direct engagement with agricultural and educational professionals. The James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, housed within ALEC, serves as a focal point for advancing research, professional development, and industry collaboration in agricultural communications worldwide.

While ALEC's primary focus is agricultural education and communications rather than cutting-edge technology or STEM innovation, the department contributes to IIN objectives by: (1) strengthening the workforce through education and professional development; (2) supporting talent development in rural regions of Illinois where agriculture remains economically vital; and (3) advancing inclusive innovation in food and agricultural systems through communication and education focused on diverse communities.

ALEC students graduate with entrepreneurial skills and knowledge that enable them to launch their own consulting, education, and communication ventures. The department's focus on leadership and communication prepares graduates to innovate in how agricultural information is shared, how agricultural education is delivered, and how agricultural leaders engage communities. Through partnerships with Extension, agricultural nonprofits, and agribusiness organizations, ALEC directly transfers

research findings and educational innovations to practitioners and industry leaders. This ensures that university research contributes meaningfully to real-world agricultural and educational innovation.

**Question 7 - Growth: Explain how the new unit engaged with business and industry in its development and how it will spur the state's economy by leveraging partnerships with local, regional, and state industry, business leaders and employers.**

ALEC has developed deep partnerships with agricultural businesses, nonprofits, Extension, and educational organizations throughout Illinois and nationally. These partnerships have informed program development and will continue to drive the department's growth and economic impact.

ALEC's curriculum is informed by regular engagement with industry and organizational leaders including FFA advisors, Extension professionals, agribusiness executives, and agricultural nonprofit directors. These stakeholders provided input during program redesign, helping align curriculum with workforce needs in agricultural education, leadership, and communications. Advisory boards provide ongoing feedback to ensure that coursework remains relevant and responsive to changing industry needs.

ALEC maintains partnerships with organizations that provide internships, professional experiences, and employment opportunities for graduates. These partnerships benefit students by providing pathways to meaningful careers while benefiting employers by building talent pipelines of skilled, educated professionals. Growing partnerships with regional Extension offices, agricultural media companies, agribusiness firms, and nonprofits expand opportunities for experiential learning.

The newly formed James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications facilitates collaboration between ALEC faculty and researchers and industry leaders. The center will host conferences, workshops, and professional development events that bring together educators, communicators, and industry professionals to share research findings and best practices. These activities generate revenue while advancing knowledge and innovation in agricultural communications, leadership, and education.

By preparing skilled educators, leaders, and communicators, ALEC contributes to workforce development across Illinois' agricultural sector. Graduates secure employment as agricultural educators, Extension professionals, communications specialists, and leaders in agricultural organizations, with average starting salaries competitive with other professional fields. This strengthens the state's ability to attract and retain talent in agriculture and related sectors, supporting broader economic

development goals across rural and urban Illinois. As a program, ALEC is informed by advisory committees and regular industry engagement processes, ensuring continuous dialogue with employers and industry leaders. Annual industry surveys and stakeholder forums will inform strategic planning and program development, ensuring that ALEC remains responsive to workforce needs and emerging opportunities.

**Question 8 - Growth: Describe how the proposed unit will expand access and opportunities for students regarding high-impact practices including research opportunities, internships, apprenticeships, career pathways, and other field experiences.**

ALEC is deeply committed to expanding access and opportunities for students to engage in high-impact practices that develop critical competencies and prepare them for successful careers. The department will continue to strengthen and expand opportunities for research, internships, apprenticeships, career pathways, and field experiences.

Undergraduate and graduate students have opportunities to participate in faculty-led research in agricultural education, leadership development, and communication. Graduate students have the option to complete thesis research that contributes to disciplinary knowledge while developing advanced research skills. Undergraduate students serve as research assistants and engage in capstone research projects. The department will expand these opportunities and ensure equitable access for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

ALEC's curriculum emphasizes real-world experience through internships, field projects, and practicum courses. Agricultural education students complete 480 hours of student teaching in secondary schools. All students engage in service learning, leadership development activities, and capstone projects that require application of classroom knowledge to authentic challenges. The department will expand internship partnerships with Extension offices, nonprofits, and agribusinesses to increase placement opportunities and ensure that all students have access to meaningful field experiences. ALEC clearly articulates career pathways for graduates entering agricultural education, Extension, agricultural communications, nonprofit leadership, and agribusiness. The department provides professional development workshops, industry networking events, and mentoring to help students understand career options and develop professional networks. Graduate students in the online Master's program benefit from flexible scheduling that allows working professionals to continue employment while advancing their credentials and career prospects.

ALEC provides study abroad opportunities that expose students to international agricultural systems, international leadership models, and cross-cultural

communication. These experiences broaden students' global competency and prepare them to engage in international agricultural development and global food systems dialogue. The department will expand these opportunities to ensure access for students from all backgrounds. ALEC ensures access to all high-impact practices for students from underrepresented backgrounds, first-generation students, students from rural and other low-sending counties, and low-income students. The department provides financial support, mentoring, and logistical assistance to remove barriers to participation in internships, research, and field experiences.

**Question 9 - Growth: Explain how the proposed unit of administration will expand its models of teaching and learning, research, and/or public service and outreach that provide opportunity for students to succeed in the work of the future.**

ALEC is fundamentally reimagining its teaching and learning models to prepare students for the evolving agricultural workforce while expanding access and flexibility. Through three strategic curricular innovations—graduate certificates and an integrated undergraduate curriculum—ALEC creates multiple pathways for students to develop the competencies demanded by contemporary agricultural systems, policy, and communication landscapes. ALEC forms the connective tissue for the durable skills needed in graduates across the College of ACES in food, agriculture, and natural resources disciplines. Together, these initiatives create a comprehensive educational ecosystem serving students at multiple life stages. Undergraduate students develop broad competencies; working professionals access targeted certificates; doctoral students become research leaders. This expansion ensures ALEC equips students with the competencies and networks necessary to succeed in increasingly interdisciplinary professions.

## **Addenda**

Addendum A - Bylaws

Addendum B - Budget Table

Addendum C - Public Hearing Announcement

Addendum D - Minutes from the Public Hearing

Addendum E - Minutes of the College of ACES faculty meeting

Addendum F - FAQ Public Document

Addendum G - Letters

The University Library

College of Media

Council on Teacher Education (COTE)

Department of Communication

# **ADDENDUM A – BYLAWS**

## **Preamble**

The Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) in the College of Agriculture, Environmental and Consumer Science (ACES) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is committed to cultivating leaders, educators, and communicators who are prepared to enhance agricultural resilience, address environmental challenges, and positively impact communities both locally and globally. Rooted in the values of innovation, inclusivity, and interdisciplinary collaboration, ALEC fosters academic excellence and real-world engagement through its undergraduate and graduate programs.

These bylaws are established to provide a framework for governance, decision-making, and operational procedures within the department. They are intended to uphold the mission of ALEC, support its faculty, staff, and students, and ensure transparency, equity, and accountability in all departmental affairs. Through these guiding principles, ALEC seeks to advance its role within the College of ACES and the broader university community, while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of the agricultural, environmental, natural resources, and community sectors.

## **Article I. Purpose and Authority**

These bylaws for the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications derive their authority from the University Statutes, which state that each academic unit shall be governed in its internal administration by its faculty, and that the governance of each unit shall be based on bylaws established and amended by the faculty of that unit. The bylaws are an extension of the Statutes, and, as such, they must accord with the Statutes and with the bylaws established by the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. In case of disagreement, the Statutes and Bylaws of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences shall prevail.

## **Article II. Vision and Mission**

**Vision:** We envision a world of thriving, resilient communities and organizations where collaborative, critically-thinking leaders address pressing challenges at the intersection of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and human wellbeing.

**Mission:** Through research, teaching, and outreach, we empower people and communities to drive innovative change in agricultural and environmental systems.

## **Article III. Membership**

The faculty of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) shall include all individuals whose primary appointment is in the Department and who hold the rank of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor and are either tenured or receiving probationary credit toward tenure. Individuals who are considered Specialized Faculty (teaching, research, or clinical), as defined by University policy, and whose primary appointment is in the Department are also members of the faculty.

The voting faculty of ALEC shall consist of tenure-system faculty with a salaried appointment of at least 50 percent within the Department, as well as specialized faculty with a salaried appointment of at least 50 percent. Voting faculty shall have rights and responsibilities in departmental governance, except where restrictions are specified by University Statutes (e.g., tenure-related matters).

Emeritus faculty, adjunct faculty, visiting faculty, affiliate faculty, and other joint appointees not meeting the above conditions are considered non-voting members of the faculty but may participate in meetings as permitted.

## **Article IV. Appointments**

### **Section 1. Tenure-Track Faculty**

Appointments to tenure-track faculty positions shall be made in accordance with University Statutes and College policies.

1. Priorities for tenure-track positions shall be reviewed during the Department's periodic review of its missions, goals, and programs and on an as-needed basis.
2. The Head shall consult with the Department Faculty Advisory Committee (DFAC) and the faculty before initiating a search.
3. The Head shall appoint a search committee to identify qualified candidates.
4. Recommendations for appointment require majority support of the search committee and consultation with DFAC before being forwarded to the Dean.

### **Section 2. Specialized Faculty**

Appointments to specialized faculty positions (teaching, research, or clinical) shall be made in accordance with University policy.

1. Priorities for specialized faculty positions shall be reviewed during the Department's periodic review of its missions, goals, and programs and on an as-needed basis.
2. The Head shall consult with the Department Faculty Advisory Committee (DFAC) and the faculty before initiating a search.
3. The Head shall appoint a search committee to identify qualified candidates.

4. Recommendations for appointment require majority support of the search committee and consultation with DFAC before being forwarded to the Dean.
5. Specialized faculty appointments are renewable and subject to regular review as specified by University policy.

### **Section 3. Adjunct, Affiliate, and Visiting Faculty**

Faculty who hold primary appointments outside ALEC may be appointed in limited roles to contribute to the Department's teaching, research, or outreach programs.

1. **Adjunct Appointments:** Available to individuals without a primary University of Illinois appointment who contribute to ALEC programs. Appointments are reviewed on an as-needed basis.
2. **Affiliate Appointments:** Available to University faculty in other departments who contribute to ALEC's programs. Appointments are renewable every three years. Affiliate faculty appointments shall be a zero-time appointment. Appointments will be made by the Head in consultation with DFAC. A letter of appointment will be issued by the Head detailing the roles and responsibilities of the affiliate faculty member. Pre-tenure Affiliate Faculty will not be assessed by the ALEC Promotion and Tenure Committee as part of the tenure process for such faculty.
3. **Visiting Appointments:** Available for short-term appointments (one year or less, renewable up to three years) for scholars or professionals contributing to ALEC programs.
4. All such appointments convey no tenure rights and no automatic voting privileges within the Department.

### **Section 4. Administrative Appointments**

The Head, in consultation with DFAC, may appoint ALEC faculty members to serve in administrative roles that support the academic programs of the Department. These may include, but are not limited to:

- **Director of Graduate Studies (DGS):** A faculty member who provides leadership and oversight for graduate programs, including admissions, curricular revisions, student advising procedures, and compliance with Graduate College policies.
- **Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS):** A faculty member who provides leadership and oversight for undergraduate programs, including curricular revisions, student advising procedures, recruitment, and program quality.

### **Section 5. Principles of Appointment**

All appointments shall adhere to the following principles:

1. Be made in accordance with University Statutes, Provost Communications, and College policies.
2. Follow established University guidelines for equity, inclusion, and affirmative action.
3. Be based solely on the qualifications of the individual and the needs of the Department.
4. Be documented in writing, with responsibilities and review periods clearly specified.

## **Article V. Rights and Responsibilities of the Faculty**

As the responsible body for teaching, research, extension, and public engagement in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC), the faculty shall have inherent rights and responsibilities in academic policy and governance.

### **Section 1. Rights of the Faculty**

The faculty shall have rights as follows:

1. Retain all departmental powers not assigned exclusively to the Head of the Department by the University Statutes or delegated by the faculty.
2. Exercise all powers delegated to the faculty by the Head.
3. Elect representatives to the Department Faculty Advisory Committee, the Promotion and Tenure Committee, and the Grievance Committee.
4. Participate in the formulation and review of departmental policies and procedures.
5. Review the missions, goals, and programs of the Department at least once every five years.
6. Request an appropriate evaluation of the performance of the Head.
7. Have voice in matters of departmental governance, subject to the provisions of the University Statutes.

### **Section 2. Responsibilities of the Faculty**

The faculty shall have responsibilities as follows:

1. Share the responsibility for maintaining high professional standards that foster academic excellence and integrity.
2. Submit annual reports of activities in the format and timeline established by the Head.
3. Uphold University policies regarding confidentiality in all matters, including those involving students, personnel, and internal governance.
4. Contribute to the governance of the College, Campus, and University as their other responsibilities allow.

5. Engage in teaching, research, extension, and service activities consistent with the mission and goals of the Department to the extent outlined in the terms of the faculty member's employment.
6. Advise the Head on matters of policy, budget, and departmental governance through elected committees and faculty meetings.

## **Article VI. Administration**

### **Section 1. Head of the Department**

The Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) shall be organized with a Head as the executive officer (EO). The Head shall be appointed and reviewed in accordance with the University Statutes.

The Head shall have general direction of the missions of the Department and shall perform duties as follows:

1. Organize the work of the Department and ensure the quality and progress of its teaching, research, extension, and public engagement programs.
2. Oversee all administrative functions of the department.
3. Formulate and execute departmental policies and ensure compliance with University and College policies.
4. Assign responsibilities to faculty and staff, consult regularly with them regarding their work, and provide appropriate evaluations of performance.
5. Consult regularly with the Department Faculty Advisory Committee regarding policy and governance matters.
6. Call regular meetings of the faculty to explain and discuss departmental policies, programs, and issues.
7. Report to the Dean and other University administrators on the teaching, research, extension, and service and outreach activities of the Department.
8. Establish and maintain effective communication among students, faculty, staff, and external stakeholders.
9. Oversee student programs within the Department.
10. Prepare, manage, and report on the Department budget and supervise the distribution of funds and care of property.
11. Maintain an up-to-date compilation of departmental policies and procedures.

In the event that the Department Head is absent, the Head shall designate an Acting Head to oversee the day-to-day operations of the department. The Acting Head is authorized to maintain routine administrative functions and ensure continuity of departmental activities. However, the Acting Head shall not conduct performance evaluations, make personnel decisions, or participate in matters that require a formal appointment as Department Head, unless designated to do so by the Dean. This

designation is intended to provide operational stability without conferring the full authority or responsibilities of the Department Head position.

## **Section 2. Associate and Assistant Heads**

The Head may appoint associate or assistant heads, or directors, as needed to carry out the administrative functions of the Department. Such appointments shall be made in consultation with the Department Faculty Advisory Committee and will specify responsibilities in writing.

## **Section 3. Other Administrative Appointments**

Faculty members appointed to leadership roles such as Associate Head, Assistant Head, Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), and Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) will serve terms of three years. There are no term limits for these appointments. If a position is vacated before the end of the term, the Department Head will appoint a new individual to complete the term. When multiple faculty members express interest in serving, the Department Head will consult with the Department Faculty Advisory Committee before making an appointment. The Department Head shall appoint faculty members to leadership roles that support the academic programs of the Department. These appointments are Department-wide in scope, made in consultation with the Department Faculty Advisory Committee. The responsibilities of these faculty-held appointments shall be defined in writing by the Head in consultation with the appointee and the Department Faculty Advisory Committee.

## **Section 4. Departmental Review**

The Department shall review its missions, goals, and programs at least once every five years. This review will be led by the Head in consultation with faculty and staff to ensure alignment with College and University priorities.

## **Article VII. Faculty Meetings**

### **Section 1. Frequency and Authority**

1. The faculty of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) shall meet at least twice each semester during the academic year.
2. Meetings may be called by the following:
  - a. The Head of the Department.
  - b. The Department Faculty Advisory Committee (DFAC).
  - c. A written request submitted by at least 50% of voting faculty members.

### **Section 2. Notice and Agenda**

1. Written notice of a faculty meeting, including the agenda, shall be distributed to all faculty members at least two days in advance.
2. Items may be placed on the agenda by the Head, DFAC, or any voting faculty member through written request.

### **Section 3. Quorum and Voting**

1. A quorum shall consist of 50 percent plus one of the voting faculty.
2. Voting privileges are limited to members of the voting faculty as defined in these bylaws.
3. Each voting faculty member shall have one vote. Proxy voting is not permitted.
4. A secret ballot shall be conducted upon request by at least three voting faculty members.

### **Section 4. Conduct of Meetings**

1. The Head of the Department, or a designee, shall preside over meetings.
2. Minutes shall be recorded and distributed to all faculty within a reasonable time and approved at the next faculty meeting.

### **Section 5. Accessibility and Participation**

1. Faculty meetings are open to all departmental academic staff, students, and invited guests, except when closed sessions are required for confidential matters.
2. Only voting faculty may introduce motions or vote.

## **Article VIII. Committees**

### **Section 1. Principles of Committee Governance**

Committees are essential to the shared governance of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC). Committees shall adhere to the following principles:

1. Operate in accordance with University Statutes and College policies.
2. Provide recommendations to the Head and faculty on matters of departmental policy and program direction.
3. Include voting faculty, with student and staff representation where appropriate.
4. Submit an annual written report of activities to the Head and faculty.

### **Section 2. Elected Committees**

1. Department Faculty Advisory Committee

The Department Faculty Advisory Committee shall consist of three voting-eligible faculty members serving staggered three-year terms. The committee shall include at least one specialized faculty member and one tenure-track/tenure faculty member. The third at-large faculty member must be a voting eligible faculty member. The Department Head shall serve as a non-voting ex-officio member. The committee shall elect a chair from among its elected members at the start of each academic year. The primary purpose of the Department Faculty Advisory Committee is to advise the Head on departmental policies and governance matters, including consultation on faculty appointments, budget matters, curriculum development, and other issues affecting the welfare of the Department. The committee shall meet at least twice each semester at the call of the Head or upon request by two committee members. Any faculty member may request a conference with the committee or any of its members on matters within the committee's purview

## 2. Promotion and Tenure Committee:

The Promotion and Tenure Committee shall consist of all eligible faculty members, each holding at least a fifty percent appointment in the Department. The Head shall serve as a non-voting chair of the committee. When considering cases for promotion of specialized faculty, all eligible specialized faculty members of equal or higher rank to the candidate being reviewed will serve on the committee. The committee shall review and evaluate performance materials for all faculty eligible for promotion and shall make recommendations to the Head regarding promotion and tenure decisions. All votes on promotion and tenure matters shall be conducted by secret ballot. The Head may attend committee meetings to gather information from discussions but shall not vote on any promotion or tenure case.

## 3. Grievance Committee:

The Grievance Committee shall consist of three faculty members serving staggered three-year terms. All voting-eligible faculty members are eligible to serve on this committee. Members of the committee will be elected by the voting faculty. The committee shall elect a chair from among its faculty members. To ensure peer representation, the committee shall be augmented based on the grievant's professional status as follows: for specialized faculty grievances, at least one specialized faculty member from the Department or College shall be appointed by the Head; for graduate student grievances, one graduate student shall be appointed by the Head; and for undergraduate student grievances, one undergraduate student shall be appointed by the Head. The committee shall consider formal grievances submitted by any faculty member, academic professional, or student, except cases involving academic misconduct or sexual

harassment or discrimination, which shall be referred to appropriate campus offices. The grievant is expected to explore other available resolution methods within the Department before submitting a formal written grievance to the committee. All grievance procedures shall comply with University of Illinois policies and procedures.

### **Section 3. Other Committees**

The Head shall appoint, in consultation with the Departmental Faculty Advisory Committee, the following standing committees on an as needed basis.

1. Undergraduate Programs Committee – oversees undergraduate curricula, student advising, recruitment, and program quality.
2. Graduate Programs Committee – oversees graduate curricula, admissions, policies, and program development.
3. Courses and Curricula Committee – reviews new courses and curricula changes and coordinates with College-level committees.
4. Outreach and Extension Committee – supports communication, leadership development, and extension/public engagement initiatives.

### **Section 4. Advisory and Ad Hoc Committees**

1. External Advisory Committee: Appointed by the Head, with attention to disciplinary, professional, and geographic diversity, to provide external perspectives on departmental programs.
2. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee: Appointed by the Head, includes faculty, staff, and students, to support inclusive excellence in departmental programs and climate.
3. Ad Hoc Committees: The Head, in consultation with the Departmental Faculty Advisory Committee, may appoint ad hoc committees as needed for specific initiatives or reviews.

### **Section 5. Standards**

- Committee members shall recuse themselves where conflicts of interest exist.
- Quorum for elected committees shall be a majority of voting members.
- Votes on personnel matters (e.g., promotion and tenure) shall be conducted by secret ballot.

## **Article IX. Elections**

### **Section 1. General Procedures**

1. All departmental elections for shall be conducted by secret ballot. Electronic balloting is acceptable.
2. Each voting faculty member shall have one vote for each position to be filled. Cumulative voting is not permitted.
3. Elections shall normally be held during the spring semester, with the term of newly elected members beginning on August 16 unless otherwise specified.

## **Section 2. Nomination and Balloting**

1. Elections shall be conducted through a two-stage process:
  - a. Nomination Ballot: Consisting of all eligible faculty members.
  - b. Election Ballot: Consisting of at least two nominees for each open position. In the event of only one nominee, that person will be automatically elected to the position.
2. Faculty members may decline nomination prior to the election ballot being finalized.

## **Section 3. Vacancies and Special Elections**

1. If an elected member is unable to complete their term, the vacancy shall be filled by the nominee with the next highest number of votes from the most recent election, if eligible and willing.
2. If no such nominee is available, a special election shall be held to fill the remainder of the term.

## **Section 4. Ties**

1. In the event of a tie on a nomination or election ballot, the outcome shall be determined by a random process conducted transparently (e.g., coin toss or random draw) in the presence of at least two faculty witnesses.

## **Section 5. Eligibility**

1. Eligibility for election shall be limited to the voting faculty, as defined in these bylaws.
2. Faculty on extended leave, or otherwise ineligible to serve for more than four months of the term, may not be elected.

## **Article X. Amendments**

### **Section 1. Initiation**

Proposed amendments to these bylaws may be initiated by:

1. The Head of the Department.

2. The Department Faculty Advisory Committee (DFAC).
3. A written petition signed by at least 50% of faculty members.

## **Section 2. Notice**

1. The text of a proposed amendment shall be distributed to all voting faculty at least two weeks prior to the faculty meeting at which it will be considered.
2. The notice shall include the exact wording of the proposed amendment.

## **Section 3. Consideration and Approval**

1. Proposed amendments may be discussed and modified at a properly called faculty meeting.
2. Approval at the meeting shall require an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the voting faculty present.

## **Section 4. Ratification**

1. Following approval at a faculty meeting, the proposed amendment shall be submitted to the voting faculty by secret ballot.
2. For ratification, at least two-thirds of the ballots returned within 15 business days must be in favor.
3. A minimum participation of 50 + 1 percent of the voting faculty is required for the ballot to be valid.

## **Section 5. Authority**

These bylaws, as amended, must remain consistent with the University Statutes, Provost Communications, and College policies. Any provision inconsistent with higher-level policy is void.

## ADDENDUM B – BUDGET TABLE

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1						
2	<b>Estimated Costs and Sources of Funds for Proposed Unit</b>					
3	<b>Illinois Higher Education</b>					
4			Year of Operation			
5			1 <sup>st</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	4 <sup>th</sup> Year
6	<b>Expenditures</b>					
7	Personnel		5	5	5	5
8	Faculty Count (19)	by # of FTE	7	7	7	7
9		Costs in \$	\$1,109,872	\$1,143,168	\$1,177,463	\$1,212,787
10	Other Personnel Expenditures					
11	in \$		\$78,250	\$80,598	\$83,015	\$85,506
12	Assistant Salaries		\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
13	Supplies, Services Equipment in \$		\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
14	Facilities in \$		0	0	0	0
15		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,338,122</b>	<b>\$1,373,766</b>	<b>\$1,410,479</b>	<b>\$1,448,293</b>
16	<b>Resources</b>					
17	Current Unit		\$772,168	\$795,333	\$795,333	\$801,510
18	Other Internal Sources <sup>2</sup>		\$559,999	\$559,999	\$559,999	\$559,999
19	Federal Funds		\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
20	Fees, Sales, Other Income		\$132,000	\$132,000	\$132,000	\$132,000
21	New State Appropriation <sup>3</sup>		0	0	0	0
22		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,467,167</b>	<b>\$1,490,332</b>	<b>\$1,490,332</b>	<b>\$1,496,509</b>
23						
24	<sup>1</sup> Includes expenditures for misc departmental expenses					
25	<sup>2</sup> Reallocation within institution from other budgetary unit.					
26	<sup>3</sup> Complete Table 2 if greater than zero.					
27						
28	NOTE:					

## **ADDENDUM C – PUBLIC HEARING DOCUMENTATION**

The public hearing was conducted on March 5, 2026 via zoom. Attendees are listed in the minutes. The hearing was advertised in eWeek and was sent to the Office of the Senate as well. Efforts were taken to include other stakeholders such as students and alumni. The text of the announcement is as follows:

*Proposal to Establish Dept. of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Comms*

*The College of ACES is holding a public hearing from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. March 5, regarding a proposal to establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications. [Follow this link to review the proposal.](#) Individuals who wish to submit written comments regarding the proposal should [follow this link to fill out a short survey.](#)*

## **ADDENDUM D – PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

### **Meeting Minutes - Public Forum for Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)– March 5, 2026**

**ATTENDEES:** Christopher Wirz (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Danielle Hendricks (Project Manager, ACES), David Rosch (Associate Professor, ALEC), Eric Morgan (Associate Professor, ALEC), Gary Ochs (Instructor, ALEC), Haden Botkin (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Jenn Smist (Teaching Assistant Professor, ALEC), Joy Das (Assistant Director, Illinois Leadership Center), Nichole Isaac (Assistant Dean for Business and Administration), Nolan Miller (Chair, Senate Committee on Education Policy), Pam Axtman-Barker (Teaching Assistant Professor, ALEC), Tiffany Marzolino (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Gail Pring (Office Manager, ALEC), Anna Ball (Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Acting Director, ALEC), Germán Bollero (Dean, ACES), Julia Abel (Director of Strategy, Planning, and Implementation, ACES), Jordi Oliver (Graduate Student, ALEC), Amy Leman (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Janice Shearer (Public Services and Engagement Librarian, Funk ACES Library), Serenity Desmond (Associate Director of Teaching Labs, Chemistry), Theresa Miller (Board Member, ACES Alumni Association Board of Directors), Eun Yi Chung (Associate Professor, Economics)

**Location:** Zoom

**Meeting was called to order at 9:01 AM.**

Dr. Germán Bollero, Dean of the College of ACES, began the meeting by sharing that the purpose of the forum was to present and receive feedback on a proposal to elevate the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program to departmental status within the college.

Dr. Anna Ball, Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Acting ALEC Director, provided an overview of ALEC and its role within the college. ALEC focuses on leadership, education, and communication within food and agricultural systems and currently offers bachelor's and master's degree programs. The program includes nine faculty members and serves

approximately 120 undergraduate and 30 graduate students. ALEC also plays an important role in preparing agricultural educators for the state of Illinois and supporting statewide FFA programming. Dr. Ball also highlighted the development of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communication.

Dr. David Rosch, Associate Professor, ALEC, explained that ALEC currently operates as an academic program within the Office of Academic Programs rather than as a department. As a result, ALEC faculty obtain tenure through other academic units, and the program does not have direct representation in college governance structures. Establishing ALEC as a department would align its governance with its academic responsibilities and provide a consistent structure for promotion, tenure, and budget management.

Dr. Eric Morgan, Associate Professor, ALEC, discussed the rationale for the proposal. He emphasized that the change is primarily structural and would not require new funding or reallocation of resources from other departments. The proposal aims to improve governance efficiency and provide clearer organizational structure for the unit.

Participants were invited to provide comments during the meeting or through a feedback survey that will remain open until 5:00 PM on Monday.

Dr. Nolan Miller, Chair of the Senate Educational Policy Committee, noted that the forum fulfills a requirement under Senate bylaws for proposals establishing new academic units. He commended the proposal preparation process and noted that written feedback could also be submitted to the Senate office.

**Meeting Adjourned at 9:27 AM.**

## ADDENDUM E – MINUTES OF THE COLLEGE OF ACES FACULTY MEETING

### **ACES Faculty Meeting Minutes - March 5, 2026**

**Location:** Heritage Room, ACES Library

**Meeting was called to order at 12:06 PM.**

Dr. Germán Bollero, Dean of the College of ACES, opened the meeting by explaining that the purpose of the faculty meeting was to present a proposal to elevate the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program to departmental status within the college and to gather faculty feedback on the proposal.

Dr. Anna Ball, Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Acting ALEC Director, then provided an overview of ALEC and its role within the college. She explained that ALEC focuses on leadership, education, and communication within food and agricultural systems and currently offers both bachelor's and master's degree programs. The program includes 9 faculty members and serves approximately 120 undergraduate students and 30 graduate students. ALEC also plays a significant role in preparing agricultural educators for the state of Illinois and in supporting statewide FFA programming.

Dr. David Rosch, Associate Professor in ALEC, explained that ALEC currently operates as an academic program within the Office of Academic Programs rather than as a department. Because of this structure, ALEC faculty obtain tenure through other academic units, and the program does not have direct representation within college governance structures.

Establishing ALEC as a department would align its governance structure with its academic responsibilities and provide a consistent framework for promotion, tenure, and budget management.

Faculty members were invited to ask questions, and several questions were raised and addressed. Faculty were then asked to vote using the link provided in the previous email they had received, which was also included in the calendar invitation. They were informed that the survey would remain open until 5:00 PM on Monday, March 9, 2026.

**Meeting Adjourned at 12:47 PM.**

# ADDENDUM F – FAQ PUBLIC DOCUMENT

## Establishment of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

### What Is ALEC?

The Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) unit was established in 2017 as an interdisciplinary academic **program** within the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES). ALEC integrates three historically distinct academic areas—**agricultural education, agricultural leadership education, and agricultural communications**—into a single instructional and outreach enterprise. Peer institutions at land grant universities across the nation have departments of varying acronyms similar to ALEC. National and regional conferences, journal publication outlets, and long standing professional and tenure and promotion norms for departments of this kind have long existed. As a brief example, the Department of ALEC at Texas A&M University has roughly 40 faculty, 1300 undergraduate students and 150 graduate students. Ohio State’s ACEL department as a nearer peer, has roughly 12 faculty, 150 undergraduate students and 50 graduate students.

At present, ALEC at UIUC:

- Operates as a **program**, not a department
- Is administratively housed within the **College of ACES Office of Academic Programs**
- Delivers a **Bachelor of Science degree** with three concentrations:
  - Organizational and Community Leadership
  - Agricultural Education
  - Agricultural Communications
- Offers a **Master of Science degree**, serving both residential and online students
- Functions as a **state-recognized teacher certification unit** in Career and Technical Education (Agriscience Education)
- Coordinates **statewide outreach and professional programming**, including statewide FFA leadership events
- Houses the **James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications**, an externally facing research and professional development entity as the nexus of communicating large scale issues in the food, agricultural and environmental sciences communication

**Tenure homes for ALEC faculty currently reside across multiple departments**, primarily Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) and Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (NRES). While these faculty contribute to a single, integrated ALEC mission, they are evaluated, promoted, and governed under different departmental standards and procedures. In short, ALEC ***functions operationally like a department***—overseeing degree programs, graduate education, teacher certification, faculty coordination, and statewide engagement—while ***structurally remaining a program***. The proposal before the Faculty Senate seeks to align ALEC’s governance structure with its existing scope and responsibilities.

### Overview of the Proposal

This proposal requests approval to elevate ALEC from program status to **departmental status** within the College of ACES. The proposal does **not** create a new academic enterprise; it simply establishes a status for an existing unit to match its scale, responsibilities, and institutional obligations.

### Rationale for Departmental Status

## 1. Alignment of Governance with Function

ALEC currently delivers:

- Both an undergraduate and graduate degree program
- State-recognized teacher certification in Career and Technical Education
- Statewide outreach and professional programming
- Oversight of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications

Functions like these are typically governed at the departmental level. Departmental status provides:

- Clear lines of authority and accountability in the IVCB budget model
- Direct responsibility for curriculum, personnel, and program oversight and representation of faculty on college level committees

## 2. Faculty Equity and Evaluation Consistency

ALEC faculty currently hold tenure homes in multiple departments despite contributing to a single, integrated academic mission. This creates:

- Differing tenure and promotion expectations
- Inconsistent workload norms
- Fragmented mentoring and evaluation processes

Establishing ALEC as a department:

- Creates a unified and equitable tenure and promotion framework
- Improves transparency and consistency in personnel decisions

## 3. Operational Excellence and Continuity

The current structure relies heavily on informal coordination and individual leadership roles to maintain continuity across instruction, research, and outreach functions. A departmental status:

- Establishes durable governance structures
- Supports succession planning
- Reduces dependence on ad hoc MOU arrangements
- Enables UIUC to attract the best talent nationwide in ALEC disciplines

## Impact on the College and University

The proposed change does **not**:

- Duplicate existing departments or programs or weaken other academic units
- Require new degree authorizations
- Expand faculty, staff or budgetary lines beyond those already supporting ALEC

## Summary Statement for Faculty Senate Consideration

The establishment of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications represents a **structural alignment of governance with function**. The proposal consolidates existing activity it and strengthens shared governance by making authority, responsibility, and accountability explicit.

# ADDENDUM G – LETTERS

## Letter of Support — University Library

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### UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Juanita J. & Robert E. Simpson  
Dean of Libraries & University Librarian  
230 Main Library, MC-522  
1408 W. Gregory Drive  
Urbana, IL 61801

February 16, 2026

ANNA BALL  
Sent electronically

Dear Anna,

On behalf of the University Library, I write in support of the proposal to elevate the Academic Leadership, Education, and Communication (ALEC) Program to the status of a full department. The University Library's faculty have been engaged with the University's agricultural communications programs for many years and see opportunities for continued engagement if ALEC shifts from program to departmental status.

As we discussed the ALEC proposal with our faculty, they highlighted the long-standing relationship between the University Library's Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC), the University Archives, and the University's Agricultural Communications programs. Not only does the University Library host the ACDC, but the University Archives serve as the custodian for the papers of Professor Jim Evans, a pioneer in the field of Agricultural Communications.

The proposal to elevate ALEC to a full department presents no significant challenges to the University Library, as we already provide a full suite of services to support media, communications, and agriculture. Moreover, with disciplinary specialists focusing on communication and media studies, agricultural communications, and agriculture, and the papers of notable individuals such as Dr. Evans in the University Archives and the over 50,000 documents of the Agricultural Communication Documentation Center, the University Library is well-situated to continue offering strong support to ALEC.

Library faculty look forward to collaborating as you should ALEC transition from program to department, and we look forward to discussing potential avenues for collaboration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Stewart'.

Claire Stewart  
Juanita J. and Robert E. Simpson Dean of Libraries and University Librarian

cc. Eric Morgan, Associate Professor, Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications

# Letter of Support — College of Media

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## College of Media

Office of the Dean  
119 Gregory Hall, MC-462  
810 S. Wright St.  
Urbana, IL 61801

March 2, 2026

Anna Ball  
Associate Dean for Academic Programs  
College of ACES

Dear Anna,

On behalf of the College of Media, I write in support of the proposal to elevate the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (ALEC) Program to the status of a full department at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

We agree that there is value to establishing a formal departmental structure for the program and believe that this transition will enhance opportunities for collaboration between ACES and Media by supporting the delivery of exceptional educational experiences and strengthening ALEC's ability to attract the faculty essential for future growth.

The College of Media looks forward to continued collaborations as you transition ALEC from a program to a department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tracy Sulkin'.

Tracy Sulkin  
Dean

# Letter of Support — Council on Teacher Education

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## Council on Teacher Education

120 Education Building, MC-708  
1310 S. Sixth St.  
Champaign, IL 61820

February 13, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

As the Executive Director of the Council on Teacher Education, I am writing in support of advancing the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) unit to department status. The Council oversees thirty-one teacher, school leader, and school service personnel licensure programs housed in eight colleges and schools on the Urbana campus. Currently, the ALEC unit functions as a state-recognized educator licensing unit within Career and Technical Education (Agriscience Education).

This move to department status will enhance the prestige of the licensure unit by aligning with comparable departmental structures of similar programs in the country. It will allow licensure program faculty to more fully participate in the governance of the College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences (ACES), thus enhancing the desirability of the program for prospective faculty hires. This move to department status will allow licensure faculty to secure tenure within an appropriate departmental home.

Likewise, this move to department status does not adversely affect other licensure programs already in existence at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and primarily represents an administrative and governance change rather than an academic expansion. The collapsing and removal of concentrations within the new structure will clarify the focus of the degree. And finally, this proposed organizational structure is consistent with common land-grant models (e.g., ALEC-type departments) that reflect the applied, community-centered mission of agricultural leadership.

I am excited by this next step in the growth of the ALEC unit, and I am happy to support this proposed change to department status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jill Donnel'.

Jill Donnel, Ed.D.  
*Executive Director*

jilldonn@illinois.edu

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN**

217.333.2804 • cote.illinois.edu

# Letter of Acknowledgment — Department of Communication

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**College of Liberal Arts & Sciences**

Department of Communication  
3001 Lincoln Hall, MC-456  
702 S. Wright St.  
Urbana, IL 61801-3640

Anna Ball

Sent via email: [aball@illinois.edu](mailto:aball@illinois.edu)

Dear Professor Ball,

Thank you for informing me of the proposal to elevate the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (ALEC) Program to the status of a full department at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. On behalf of the Department of Communication, I acknowledge being notified.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'John P. Coughlin'.

Professor and Head

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN**

217.333.2683 • [communication.illinois.edu](http://communication.illinois.edu)

## Establishment of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

### What Is ALEC?

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**Tenure homes for ALEC faculty currently reside across multiple departments**, primarily Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) and Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (NRES). While these faculty contribute to a single, integrated ALEC mission, they are evaluated, promoted, and governed under different departmental standards and procedures. In short, ALEC ***functions operationally like a department***—overseeing degree programs, graduate education, teacher certification, faculty coordination, and statewide engagement—while ***structurally remaining a program***. The proposal before the Faculty Senate seeks to align ALEC’s governance structure with its existing scope and responsibilities.

### Overview of the Proposal

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### Rationale for Departmental Status

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The current structure relies heavily on informal coordination and individual leadership roles to maintain continuity across instruction, research, and outreach functions. A departmental status:

- Establishes durable governance structures
- Supports succession planning
- Reduces dependence on ad hoc MOU arrangements
- Enables UIUC to attract the best talent nationwide in ALEC disciplines

## Impact on the College and University

The proposed change does **not**:

- Duplicate existing departments or programs or weaken other academic units
- Require new degree authorizations
- Expand faculty, staff or budgetary lines beyond those already supporting ALEC

## Summary Statement for Faculty Senate Consideration

The establishment of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications represents a **structural alignment of governance with function**. The proposal consolidates existing activity it and strengthens shared governance by making authority, responsibility, and accountability explicit.

**1. Unit Objectives and Contributions**

Describe specific objectives and measurable contributions the unit will make to the university's mission, paying particular attention to the unit's consistency with the university's focus statement and priorities. Is the unit to be involved in instruction and, if so, to what extent?

**Overview**

This proposal seeks to establish the ALEC program to become an ALEC department in the College of ACES. The document will outline the current program structure, map how ALEC functionally operates like a department, and requests that the current structure match the operational function through a formal department without developing any new programs or asking for additional resources.

Since 2017, the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program has engaged the key missions of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with distinction, establishing itself as a vital component of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES). Currently, ALEC is a distinct program in the College of ACES under the Office of Academic Programs. It includes 7 tenure-track faculty, 5 specialized faculty, and 1 visiting academic professional. ALEC faculty deliver instruction across three undergraduate concentrations: Organizational and Community Leadership, Agricultural Education, and Agricultural Communications. In addition, they teach graduate-level courses within an interdisciplinary Master's program that serves both residential and online students. The program currently enrolls 122 undergraduates and 35 graduate students, reflecting its significant academic footprint and growing demand.

Peer institutions at land grant universities across the nation have departments of varying acronyms similar to ALEC. National and regional conferences, journal publication outlets, and long standing professional and tenure and promotion norms for departments of this kind have long existed. As a brief example, the Department of ALEC at Texas A&M University has roughly 40 faculty, 1300 undergraduate students and 150 graduate students. Ohio State's ACEL department as a nearer peer, has roughly 12 faculty, 150 undergraduate students and 50 graduate students.

The University of Illinois' Boldly Illinois strategic plan sets forth a vision to strengthen the institution's impact through four overarching goals: fostering scholarship, discovery, and innovation; providing transformative learning experiences; making a significant and visible societal impact; and stewarding current resources while generating additional support. These priorities guide the university's commitment to excellence in education, research, and public engagement. The Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program embodies this vision by integrating leadership, education, and communication into a dynamic academic unit that advances innovation, prepares students for global challenges, and strengthens Illinois' agricultural and educational systems.

**Foster Scholarship, Discovery, and Innovation**

ALEC faculty advance research in agricultural communication, leadership development, and education, generating new knowledge that strengthens workforce preparation and informs best practices across the agricultural, environmental, food, and natural resource sector. This scholarship contributes to innovation in teaching, leadership, and outreach, ensuring Illinois remains a leader in agricultural leadership, education, and communication. Specifically, faculty engage in regional and national conferences embedded in the American Association for Agricultural Education, the Association for Leadership Educators, the International Leadership Association, and the National Association for Communication

Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Life and Human Sciences. Faculty publish in the Journal of Agricultural Education, the Advancements in Ag Development Journal, the NACTA Journal, the Journal of International Extension Education, the Journal of Leadership Education, the Journal of Leadership Studies, and the Journal of Applied Communications to name a few.

### **Provide Transformative Learning Experiences**

ALEC offers an interdisciplinary curriculum that prioritizes experiential learning, active engagement, and global perspectives. Students participate in hands-on projects, leadership development activities, and real-world problem-solving exercises that prepare them for dynamic careers. Specifically, students studying to be public school agriscience teachers engage in a series of 3 intensive, cohort based clinical experiences situated in schools across Illinois for the purpose of learning to be practicing teachers. Students in agricultural leadership and agricultural communications engage in intensive internship courses similar to the student teachers, but within the context of the companies and community organizations of their future employment. ALEC also provides study abroad opportunities that expose students to international agricultural systems and cross-cultural communication, broadening their global competency. Currently faculty lead a freshman oriented new student study abroad for agricultural systems in Panama and a Food and Wine writing study abroad in France. These experiences are complemented by involvement in student organizations such as Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow, Emerging Illini Leaders, and Alpha Tau Alpha/the Agricultural Education Club, as well as events like the Greenhand Conference and FFA (formerly the Future Farmers of America) competitions, which immerse students in authentic leadership and communication contexts. Approximately 600 high school freshmen from across the state of Illinois attend this annual conference.

### **Make a Significant and Visible Societal Impact**

ALEC serves as a teacher certification unit for aspiring Career and Technical Education teachers broadly and more specifically in the realm of Agriscience Education, ensuring Illinois schools have qualified educators who inspire future leaders in food, agriculture, and natural resources. Through statewide outreach—including FFA (formerly the Future Farmers of America) events and conferences that bring hundreds of high school students to campus—ALEC strengthens educational pipelines and reinforces the land-grant mission of serving communities across Illinois. Moreover, many employees in the Office of Extension positioned throughout the state of Illinois hold undergraduate and/or graduate degrees in ALEC, as skills of planning, delivering, and assessing the effectiveness of educational programs taught in the context of in public school settings in turn translate to developing educators in community-based settings at large.

### **Steward Current Resources and Generate Additional Support**

ALEC demonstrates responsible stewardship of resources through strategic integration of agricultural education, leadership, and communication into a single unit, maximizing efficiency and impact. The program actively seeks additional support through partnerships, grant-seeking initiatives, and innovative program delivery. A key example of this commitment is the founding of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, which serves as a hub for advancing research, professional development, and industry collaboration in agricultural communications worldwide. This center not only elevates ALEC's visibility and impact but also creates new opportunities for external funding and partnerships. Additionally, ALEC's hybrid master's program expands access to advanced education for working professionals, ensuring operational excellence while meeting the evolving needs of Illinois' workforce.

2. Need

Explain how the unit will meet regional and state needs and priorities. What is the demand for the unit's services? What clients or population will the unit serve? Identify similar units of administration, research, or public service in the state, at both public and private colleges and universities. Compare the proposed unit with these units and discuss potential impact upon them.

**Program Impact and Need**

The Agricultural Education concentration in ALEC currently prepares both undergraduates and graduate students seeking a grade 5-12 teacher license in food and agriculture. With over 550 food and agriculture teacher positions in Illinois alone, preparing students for this professional sector is a high priority and Agricultural Education in ALEC is instrumental in developing the public school teacher pipeline in this discipline area. The ALEC program at the University of Illinois is one of four institutions in the state who certify teachers in this area, yet historically produce nearly half of the graduates in Agricultural Education for the state. The ALEC Master's degree program makes a further impact through providing high quality online education to fulfill the need for a highly qualified extension educator pipeline in Illinois. Currently, there are approximately 150 full time Extension educators across Illinois with Master's degrees and nearly half of whom need training in educational programs, delivery and design, provided by the ALEC online Master's degree. Further, there are nearly 250 Extension program coordinators who lack a Master's degree but would be eligible to become an Extension educator if fully credentialed. Roughly two-thirds the students enrolled in the ALEC online Master's degree program are pursuing the degree in order to enhance their skills in educational program design, delivery and assessment, and to become fully credentialed Extension educators.

The need for a highly skilled workforce around the human sciences of teaching and learning and program design and evaluation extends beyond the public school teachers and extension professionals in the state. Chicago as the epicenter for food, boasts over 3,500 companies in food and agricultural systems. According to the ACES first destination survey data, over 700 unique companies hire ACES graduates. Currently, just over 10% of the total workforce in the nation is working in a food and agricultural system related position. There is a growing need to upskill the existing workforce in the food and agricultural systems industries, fill the gaps in existing soft skills training, and fulfill the need for well-trained professionals to be the future leaders at large in food and agricultural disciplines. In 2025 alone, there were nearly 23,000 more jobs in food and agricultural companies than individuals to fill those positions. ALEC concentrations in Agricultural Communications and Organizational and Community Leadership form the underpinnings of the durable skills needed for current graduates, as well as upskilling the existing workforce, in food systems careers across the Illinois food systems sectors.

With a growing gap between consumer and producer knowledge of the grand challenges of food, agricultural and environmental systems disciplines, the Agricultural Communications concentration in ALEC prepares disciplinary experts in the science of effective food systems communication. The growing concerns around those who produce and those who consume food seem to illustrate the need to expand our human capacity for communicating the innovations in food and agricultural disciplines. Misinformation around climate change, genetically modified organisms, hormones, and basic nutritional information, among other topics continues to persist and create larger knowledge gaps in and about our food system, leading to a largely uninformed population of consumers. As it stands, the need for a better-

informed consumer base and a better trained swath of communications professionals to educate said consumer base on the sciences in and of food and agricultural systems topics is a global issue as well. The International Federation of Agricultural Journalists is the disciplinary home for over 5,000 food and agricultural systems communications professionals representing over 50 countries across the globe. The Agricultural Communications concentration of ALEC is highly connected with this global federation of Agricultural Journalists and through the newly formed James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, is developing a global certificate in food and agricultural systems communication to educate the experts in the science of various food systems topics to better communicate, design educational campaigns, and utilize digital communication as a tool for educating the public to be more engaged participants and savvy consumers of food.

### **Comparison to other Units**

Several universities in Illinois offer programs that share elements with ALEC, including Southern Illinois University, Illinois State University, and Western Illinois University, which provide coursework or concentrations in agricultural education, and/or communication. However, these offerings are typically housed within broader agricultural or education departments and do not integrate all three areas into a single, comprehensive unit. ALEC at the University of Illinois is unique in combining agricultural leadership, education, and communications under one program and further distinguishes itself by offering a robust team of tenure-track faculty seeking external grant funding,. Because ALEC already exists as a recognized program and serves a distinct niche, its continuation and growth are not expected to negatively impact similar units at other universities. Instead, ALEC complements statewide efforts by providing advanced training and interdisciplinary expertise meshing the three sub-areas of agricultural education, agricultural communications and agricultural leadership that other institutions do not currently offer.

<b>3. Organization</b>
------------------------

Describe the proposed unit's organizational structure. Explain how the unit is organized to meet its stated objectives.
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Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) is an academic program housed within the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, operating under the auspices of the Office of Academic Programs. Established in 2017, ALEC represents the strategic integration of three previously distinct academic areas—Agricultural Education, Agricultural Leadership Education, and Agricultural Communications—into a single, interdisciplinary unit. The unit comprises seven tenure-track faculty members, five specialized faculty members, and one visiting academic professional. Executive leadership is provided by the Executive Officer, Dr. Anna Ball, who serves in a dual role as the Associate Dean of Academic Programs. The program currently operates as a stand-alone unit managing its own budget, hiring new faculty and staff, governing the operations of the undergraduate and graduate programs, determining program quality through regular program evaluation processes and annual faculty and staff evaluation processes, and engaging in strategic planning and budgeting processes every summer. The attached unit bylaws specifically outline governance around regular faculty meetings, advisory committee structures, and governance around undergraduate and graduate programs. In short, the ALEC program currently informs itself through an advisory committee structure, conducts monthly faculty meetings, and has operational committees for it's college and campus operations. Faculty and staff are evaluated annually, and the program reports its strategic priorities annually to the dean's office for informing budget appropriations.

The proposed structure does not change the operations of ALEC, but rather formalizes the unit into a department to more adequately match the current operation of ALEC.

#### 4. Unit Outcomes

Identify what targets have been set to assess the proposed unit's success in achieving its objectives. Among others, specific performance measures might include: expected research and/or public service products; ratio of external to internal funding for unit; impact of this unit on national, state, regional, and local area organizations, businesses, or communities; and collaborative research product that promotes the Illinois economy.

The ALEC program regularly undergoes unit evaluations required by campus, the state accrediting bodies, and the college strategic planning and goal setting processes. Annually, ALEC meets its requirements for the Higher Learning Commission through a careful review of the program's learning outcomes and developing systematic ways to assess learning outcomes. Undergraduate students in the program engage in a capstone class where they develop authentic products that measure learning throughout the 4 years in the program and then faculty make course level adjustments to the gap areas in student learning. Students in the Agricultural Education concentration of the program are evaluated through state teacher accreditation requirements, passing content tests and performance based teaching evaluations in order to be fully licensed teachers. The program also undergoes a 5-year review process with an external review team. The most recent external review was conducted in the spring of 2025, and was a two-part process where a team of department chairs from peer institutions in the nation spent time on campus interviewing faculty, staff, students and administrators across the college and examining internal and external documents about the program. Further, a consulting firm was hired to collect data from alumni regarding the strengths and challenges of the program in developing graduates. Results of that recent external review resoundingly asserted the need for ALEC to seek official department status. Further, the teams suggested some minor curricular streamlining in order to make the content more seamless between the three academic concentrations.

Performance metrics for ALEC include the number of graduates it continues to produce in sectors across IL and beyond, the number of high enrollment classes taught serving the learning needs in the durable skills areas of leadership and communications across the college and university, and the success of faculty in their academic associations. With approximately 122 undergraduate and 35 graduate students enrolled in the program, ALEC will continue to focus on increasing total enrollment. Further ALEC offers some high enrollment courses in the arena of individual leadership, team leadership, and collaborative and community leadership as a part of the campus Leadership minor. ALEC will continue to promote the minor as well as expanding enrollment in those courses to continue to develop the durable leadership and communication skills needed for graduates of all majors in ACES.

Finally, ALEC faculty have been recognized in their disciplines for outstanding research and practice. The Agricultural Education concentration was recognized in 2024 by the National Association of Agricultural Educators as an outstanding teacher education program. Past faculty have been recipients of outstanding research poster and papers by the American Association of Agricultural Educators, and leadership faculty have been recognized via outstanding leadership research and educator awards by the Association of Leadership Educators.

#### 5. Quality Assurance Processes

Briefly describe the processes that will yield evidence to demonstrate the quality of the unit. Address the

following elements: evidence that the unit supports the university's mission and statewide goals; evidence that the unit's product or outcomes achieve stated objectives; determination of organizational effectiveness; faculty and staff qualifications and reward structures; determination of adequate support staff, equipment, and other resources; and use of results from evaluations to improve the unit's effectiveness.

As mentioned in the prior section, the ALEC program currently engages in annual and multi-year processes to review the program at the individual faculty and student levels, to the overall program levels and will continue to do so in a similar fashion once it achieves department status. Faculty and staff undergo an annual review process where they submit a CV and accomplishments for the year and meet with the director annually to review needs, goals and areas of improvement. The program annually reviews its overall learning outcomes and makes curricular adjustments based on student performance in the capstone courses. Faculty meet once a month to engage in governance and decision making for the unit as a whole, and they also meet once a week for regular program quality review and share out on the day to day work and success of the unit. Finally, the ALEC director submits an annual review and presents the results of the program success and challenges for the year based on metrics associated to enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs, instructional units generated across the program, metrics from paid online enrollment, and program success in indirect cost recovery generation from external grants. The director meets with the faculty annually to assess strengths and areas of improvement in the metrics of enrollment, instructional units, online revenue generated and indirect cost recovery generated. The team uses that information to develop a strategic plan for the year including the major goals, the strengths and weaknesses of the unit, and the hiring plans needed to achieve the annual goals. The director then presents the plan to the dean and associate deans in the college and is given feedback on college level metrics and where the unit must improve each year in meeting its overarching goals. This current proposal does not propose to change any of the existing quality assurance processes as the ALEC program currently undergoes the same quality assurance processes of all of the departments in ACES. Rather, the program seeks to formalize the current processes as a stand alone department, rather than as a program that reports to the office of Academic Programs in the college.

#### 6. Facilities (space, equipment, instructional materials)

Describe the available facilities and equipment to develop and maintain high quality in this unit of administration, research, or public service including buildings, classrooms, office space, laboratories and equipment, and other instructional technologies. Summarize information about library resources including a list of key academic journals and other publications that will support this unit and be used by faculty, students, and staff.

No new resources will be needed for the current ALEC program to become an official department. ALEC already occupies office spaces on the first and 5th floors of Bevier Hall. A suite of faculty offices and a conference room and storage room exist in 174 Bevier. The graduate student office suites are on the first and fifth floors of Bevier. Additionally 4 individual faculty offices are on the first floor and 2 individual faculty offices are located on the 5th floor of Bevier respectively. ALEC operates a departmentally controlled classroom in 122 Bevier Hall that was originated from and is maintained by gift funds. Finally, the newly formed James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications lecture hall maintained by ALEC is in the basement of the ACES Library Alumni and Information Center, along with an office for the Evans Center Director. As a social sciences units, the laboratory needs in terms of accomplishing the research mission, exist with individual faculty and graduate students in computing, software and research travel needs already being supported by the unit through start-up funds, internal, and external grant award support. The unit uses existing library resources that subsequently won't change if

converted from a program to a department as well. The major journals for ALEC disciplines include: the Journal of Extension, the Journal of Agricultural Education, the Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research, the NACTA Journal published by the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agricultural, the Advancements in Agricultural Development journal, the Journal of Leadership Education, the Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, and the Journal of Applied Communications. Furthermore, ALEC shares a unique relationship with the University Libraries with the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC). The ACDC is a specialized library collection housed in the Funk ACES Library established nearly 50 years ago to house documents and publications specific to agricultural communications. Agricultural Communications faculty in ALEC serve in an advisory and resource capacity to the ACDC and in turn, the ACDC provides unique library infrastructure to Agricultural Communications faculty and students.

#### 7. Resources

Indicate the number of students, businesses, industries, and/or other clients to be served by this unit. Include a description of faculty participation and student involvement in the unit if applicable. Provide a narrative budget statement explaining the data in the associated Budget Table. Include detail describing revenues from governmental grants and contracts private gifts and grants, endowment/investment income, sales and services, and other sources; and expenditures including salaries of faculty, administrative staff, benefits, and other personnel related expenses for the proposed unit; library resources, services, equipment, and facilities.

As discussed in prior sections, ALEC has maintained a consistent number of undergraduate and graduate students, with potential to increase revenue by expanding enrollment and growing online education offerings. Resources for ALEC are primarily based on undergraduate enrollment and instructional units taught by ALEC faculty and specialized faculty. Additional program support is provided by the College of ACES, as well as through partnerships with the University of Illinois Extension and faculty engaged in applied research programs. ALEC also benefits from a strong network of alumni and stakeholders committed to agricultural leadership and outreach, who support programmatic opportunities and student scholarships through endowments. Leveraging the diverse expertise of ALEC faculty, the program's grant portfolio has expanded to include private, federal, and foundation funding, generating facilities and administrative returns that support program overhead costs.

#### 8. A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth

IBHE is charged to develop a strategic plan to address the present and future aims and needs and requirements of higher education in Illinois (110 ILCS 205/6) (from Ch. 144, par. 186) Sec. 6).

Illinois Administrative Code: 1050.30(a)(6): A) The unit of instruction, research or public service is educationally and economically justified based on the educational priorities and needs of the citizens of Illinois

Respond to the following questions about how the proposed unit will support the three goals of A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth Strategic Plan.

- Equity: Close the equity gaps for students who have historically been left behind
- Sustainability: Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions

- Growth: Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth

#### Equity

1. Describe plans to implement systemic solutions that will increase access and opportunities for service to underserved communities and the implications for the proposed unit of administration. Explain how progress will be monitored. [See Equity Strategy #1 and #2]
2. Explain institutional strategies being implemented to increase and retain faculty, staff, and administrators of color and the implications for the proposed unit. Explain how progress will be monitored. [See Equity Strategy #3]

#### Sustainability

3. For this new unit of administration, describe how the institution plans to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies in its administrative structure and operations while avoiding unnecessary or existing duplication.
4. Explain further how the new unit will capitalize and build collaborative synergies on campus and within and outside of the state; support future-ready learning, research, or public service approaches; and ensure that the unit is a good steward of its financial resources.

#### Growth

5. As one of the Core Principles, demonstrate how the proposed unit will reinforce and promote public good in the state (e.g., civic engagement, exposure to arts and humanities, and solutions to society's challenges).
6. Describe how the unit plans to contribute to research, innovation, and economic development by leveraging the Illinois Innovation Network. [See Growth Strategy #1]
7. Explain how the new unit engaged with business and industry in its development and how it will spur the state's economy by leveraging partnerships with local, regional, and state industry, business leaders and employers. [See Growth Strategy #3]
8. Describe how the proposed unit will expand access and opportunities for students regarding high-impact practices including research opportunities, internships, apprenticeships, career pathways, and other field experiences. [See Growth Strategy #6]
9. Explain how the proposed unit of administration will expand its models of teaching and learning, research, and/or public service and outreach that provide opportunity for students to succeed in the work of the future. [See Growth Strategy #6]

(For more information about each of the three goals of the A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth Strategic Plan, go to the IBHE website: <https://ibhestrategicplan.ibhe.org/>).

**Equity Question 1: Describe plans to implement systemic solutions that will increase access and opportunities for service to underserved communities and the implications for the proposed unit of administration. Explain how progress will be monitored.**

The Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program is committed to implementing systemic solutions that increase access and opportunities for underserved communities,

particularly rural students, first-generation students, and students from low-income backgrounds who have historically had limited exposure to agricultural education, leadership development, and agricultural communications.

ALEC's curriculum emphasizes service learning, internships, and field experiences that engage students from underrepresented minority backgrounds. Research shows these high-impact practices contribute significantly to student success and retention. ALEC intentionally designs capstone projects and student teaching experiences to address real-world challenges in rural and underserved communities. ALEC's online Master of Science program specifically removes geographic and economic barriers that prevent working professionals from accessing advanced education. By continuing to expand flexible learning modalities, the department ensures that students throughout Illinois and beyond can pursue agricultural leadership, education, and communications credentials without relocating or abandoning employment. This directly addresses the equity strategy focus on extending learning opportunities to mitigate barriers for underserved populations.

Through the annual Greenhand Conference and state FFA programming, ALEC actively engages high school students from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly rural youth in agricultural regions. These outreach events create early exposure to agricultural careers and education pathways, encouraging students who might otherwise not consider postsecondary education in agriculture to explore these opportunities. ALEC provides advising and support for first-generation and low-income students. The department will continue to ensure that students have access to mental health resources, basic needs support, and mentoring that helps them navigate both academic and professional challenges.

Finally, ALEC monitors progress through: (1) disaggregated enrollment and retention data by demographic groups; (2) tracking persistence rates for first-generation, low-income, and rural students; (3) assessment of graduation rates and time-to-degree for underrepresented students; (4) evaluation of internship and career placement outcomes across demographic groups; and (5) annual review of departmental climate surveys and student feedback to identify and address equity gaps.

**Equity Question 2: Explain institutional strategies being implemented to increase and retain faculty, staff, and administrators of color and the implications for the proposed unit. Explain how progress will be monitored.**

ALEC recognizes the critical importance of building a diverse faculty, staff, and administrative team that reflects and serves the diverse student population across Illinois and beyond. ALEC is guided by the ACES office of Human Resources (HR) as well as the ACES office for Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to implement institutional equity strategies to increase recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and administrators of color. All hiring must go through quality control checks with a committee in ACES HR and ACES DEI to determine that the program meets guidelines, ensures inclusive recruitment and retention practices.

Through ACES HR and ACES DEI offices, ALEC receives training on equitable faculty hiring practices, including awareness of microaggression and bias in interviews and CV review. ALEC works with graduate programs and professional networks to identify promising scholars from diverse backgrounds and leverages state initiatives such as the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program. Through campus and ACES HR resources, all ALEC faculty and staff have access to professional development programs

that build skills in cultural communication, awareness of implicit bias, and capacity to mentor and support students from underrepresented backgrounds. The progress of the ALEC program in all of these efforts is currently monitored by and will continue to be checked by the ACES HR and ACES DEI offices via: (1) annual tracking of faculty and staff diversity metrics by demographic category; (2) exit interviews and retention studies to understand challenges faced by faculty and staff of color; (3) review of hiring practices and search committee outcomes; (4) assessment of departmental climate surveys regarding diversity and inclusion; and (5) evaluation of professional development participation and impact on cultural awareness and mentoring capacity.

**Sustainability Question 3: For this new unit of administration, describe how the institution plans to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies in its administrative structure and operations while avoiding unnecessary or existing duplication.**

The elevation of ALEC from a program to a department represents an intentional strategy to maximize institutional effectiveness and eliminate inefficiencies that constrain the unit's ability to serve students and advance the university's mission. Currently, ALEC operates as a program within the College of ACES structure, which creates organizational fragmentation and administrative complexity.

Departmental status allows for more strategic allocation of faculty expertise. Currently, faculty contributions are distributed across different departments creating inequities in scheduling and workload distribution. As a cohesive department, ALEC will be poised to optimize and align faculty research and teaching portfolios more effectively to minimize unnecessary costs, particularly concerning grant support. This is important given that currently four of the seven tenure/tenure-track faculty retain tenure 'homes' in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, while the other two are 'housed' in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Science. This structural division creates inequity by fragmenting the faculty into separate collegial communities and subjecting them to disparate tenure and promotion standards and procedures, undermining the consistency, fairness, and transparency that should govern how all seven faculty members are evaluated and promoted.

Furthermore, attainment of departmental status will consolidate ALEC's administrative functions (budget management, personnel coordination, facilities management, etc.) under a single, streamlined structure. This eliminates redundant reporting lines and administrative overhead currently distributed across multiple departmental entities (HDFS, NRES, and the College of ACES Office of Academic Programs).

The disciplines that comprise ALEC at Illinois are specialized and focused areas. No other academic unit at the university offers the integrated combination of agricultural leadership, education, and communication found in ALEC. By consolidating these three previously separate areas into a single department, ALEC eliminates redundancy and concentrates expertise, ensuring better resource stewardship.

**Question 4: Explain further how the new unit will capitalize and build collaborative synergies on campus and within and outside of the state; support future-ready learning, research, or public service approaches; and ensure that the unit is a good steward of its financial resources.**

ALEC is positioned as a key connector and collaborator across the College of ACES, the University of Illinois campus and throughout Illinois' food, agricultural, environmental, and education sectors. As a department, the unit will leverage these strategic partnerships to maximize institutional and regional impact while ensuring exemplary stewardship of financial resources. Collaborations with other departments in ACES have the potential to expand course offerings without duplicating resources and will

prepare students for complex, multidisciplinary challenges in food and agricultural systems and environmental sustainability. Cross-listed courses allow students to develop expertise in complementary areas while optimizing faculty efficiency.

ALEC actively engages with University of Illinois Extension, various agricultural commodity groups. For example, one of the upper level undergraduate courses engages with the Jackie Joyner Kersee Foundation to in a youth participatory action research initiative, where college students work with youth in an after school program to develop mechanisms for designing, delivering and evaluating effective youth programming in the underserved communities in East St. Louis. This partnership as well as others across ALEC creates authentic learning opportunities for students through internships and field projects while advancing applied research that addresses real-world agricultural and educational challenges. Such collaborations enhance program quality without requiring proportional increases in departmental resources. ALEC demonstrates responsible financial stewardship through strategic resource allocation that prioritizes student-facing services, evidence-based expenditures, and revenue generation. The department actively pursues external funding through grants and partnerships and will explore revenue-generating activities such as professional development workshops and certificate programs for working professionals. ALEC is currently developing online graduate-level certificates as a revamp of their existing online courses, aimed to scale the delivery of high value durable skills coursework. Departmental status provides greater autonomy and accountability in budget management, enabling more responsive and efficient financial decision-making.

**Growth Question 5: As one of the Core Principles, demonstrate how the proposed unit will reinforce and promote public good in the state (e.g., civic engagement, exposure to arts and humanities, and solutions to society's challenges).**

ALEC embodies the University of Illinois' land-grant mission by directly advancing public good through civic engagement, knowledge dissemination, and solutions to consequential state challenges. The department prepares professionals who strengthen democratic participation, build agricultural and science literacy, and address critical gaps in agricultural education and environmental decision-making.

Illinois faces a severe shortage of qualified agriscience educators, creating a pipeline crisis that undermines both agricultural workforce development and science education in rural communities. ALEC's teacher certification program directly serves the public good by preparing innovative educators who fill this gap. These graduates teach agricultural science, environmental literacy, and career awareness to thousands of secondary students annually, many in underserved regions. By strengthening K-12 agricultural education, ALEC ensures that all Illinois students—regardless of zip code—have access to quality instruction in food systems, sustainability, and STEM careers.

ALEC graduates work as communicators, educators, and advocates throughout Extension services, nonprofits, government agencies, and the private sector. They translate complex agricultural and environmental science into accessible information for diverse audiences—farmers, policymakers, consumers, and diverse communities. This work directly addresses critical public challenges including food security, climate adaptation, sustainable resource management, and economic resilience. By improving food and agricultural literacy and environmental understanding, ALEC graduates enable informed civic participation on decisions that affect Illinois' agricultural future and environmental health.

ALEC's leadership development programs prepare students for community-facing roles in Extension, civic organizations, and nonprofit institutions. Through service-learning projects, students engage directly

with community challenges—from watershed management to agricultural policy—while developing skills to facilitate inclusive, democratic decision-making. These experiences ground students in authentic civic engagement and position them as leaders capable of fostering collaborative problem-solving across diverse stakeholder groups in agricultural and environmental contexts.

ALEC extends its reach far beyond campus through the Greenhand Conference, FFA state competitions, and partnership programs that engage hundreds of high school students annually. These initiatives expose young people to agricultural careers and educational pathways, strengthen the talent pipeline for agricultural professions, and demonstrate the university's tangible commitment to serving students throughout Illinois—particularly in rural areas where agricultural education opportunities may be limited.

ALEC faculty conduct research in agricultural education, leadership development, and communication that generates evidence-based insights to improve teaching effectiveness, organizational practice, and public engagement about food, agriculture, environment, and natural resources. This scholarship bridges disciplinary knowledge and practical application, ensuring that improvements in agricultural education reach classrooms and communities across Illinois.

**Growth Question 6: Describe how the unit plans to contribute to research, innovation, and economic development by leveraging the Illinois Innovation Network.**

ALEC actively leverages the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) and related regional economic development initiatives to advance innovation in agricultural education, leadership, and communications and to support economic vitality across Illinois and the Midwest.

ALEC faculty conduct applied and basic research in agricultural communication, leadership development, and education that generates innovations in teaching methods, professional development approaches, and strategic communication practices. This research is disseminated through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and direct engagement with agricultural and educational professionals. The James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, housed within ALEC, serves as a focal point for advancing research, professional development, and industry collaboration in agricultural communications worldwide.

While ALEC's primary focus is agricultural education and communications rather than cutting-edge technology or STEM innovation, the department contributes to IIN objectives by: (1) strengthening the workforce through education and professional development; (2) supporting talent development in rural regions of Illinois where agriculture remains economically vital; and (3) advancing inclusive innovation in food and agricultural systems through communication and education focused on diverse communities.

ALEC students graduate with entrepreneurial skills and knowledge that enable them to launch their own consulting, education, and communication ventures. The department's focus on leadership and communication prepares graduates to innovate in how agricultural information is shared, how agricultural education is delivered, and how agricultural leaders engage communities. Through partnerships with Extension, agricultural nonprofits, and agribusiness organizations, ALEC directly transfers research findings and educational innovations to practitioners and industry leaders. This ensures that university research contributes meaningfully to real-world agricultural and educational innovation.

**Growth Question 7: Explain how the new unit engaged with business and industry in its development and how it will spur the state's economy by leveraging partnerships with local, regional, and state industry, business leaders and employers.**

ALEC has developed deep partnerships with agricultural businesses, nonprofits, Extension, and educational organizations throughout Illinois and nationally. These partnerships have informed program development and will continue to drive the department's growth and economic impact.

ALEC's curriculum is informed by regular engagement with industry and organizational leaders including FFA advisors, Extension professionals, agribusiness executives, and agricultural nonprofit directors. These stakeholders provided input during program redesign, helping align curriculum with workforce needs in agricultural education, leadership, and communications. Advisory boards provide ongoing feedback to ensure that coursework remains relevant and responsive to changing industry needs.

ALEC maintains partnerships with organizations that provide internships, professional experiences, and employment opportunities for graduates. These partnerships benefit students by providing pathways to meaningful careers while benefiting employers by building talent pipelines of skilled, educated professionals. Growing partnerships with regional Extension offices, agricultural media companies, agribusiness firms, and nonprofits expand opportunities for experiential learning.

The newly formed James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications facilitates collaboration between ALEC faculty and researchers and industry leaders. The center will host conferences, workshops, and professional development events that bring together educators, communicators, and industry professionals to share research findings and best practices. These activities generate revenue while advancing knowledge and innovation in agricultural communications, leadership, and education.

By preparing skilled educators, leaders, and communicators, ALEC contributes to workforce development across Illinois' agricultural sector. Graduates secure employment as agricultural educators, Extension professionals, communications specialists, and leaders in agricultural organizations, with average starting salaries competitive with other professional fields. This strengthens the state's ability to attract and retain talent in agriculture and related sectors, supporting broader economic development goals across rural and urban Illinois. As a program, ALEC is informed by advisory committees and regular industry engagement processes, ensuring continuous dialogue with employers and industry leaders. Annual industry surveys and stakeholder forums will inform strategic planning and program development, ensuring that ALEC remains responsive to workforce needs and emerging opportunities.

**Growth Question 8: Describe how the proposed unit will expand access and opportunities for students regarding high-impact practices including research opportunities, internships, apprenticeships, career pathways, and other field experiences.**

ALEC is deeply committed to expanding access and opportunities for students to engage in high-impact practices that develop critical competencies and prepare them for successful careers. The department will continue to strengthen and expand opportunities for research, internships, apprenticeships, career pathways, and field experiences.

Undergraduate and graduate students have opportunities to participate in faculty-led research in agricultural education, leadership development, and communication. Graduate students have the option to complete thesis research that contributes to disciplinary knowledge while developing advanced research skills. Undergraduate students serve as research assistants and engage in capstone research projects. The department will expand these opportunities and ensure equitable access for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

ALEC's curriculum emphasizes real-world experience through internships, field projects, and practicum courses. Agricultural education students complete 480 hours of student teaching in secondary schools. All students engage in service learning, leadership development activities, and capstone projects that require application of classroom knowledge to authentic challenges. The department will expand internship partnerships with Extension offices, nonprofits, and agribusinesses to increase placement opportunities and ensure that all students have access to meaningful field experiences. ALEC clearly articulates career pathways for graduates entering agricultural education, Extension, agricultural communications, nonprofit leadership, and agribusiness. The department provides professional development workshops, industry networking events, and mentoring to help students understand career options and develop professional networks. Graduate students in the online Master's program benefit from flexible scheduling that allows working professionals to continue employment while advancing their credentials and career prospects.

ALEC provides study abroad opportunities that expose students to international agricultural systems, international leadership models, and cross-cultural communication. These experiences broaden students' global competency and prepare them to engage in international agricultural development and global food systems dialogue. The department will expand these opportunities to ensure access for students from all backgrounds. ALEC ensures access to all high-impact practices for students from underrepresented backgrounds, first-generation students, students from rural and other low-sending counties, and low-income students. The department provides financial support, mentoring, and logistical assistance to remove barriers to participation in internships, research, and field experiences.

**Growth Question 9: Explain how the proposed unit of administration will expand its models of teaching and learning, research, and/or public service and outreach that provide opportunity for students to succeed in the work of the future.**

ALEC is fundamentally reimagining its teaching and learning models to prepare students for the evolving agricultural workforce while expanding access and flexibility. Through three strategic curricular innovations—graduate certificates and an integrated undergraduate curriculum—ALEC creates multiple pathways for students to develop the competencies demanded by contemporary agricultural systems, policy, and communication landscapes. ALEC forms the connective tissue for the durable skills needed in graduates across the College of ACES in food, agriculture, and natural resources disciplines. Together, these initiatives create a comprehensive educational ecosystem serving students at multiple life stages. Undergraduate students develop broad competencies; working professionals access targeted certificates; doctoral students become research leaders. This expansion ensures ALEC equips students with the competencies and networks necessary to succeed in increasingly interdisciplinary professions.

[Click here to see this online](#)

**I** ILLINOIS

EWEEK

NOTICES FOR FACULTY AND STAFF AT ILLINOIS

If you will need disability-related accommodations in order to participate, please email the contact person for the event. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

Announcements for the week of February 22, 2026

#### Online Events

Proposal to Establish Dept. of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Comms

The College of ACES is holding a public hearing from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. March 5, regarding a proposal to establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications. [Follow this link to review the proposal.](#) Individuals who wish to submit written comments regarding the proposal should [follow this link to fill out a short survey.](#)

March 5, 9–10 am • [Zoom](#)

[Julia Abel](#) • College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

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**From:** [Office of the Senate](#)  
**To:** [Office of the Senate](#)  
**Cc:** [Abel, Julia Louise](#); [Miller, Nolan H](#); [Lehman, Barbara J](#)  
**Subject:** Public Hearing: Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 24, 2026 5:17:00 PM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)

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Dear 2025-2026 Senators,

The Senate Committee on Educational Policy is collecting information regarding a proposal to establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications. The Department will reside in the College Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES).

[Follow this link to review the proposal.](#)

### **Public Hearing**

Date: March 5, 2026

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Place: [Follow this link to access the Zoom meeting](#)

### **Written Comments**

Individuals who wish to submit written comments regarding the proposal should follow [this link to fill out a short survey](#).

Thank you for your contribution to shared governance.

Nolan Miller

Chair, Senate Committee on Educational Policy

### **OFFICE OF THE SENATE**

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*Under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act any written communication to or from university*

*employees regarding university business is a public record and may be subject to public disclosure.*

# Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

1. Name:

Sarah Williams

2. Title:

no answer provided

3. College/School/Unit

University Library

4. Affiliation

Faculty

5. Please enter your comment below. Response length is not limited, but please try to be focused and brief.

Given how the ALEC program currently functions, the proposal to establish ALEC as a department seems logical to me.

# Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

1. Name:

Ramona Faith Oswald

2. Title:

Professor and Department Head

3. College/School/Unit

ACES/Human Development and Family Studies

4. Affiliation

Faculty

5. Please enter your comment below. Response length is not limited, but please try to be focused and brief.

My department (HDFS) is the tenure home for several ALEC faculty members, and I serve as their designated EO for P&T. I have mentored multiple ALEC faculty members through the process and have also provided behind-the-scenes administrative guidance. The current system creates unnecessary stress and confusion for ALEC faculty as their P&T homes are outside of their discipline and department. ALEC faculty are doing important work, and they deserve to have their own home. I am 100% in favor of this proposal to grant ALEC department status.

# Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

1. Name:

Kerry Hagan

2. Title:

no answer provided

3. College/School/Unit

School of Music

4. Affiliation

Faculty

5. Please enter your comment below. Response length is not limited, but please try to be focused and brief.

I see no objection to the change based on university resources, but I would like to see the impact on the budgets of the departments currently sharing the program.

# Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

1. Name:

Jordan Oliver

2. Title:

ALEC Graduate Student

3. College/School/Unit

College of ACES

4. Affiliation

Student

5. Please enter your comment below. Response length is not limited, but please try to be focused and brief.

I fully support ALEC to be a department. They have helped me so much in my education program.

It is a crucial degree as communication and gaps in education grow in the world. It is filled with incredible staff and has positively impacted my educational career

# Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)

1. Name:

Nick Bonanno

2. Title:

Assistant Director

3. College/School/Unit

Illinois Leadership Center

4. Affiliation

Staff

5. Please enter your comment below. Response length is not limited, but please try to be focused and brief.

This initiative just makes sense. I was a student in the leadership minor about 10 years ago, and the ALEC program felt like a department to me then, despite its program status. Now I work on campus in a department that works closely with ALEC faculty. They have done the hard work to support their proposal, and I am excited to see it move forward.

**Meeting Minutes - Public Forum for Proposal to Establish the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)– March 5, 2026**

**ATTENDEES:** Christopher Wirz (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Danielle Hendricks (Project Manager, ACES), David Rosch (Associate Professor, ALEC), Eric Morgan (Associate Professor, ALEC), Gary Ochs (Instructor, ALEC), Haden Botkin (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Jenn Smist (Teaching Assistant Professor, ALEC), Joy Das (Assistant Director, Illinois Leadership Center), Nichole Isaac (Assistant Dean for Business and Administration), Nolan Miller (Chair, Senate Committee on Education Policy), Pam Axtman-Barker (Teaching Assistant Professor, ALEC), Tiffany Marzolino (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Gail Pring (Office Manager, ALEC), Anna Ball (Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Acting Director, ALEC), Germán Bollero (Dean, ACES), Julia Abel (Director of Strategy, Planning, and Implementation, ACES), Jordi Oliver (Graduate Student, ALEC), Amy Leman (Assistant Professor, ALEC), Janice Shearer (Public Services and Engagement Librarian, Funk ACES Library), Serenity Desmond (Associate Director of Teaching Labs, Chemistry), Theresa Miller (Board Member, ACES Alumni Association Board of Directors), Eun Yi Chung (Associate Professor, Economics)

**Location:** Zoom

**Meeting was called to order at 9:01 AM.**

Dr. Germán Bollero, Dean of the College of ACES, began the meeting by sharing that the purpose of the forum was to present and receive feedback on a proposal to elevate the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) program to departmental status within the college.

Dr. Anna Ball, Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Acting ALEC Director, provided an overview of ALEC and its role within the college. ALEC focuses on leadership, education, and communication within food and agricultural systems and currently offers bachelor's and master's degree programs. The program includes nine faculty members and serves approximately 120 undergraduate and 30 graduate students. ALEC also plays an important role in preparing agricultural educators for the state of Illinois and supporting statewide FFA programming. Dr. Ball also highlighted the development of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communication.

Dr. David Rosch, Associate Professor, ALEC, explained that ALEC currently operates as an academic program within the Office of Academic Programs rather than as a department. As a result, ALEC faculty obtain tenure through other academic units, and the program does not have direct representation in college governance structures. Establishing ALEC as a department would align its governance with its academic responsibilities and provide a consistent structure for promotion, tenure, and budget management.

Dr. Eric Morgan, Associate Professor, ALEC, discussed the rationale for the proposal. He emphasized that the change is primarily structural and would not require new funding or reallocation of resources from other departments. The proposal aims to improve governance efficiency and provide clearer organizational structure for the unit.

Participants were invited to provide comments during the meeting or through a feedback survey that will remain open until 5:00 PM on Monday.

Dr. Nolan Miller, Chair of the Senate Educational Policy Committee, noted that the forum fulfills a requirement under Senate bylaws for proposals establishing new academic units. He commended the proposal preparation process and noted that written feedback could also be submitted to the Senate office.

**Meeting Adjourned at 9:27 AM.**