



***Market Analysis, Phase 2***

***Prepared for:***  
**University of Alaska**

***November 2017***



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***November 2017***

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# Study Purpose and Methodology

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## Phase 1 Overview

The research reported in this document was preceded by an initial phase of more exploratory tasks including the following:

1. Review of past survey data and other research
2. Analysis of student enrollment and achievement data
3. Preliminary market segmentation
4. Preliminary design for further research

In Phase 1, the research team examined data from the following sources:

- UA student enrollment and financial aid data
- Regularly published UA reports and other information provided by UA staff
- Analyses developed by internal UA offices, for example Student Affairs
- Survey and other research commissioned by UA from McDowell Group and other providers
- Other relevant state or national research commissioned by the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE), the U.S. Department of Education, and other entities
- Workforce and other data collected and published by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) and other state agencies

Phase 1 research products included an initial segmentation matrix that tentatively identified priority target markets and a set of key questions about individual market segments, UA's core brand, and potential marketing strategies. The Phase 1 report also described several potential next steps toward development of a comprehensive UA marketing strategy.

## Phase 2 Purpose

The research program for Phase 2 was designed to expand on the findings of Phase 1, in particular to help address three overarching strategic questions:

- **Among the different types of UA students, what are the most promising and actionable segments for increasing enrollment in the future and what are the best ways to attract and keep those candidates as students?** Three populations are of particular interest: current students, Alaskan's who have some postsecondary education but no degree and who are not currently enrolled, and recent Alaska high school graduates who have not yet engaged in postsecondary education.
- **How and to what extent do key UA market segments respond to the costs of attending UA?** This includes other costs in addition to tuition, such as books, fees, and housing, as well as the availability and accessibility of financial aid.

- **What major factors have influenced UA's enrollment over the past 5 years and to what extent can the university address those factors.** Also, what factors reflect national trends and what factors are specific to Alaska?

## Phase 2 Methodology

### Major Research Tasks

The research plan for Phase 2 addresses these questions by gathering and analyzing data from four sources:

1. **A series of 35 executive interviews** with representatives of three groups who influence the postsecondary decisions of Alaska high school students:
  - Representatives at each of the 13 UA campuses who are familiar with student recruitment and retention trends
  - Student counselors at selected Alaska high schools
  - A selection of UA student advisors

McDowell Group conducted the interviews during spring term 2017. Interviewees were selected to be as broadly representative as possible based on recommendations from UA deans and other staff and by the interview subjects themselves, as well as on McDowell Group's professional relationships and experience with secondary and postsecondary entities throughout Alaska. Interviews followed protocols developed in consultation with UA but were flexible so as not to miss unanticipated insights and observations by interviewees.

2. **Two comprehensive online surveys, one of current UA students and one of former students.** Former students were defined as those who have attended UA within the past ten years but did not obtain a degree or certificate during that time and who were not enrolled as of the spring 2017 semester. Additional information about the survey methodology may be found in the "Surveys of Current and Former Students" chapter of the report.

Surveys were conducted in May (current students) and July (former students) of 2017. The sample frame for current students was provided by UA Institutional Research, Planning and Analysis (IR) and consisted of approximately 26,000 individual students who were enrolled system-wide during the spring 2017 term. The sample frame for former students was also provided by IR and consisted of approximately 59,000 students who had attended UA at some time between 2006 and 2016 and were not enrolled during the spring 2017 term. This list was further manipulated to represent as closely as possible typical UA students with some college but no degree. (See "Overview of Sample Demographics" on page 25 for more detail.)

Survey invitations and subsequent reminders were distributed by the UA Office of Student and Enrollment Strategy to the last known email address(es) for all students in the sample frames. There were 3,928 useable responses from current students and 2,512 from former students. Sample representativeness is discussed in the chapter of the report that describes the survey results.

3. **Enhancement of the survey results by incorporating selected data from individual student records for all survey respondents.** To expand the scope of analysis for the survey results, McDowell Group also worked with IR to obtain selected student data for approximately 190,000 current and former UA students. These records allowed the research team to match specific student information, for example, credits attempted and passed, degree status, and financial aid status, with individual survey responses. This step required substantial effort by both UA and the research team, but allows for a more detailed analysis of student characteristics, priorities and needs.
4. **A comparison of UA enrollment history with data and trends for comparable institutions elsewhere in the U.S.** The research team reviewed UA enrollment records, performed a limited literature search for articles and studies on postsecondary enrollment trends, and developed an online database using Tableau data-visualization software. The database facilitates comparisons among the three UA Major Administrative Units (MAUs) in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau with other institutions nationwide using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the U.S. Department of Education.

## Confidentiality

Maintaining student confidentiality was a high priority. McDowell Group works often with education data, healthcare data and financial data, as well as other confidential information. The firm follows established data protocols to protect personal privacy. Data sets for this research were linked only by numerical identifiers, without names or addresses. All data sets that included identifier codes were transferred and maintained in encrypted, password-protected formats. Data is reported only in group totals.

## Research Limitations

Budget and practicality considerations imposed several constraints on this research.

- All the primary student data used in this analysis represents current or former UA students. This excludes an important target segment, Alaskans with some postsecondary education but no degree *who did not attend UA* within the past ten years. It was judged impractical to identify and sample those individuals with the resources available for this research. Students who attended UA in the past but did not obtain a degree and who were not enrolled as of spring 2017 therefore serve as a proxy for the broader segment of Alaskans with partial postsecondary education.
- The initial research design anticipated more analysis of student records in conjunction with the survey results. However, extracting student data from UA archives proved more challenging and time consuming than the research team expected, and this limited the degree to which survey results and student records could be cross-referenced.



## Interpreting the Two Surveys

Results from the Current Students survey are the best indicators of the characteristics and perspectives of current students and UA's most recent applicants. The survey sample is larger than the Former Student sample (3,900 versus 2,500) at least in part because current students tend to be more involved with the university and therefore willing to provide information.

As noted above, the sample of former students is to some extent a proxy for the larger population of Alaskans with some postsecondary training but no degree. It includes students who have not taken a UA class in as much as 9 years. However, the sample also includes many students who have attended UA in multiple recent semesters, but did not attend in the semester immediately prior to the survey. Those students are, therefore, more involved with UA than someone whose postsecondary classes were entirely at another institution. The Former Student sample also includes approximately 1,450 students (58 percent) who have earned a degree or certificate, mostly bachelor's or associate degrees and mostly somewhere other than UA.

The two surveys are structured differently. However, the content of the surveys is similar. As a result, the fullest understanding of UA's market segments may be had by interpreting the results of each survey in light of the other. This may be done readily where both surveys have questions that address, for example, the same list of reasons for attending or not attending UA. Less direct comparisons will require a more nuanced analytical approach.

Finally, both surveys are complex, and many of the tables of results refer to subsets of the full sample. It is important to note the group that constitutes the "base" addressed in each table. Where the base is not specifically identified, the table describes the full sample.

## Understanding Respondent Subgroups

It is important to remember that the data from the two surveys covers a great deal of information, particularly when the analysis combines it with additional data from UA records. Subgroups of students do not have uniform demographics or preference patterns. Each subgroup represents a range of perceptions and experiences, and those ranges often overlap each other. Take, for example, the following subgroup, which may be a promising market for a UA degree, but only if it is well understood.

### **STUDENTS WHO ENROLL AT UA FOR "PERSONAL GROWTH"**

14 percent of respondents to the survey of former students said the main reason they enrolled in their most recent semester at UA was personal growth. Three quarters of those students said they are very or somewhat likely to pursue a degree in the future. However, only 6 percent said they were sure they would pick UA if they returned. 44 percent said they would consider UA, and another 44 percent said they were sure they would go elsewhere.

To understand whether and how to market to this segment, we must also note that 75 percent of personal-growth students already have at least one degree. 60 percent of those have bachelor's degrees, and some have master's degrees and doctorates. So most personal-growth students are already highly educated. The fact that they are also interested in additional programs makes them a potential source of demand, but one that requires a targeted marketing effort.

Please see the survey section “Overview of Sample Demographics,” page 25, for additional information about survey subgroups.

## **Definition of “Marketing”**

For purposes of this report, the term “marketing” means primarily two things:

**Segmentation** – how different groups of customers, in this case students and potential students, are similar and different in their perceptions, attitudes, needs, priorities, and in the channels of communication they use and respond to.

**Brand-building** – how to create additional value in a business or product by addressing the needs of different segments using *both communications and product development*.

The process of segmentation is discussed throughout the report. The process of brand-building is not addressed directly, for the most part. However, it is critical to understand that a successful marketing strategy for UA, or any complex entity, must involve more than messages. It must incorporate a fundamental willingness to adjust operations and products to the needs and priorities of customers, colloquially, to “walk the talk.” This report, and the data that underlies it, are designed to support that kind of dual strategy.

# Summary of Findings

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## Introduction

The combination of a geographically complex university system in Alaska; a long and often unfamiliar application, admission, and registration process; and a diverse student population with widely varying backgrounds, aptitudes, and interests, presents both challenges and opportunities for the University of Alaska (UA) as it seeks to attract more students and serve the ones it has better and better. The task at hand is to identify the fundamental building blocks of a marketing strategy that is actionable and productive within this complex environment. The tools consist of information from three sources:

- Interviews with people whose work is to address the questions and needs of UA students and prospective students, namely high school and college counselors and advisors
- Information about broader trends in postsecondary enrollment
- Data from nearly 6,000 detailed surveys of past and current UA students, supplemented by portions of more than 190,000 student records from UA's internal databases.

Findings from all three sources are, it turns out, closely aligned. The interview process identified many key themes; the enrollment research offered context for those themes; and the surveys provide an extraordinarily rich and detailed picture of student motivations, concerns and aspirations. The data supports much of what is already known or suspected but also suggests new insights and invites more and deeper analysis as UA continues to develop marketing, administrative, and academic priorities.

## Major Types of Students

The tables and discussion in this report focus on how to increase the portion of UA students whose goal is a degree or certificate of some kind, which is approximately 70 percent of students. Roughly 30 percent of the total UA student body at any one time consists of Non-Degree-Seeking (NDS) students. Survey results indicate that a portion of NDS students in fact do intend to obtain a degree but have not declared that intention. Those students are part of the target market. However, most NDS students take one course at a time either because they are personally interested in the material, feel the course will enhance their work skills, or are required to take courses periodically to maintain a credential. That larger group of NDS students is treated as a target market only to the extent they might be converted to degree-seeking students. This analysis does not address specifically how to increase the number of students who enroll only for a single course.

This report, therefore, defines three main types of UA students as follows:

- **Degree-seeking students** have declared their intention to earn a particular credential. 86 percent of the sample of current students and 49 percent of the sample of former students fall into this category.

- **Non-degree-seeking students** primarily take just one or two courses either for work-related purposes or for personal interest. Some may intend to obtain a credential, but they have not declared that goal to UA. 14 percent of the sample of current students and 51 percent of the sample of former students consists of NDS students.
- **“Stop-out” students** are students who have taken a portion of the courses needed for a degree or certificate in the past, either at UA or elsewhere, but have not completed a program. The sample of former UA students is designed to represent this type of student.

The survey samples also include a small number of so-called “dual enrollment” students. These are students who take courses at UA while they are still in high school. The report does not specifically address dual-enrollment students as a market.

## Key Segments for Enrollment Growth

Following are several ways to define what the research indicates are worthwhile target markets. The definitions are not always mutually exclusive. Market segments often overlap. The research provides enough data to “map” these segments in terms of demographic and psychographic variables. Mapping is a way of defining more precisely where segments are unique, where they overlap, and what that implies for marketing strategies. Such mapping is beyond the scope of this report, however.

**High school students** – Strategies to attract high-school students are addressed mainly in the section of the report, “Executive Interview Themes.

**Alaskans Age 18 to 25** – This is the core market for much of postsecondary education. Enrollment is affected by a range of factors that include attributes of UA and attributes of different sub-segments of students such as urban/rural, higher- and lower-performing, ethnicity, and especially economic characteristics. However, the primary determinant of total UA enrollment by members of this age group is demographic, i.e., the extent to which they are represented in the overall population (in particular the populations of Juneau, Fairbanks, and especially Anchorage) at any given time.

**Former UA students age 26 to 45 with no UA degree or credential** – This is a high-priority marketing target. UA already has significant information about this group’s backgrounds and personal interests, and they are much easier to reach with marketing efforts than similar types of Alaskans who have never attended UA. A portion of these former students will have obtained degrees elsewhere. A small portion are included in our survey results, but most must be identified through structured marketing experiments.

**Alaskans age 26 to 35 with no postsecondary education** – This is a large segment, but it is difficult and potentially expensive to market to because it represents a broad range of priorities and interests.

**Alaskans 26 to 45 with no degree and some postsecondary education, but not at UA** – This is a large group (perhaps 50,000 individuals) but one that is difficult to market to because, although their attributes and preferences are similar to many former UA students, they can’t be individually identified with public data. That means marketing efforts will need to rely initially on media with broad-spectrum targets. Carefully tracked

marketing experiments, for example on social media and possibly in print, can help define this segment in more detail over time.

**Alaskans entitled to military benefits, Age 18 to 45** – This segment is relatively small but they have access to federal education dollars. They also have unique needs and priorities and require advising and administrative support tailored to their unique situation. A starting point is to understand in more detail how current students use military funding sources.

**Alaskans with employer education benefits or requirements** – These are Alaskans whose education priorities are either driven by their jobs or whose employers have policies that include financial support for postsecondary education. UA already gets a large portion of this market. However, some are lost to online programs at other institutions and some need more motivation (marketing) to get them to enroll. Since their financial needs are at least partially met, this group's first priorities are course/program availability and flexible scheduling.

**Women** – Since women outnumber men at UA, 60 percent to 40 percent, marketing and retention strategies should address their particular needs. Those include childcare, financial aid support, and distance courses and other means to limit time away from home.

**Out-of-state high school students and potential transfers** – The surveys did not target these groups, but some respondents in both samples are from outside Alaska. In general, out-of-state students seek a bachelor's degree or higher and expect to pay non-resident tuition. This makes them a desirable market segment, and one that could be profiled in more detail using the available data.

**Alaskans over age 45 with or without some postsecondary education** – In the opinion of the research team, individuals over age 45 do not warrant a significant targeted marketing effort. Both in Alaska and nationally they make up a small part of the postsecondary market, in part because they are not in a position to amortize the cost of a degree over a sufficiently long time to make it economically attractive. Further, the most promising candidates in this segment are highly motivated and are likely to explore UA without extensive marketing.

## Alaskans with and without Degrees

Survey results for former students were analyzed to compare those with and without postsecondary degrees or certificates. In many areas of preference, there was little difference between the two groups. Thirty-five percent of those with degrees said the main reason for their most recent UA enrollment was to get or make progress toward a degree. Another important reason was for job-related requirements (22 percent).

For those without degrees, just 3 percent said their most recent enrollment was for a job requirement. 67 percent said the main reason was to get or make progress toward a degree, however, nearly the same number also said they did not know how many credits they needed to graduate. 26 percent of former students with no degree said the highest degree they aspired to is associate; 39 percent said bachelor's. Both groups identified a mix of course delivery methods when asked what they prefer.

The table below shows some of the other areas where there was a significant difference between former students with and without degrees. Note that, reflecting the sample selection process, those with degrees did not obtain them from UA.

**Table 1. Former Students with and without Degrees, Selected Comparisons**

Question or Topic	Former Students with Degrees/ Certificates	Former Students without Degrees/ Certificates
Reasons you don't expect to complete a degree in the future	18%	40%
Reasons you don't expect to complete a degree in the future	11%	31%
Main reasons you stopped attending UA	18%	32%
Main reasons you stopped attending UA	8%	25%
Likelihood of taking a for credit class at UA in the future	19%	25%
Satisfaction with past UA instructors	29%	20%

## Retaining Current Students

An established rule of marketing is that it is more cost-effective to retain existing customers than to find new ones. UA student satisfaction as measured in these and past surveys is reasonably good, but there is room for improvement, particularly in moving students from feeling “somewhat satisfied” to “very satisfied.” Satisfaction levels of current and past students have implications for recruiting as well. When potential new students consider their options, one factor is their perception of the satisfaction and retention levels of current and past students.

The research suggests the following variables, in addition to the intrinsic capabilities of individual students, have the greatest influence on whether students maintain their UA enrollment (in approximate order of importance):

- **Financial demands.** The extent to which they are foreseen, understood and met.
- **Effectiveness and timing of counseling and advising.** Primarily at the university level, but also in high school.
- **Class schedules and course availability.** How well they meet personal needs, primarily employment demands, but also child care, commuting patterns, preferences for in-person versus online instruction, and other considerations.
- **Student support and campus culture.** In particular, the extent to which students feel personally valued in their interactions with faculty and staff.

- **Quality and reputation of the university.** Partly student perception of how UA compares with other options and partly their confidence that quality levels will be maintained in the future.

**All students face a complex web of pressures and challenges that threaten their ability to achieve postsecondary goals.** UA students and former students have ambitious postsecondary aspirations, but there is a significant gap between the number who hope to earn degrees and certificates and the number who succeed. Financial pressures and demands are the single greatest factor when students decide to interrupt or stop their postsecondary education, however many other factors also play a role. When students drop out of a program of study, it is less likely that the cause is a single event or issue than that the student reached a tipping point beyond which the combined stresses he or she feels appear unmanageable.

**Uncertainty about UA's financial stability and its ability to continue to offer particular programs and courses has adversely affected students' perceptions of the university's quality.** It also makes it harder for students and prospective students to plan for and commit to their postsecondary goals.

**UA serves a student body with an extremely wide range of interests, needs and priorities.** Variation in their educational goals, financial means, and personal situations all contribute to student perceptions of the university and their decisions about when, where and how to interact with it. Interviews and survey comments indicate the university takes too much of a one-size-fits all approach to dealing with individual students.

If there is one word that captures the essence of what students need from UA to maximize their chances of success, it is ***flexibility***.

Following are brief discussions and suggestions for actions UA might consider to help retain students as well as attract them. The topics addressed are just a selection from among many that might be culled from the research results.

## **Advising and Counseling**

For all students, but especially those enrolling at UA for the first time, navigating the UA registration and administrative system can be a significant challenge. Most, though not all, advisors do a good job of keeping students informed about their own program or department, but access to information about other programs, and especially other campuses, is often unreliable. **One of the most demotivating experiences for some students is difficulty getting accurate information about academic, financial aid, registration, and other requirements.**

A so-called "high-touch" approach to student advising and other support would address many of the student concerns identified in the research. High school counselors suggest aggressive counseling, covering both academics and the campus experience, are needed. This support needs to start early in students' high school careers, intensify during the application process and while they are freshmen, and continue throughout their postsecondary participation.

However, it is not realistic for UA to commit to high-touch advising if that becomes a synonym for high-cost advising. The research indicates that investment in a more effective system of advising and counseling (including high school counseling) can increase enrollment and improve student outcomes. It is important to

be thoughtful, creative and disciplined in creating that system. And part of that thoughtfulness begins with treating it as a **system**.

The geographic, academic, and technical scope of UA's operations, together with a lineage that combines community colleges, technical and research entities, and the highest academic aspirations all tend to preserve unique enclaves, not the least of which are the 16 individual campuses. According to the research, meeting student needs in the future will require further efforts to make the UA system an efficient, transparent, and well-coordinated whole that can interact with students, if not entirely seamlessly, at least painlessly.

## **Meeting Financial Demands**

The research clearly identifies financial issues as the most important drivers of postsecondary enrollment and completion (and this echoes national trends). Stresses in Alaska's economy are passed along to students through changes in the earning power of their families, but more importantly of the students themselves, the vast majority of whom work while attending UA.

Simply lowering student costs is not a realistic option for a university under severe revenue pressures of its own. What is needed is a flexible approach that takes individual student needs and priorities into account throughout the enrollment processes, including academic advising that provides students with the maximum support possible to help them confront whatever challenges they face.

An important step toward meeting student financial needs would be to provide a determination of financial aid earlier. Prospective students can now submit the FAFSA application in October of their senior year. Getting those results early, combined with more intensive financial aid and course selection counseling from UA, could alleviate stress and correct key misperceptions for many students so they can meet financial demands more effectively.

The research indicates that students who need financial aid are different from those who don't, and not just with respect to finances. For example, they are more than twice as likely to say they stopped attending because they weren't performing well academically (17 percent compared to 7 percent). One important area to explore is the extent to which available financial aid and financial-aid counseling meet the needs of non-traditional students, because they make up the majority of stop-out students interested in re-engaging in postsecondary education. For example, the financial needs of non-traditional students may be highly specific, such as a short-term loan to repair a car or a month's rent to get them through until summer employment begins. Other institutions have experimented with special discretionary loan and grant programs to help students in acute financial difficulties, especially students nearing completion of a degree.<sup>1</sup>

## **Class Scheduling and Availability**

If financial flexibility is students' most pressing need, scheduling flexibility is number two. Not being able to get the classes when and where they need them is one of the biggest frustrations UA students face. Students look to UA to provide scheduling flexibility because they often have, or feel like they have, little control over

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<sup>1</sup> For example: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/when-students-face-financial-hardships-these-colleges-step-up/2016/02/22/fb40fc0e-c9cb-11e5-ae11-57b6aeab993f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f5dce4eca342](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/when-students-face-financial-hardships-these-colleges-step-up/2016/02/22/fb40fc0e-c9cb-11e5-ae11-57b6aeab993f_story.html?utm_term=.f5dce4eca342)



work and family demands, commuting schedules, childcare availability, and other factors. Roughly three-quarters of UA students hold down a job while they attend, and many others have family responsibilities. In fact, when it comes to making the difference between attending full-time or part-time, scheduling can be factor number one.

One aspect of course availability that can't be entirely ignored is that, when people say classes aren't available, part of their calculus is to avoid teachers with bad reputations. Those reputations may be very rare and may or may not be warranted, but survey comments indicate that students need to have confidence in any university's capacity and willingness to manage its quality of instruction in a systemic and demonstrable way.

## **Student Perceptions of Support**

The ways in which advising, financial support, and scheduling flexibility support enrollment and completion are easy to understand. The impacts of how students feel about their university and how they perceive the university feels about them is a grayer, but still important influence.

The most visible signal of how much UA cares is how students feel when they interact with advisors and faculty. Survey comments suggest those feelings are mixed. Rightly or wrongly, some students don't feel their administrators and professors respect or care about them.

A more institutional signal of how UA views certain students is the practice, and particularly the process, of moving students into developmental courses. Developmental courses are viewed negatively by some current and past UA students and with suspicion by high school counselors, however survey results indicate they are worthwhile for many students. This suggests improvement is needed in the way students are assigned to those courses and possibly the quality of the courses themselves, at least until high school graduation requirements are better aligned with college entrance requirements. Tutoring and other academic support may be a better option than developmental courses for some students, however.

There is also some stigma attached to students who, for whatever reason, are attending less than full-time. Policies to encourage students to move from part-time to full-time status can easily create anxiety and a feeling by students that they are being pushed to justify scheduling choices they may feel they have little control over.

Ensuring that every student goes through a defined, thoughtful orientation process, at a scale appropriate to the student's postsecondary goals, would help ensure students feel welcome and supported as well as providing information that will almost certainly make the student's UA experience less stressful and potentially more productive.

Similarly, encouraging, possibly even requiring, students to live on campus or otherwise spend time on campus, under defined circumstances could, provided it is not an unwanted financial burden for the student, make the student feel more integrated and connected with the university.

Improving information and coordination among campuses will also make students feel more welcome and supported. See "One University" in the section on Executive Interview Themes.

Finally, it may seem like a small point, but food sends a message. No food service will please everyone, but survey comments suggest food quality and healthfulness may be worth some consideration.

## Marketing and Enrollment Considerations

**Is UA one university or an association of several?** This fundamental issue underlies many of the more specific ones above. Survey responses indicate that many students view coordination and communication among the three MAUs and between the MAUs and rural campuses as less than optimal. For example, more than three quarters of current students agree or strongly agree their advisor gives them the information they need about their primary UA campus, but less than half say the same for information about other campuses, and transferring credits between MAUs has been a frustrating challenge for some students.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that advisors can address student needs on a university-wide basis, either by having access to more complete information, or by networking with advisors in other departments or administrative units and on other campuses.

**Does UA need a more integrated marketing approach?** In the past, MAUs typically have developed and implemented their own marketing strategies, and to some extent the MAUs compete with each other for students. While the concept that each MAU has unique “selling propositions,” as marketers like to say, competing with institutions outside Alaska in a world where online courses and degree programs are more and more common likely calls for a more coordinated approach.

**Recommendation:** UA efforts to be more proactive both in marketing and in identifying and meeting student needs would be served by a more integrated, system-wide information system. Obtaining data from university records to support this analysis was extremely time-consuming for both UA staff and the study team. Based on that experience, the study team believes the current data system needs enhancement to effectively support marketing and strategic management.

**A wide variety of issues that are under the control of UA may seem relatively minor but can have a significant impact on students’ commitment to their postsecondary goals.** For example, all of the following are non-tuition items that many students see as unnecessarily increasing their costs of attendance:

- Campus activity fees that seem irrelevant to students who don’t make use of the activities or may seldom or never be physically present on that campus.
- Application fees perceived as higher than average, together with mismatch between the application calendar and the financial aid approval calendar that can encourage students to look first at other schools.
- Textbooks represent a significant expense For which many students fail to anticipate and budget.
- Difficulty transferring credits from other schools and from one MAU to another.
- Parking that is seen as expensive and sometimes inadequate.

## Implications of Pricing

### **Financial concerns figure prominently in student decision-making about post-secondary education.**

Affordability was a primary consideration when current students selected UA and current students say financial concerns are the most likely reason they would stop attending. Students are wary of taking out loans, and many students work nearly full-time to control costs while attending UA. Younger students are most sensitive to cost, which suggests financial issues will remain a focal point for incoming students.

### **There are many different dimensions of student financial concerns that affect student course loads, degree timeline, persistence, satisfaction, and academic performance.**

Costs (tuition, fees, textbooks, housing) affect student choices about attending UA at the outset and each semester. They also affect student engagement with campus life (for example, whether students live on campus and if they have time to form connections while balancing school and work) and even study habits (for example, whether a student purchases all textbooks for a semester, or only some and when that affects academic performance).

Student financial literacy—the degree to which students understand the return on investment for achieving a particular degree, can manage and budget their finances during school, and are able to evaluate financial decisions such as attending part-time versus full-time—has significant bearing on student behaviors and decision making regarding course load, degree-seeking status, and persistence. Likewise availability of financial aid, timeliness of award, and clarity of information can expand or contract a student’s perception of their options. Students routinely assess value (whether their experience is worth the costs).

The implications of this multi-faceted financial context are important for UA to understand, and they require a similarly nuanced strategy in response.

### **Student financial concerns cannot be addressed through pricing alone. UA needs a comprehensive strategy that prepares students to successfully manage the financial burden of obtaining a degree.**

An approach that simply aims to maximize tuition revenues will foreclose student opportunities that could be maintained by a more flexible approach to pricing that takes into account the needs and preferences of different market segments. Further, a purely or heavily tuition-based strategy runs the risk that UA will be perceived as a generic product competing mainly on cost rather than on brand value.

Identifying and calibrating the precise components of a UA pricing strategy will require much more analysis. The research suggest the following are areas to explore, however:

- **Ensure timely access to financial aid information.** This includes making financial aid application information clear, awarding aid earlier in the admission process so that students have a complete picture of their financial status when they enter UA, and increasing financial aid offerings for non-traditional, transfer students, and other students who have limited access.
- **Remove or restructure financial pressure points.** Many students are caught off guard by activity, lab, and application fees, textbook costs, and other “add-on” expenses. Could fees be repackaged or designated in ways that are more palatable, and more certain to be covered by common financial aid tools? Are some fees duplicative, as some students believe? Can campus bookstores be integrated to

reduce costs and variations in cost? Can fees be tailored to different types of students such as those living on- and off-campus or attending multiple campuses?

- **Use “high-touch” advising to help students balance academic and financial goals.** Students will go to lengths to avoid loans. How can UA advising work with students to ensure those lengths do not undermine the student’s ability to complete their degree successfully? How can advisors ensure that a student’s financial concerns are regularly addressed and not dismissed or forgotten?
- **Experiment with different ways to address costs in University marketing and track the response.** For example, marketing and recruitment efforts could help teach financial literacy. Materials could lay out precisely what students can expect in school costs and compare them to the ROI of degree completion. Department websites might describe the earning potential of different degrees or include guides or training in financial literacy.

# Executive Interview Themes

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Themes from interviews with high school counselors and UA advisors/campus representatives are summarized below. These themes represent the perceptions of the interview subjects. Information provided by them as factual has not been independently verified. Suggestions and recommendations described in the summaries are those of the subjects and should be considered in that context.

## High School Counselor Interviews

In the summaries below, the bolded first lines highlight prevalent themes from the interviews.

### **HIGH SCHOOL ATTITUDES TOWARD POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

**High school students have not changed significantly in recent years.** High school counselors say they have not seen significant changes in student attitudes towards postsecondary education in recent years. They believe graduating high school students are no more or less certain about specific colleges, majors, career paths or the value of postsecondary education than they were five years ago. Most Alaska high school students do not have a clear idea of what they want to do in college, how long it will take to complete a degree, how they will finance their degree, or the trade-offs between working and going to school. Many Alaska high school students select their post-secondary path somewhat randomly, for example because other high school graduates are interested in the same school or major, because of the weather at a college, or because they are researching colleges geographically, or even alphabetically, and stop at the first one they like. This type of casual decision-making is not an anomaly of the current times. It was also identified in a 2001 study commissioned by UA.

**Attitudes toward UA have shifted slightly over the last five years.** The budget challenges of the University have made UA appear less stable than it was. A few years ago, the University was a source of enthusiasm, but there is a growing perception the University is moving toward a community college status. This leads to lower student (and parent) confidence in the University and fear that more programs will be cut and intended degrees will not exist by the time of graduation. Many counselors acknowledged the difficult choice UA faces between maintaining many programs on slim budgets or fewer well-funded programs. Some counselors indicated there is a negative stigma about going to UA among urban high school students, and many students say they plan to attend UA for their “generals” and then transfer elsewhere. According to counselors, however, many of these students ultimately stay at UA through to graduation. *(NOTE: Student and former-student attitudes toward UA are explored in the survey results elsewhere in this report.)*

**UA is a first choice for some, the only choice for others, and a financial choice for many.** High performing urban students typically look out-of-state first if they feel they can afford it. UA is a popular choice for rural students (high performing or not) because they can stay close to home. Counselors report that more students are showing interest in UA because of the high cost of college out of state. Increasingly, they see UA as a quality degree for a more affordable price. Several counselors also report seeing students attend the first year of college out of state but returning to the UA system after experiencing the high cost and accumulation of debt elsewhere. There is high interest in and enthusiasm about UA Scholar and the Alaska Performance

Scholarship (APS). (NOTE Survey results elsewhere in this report explore the reasons students choose to attend UA.)

## **UA RECRUITING AND ADMISSIONS**

**Stronger on-campus connections would aid recruiting.** Counselors say high school students are swayed by on-campus experiences. Students are more likely to attend a university if they visit and can see what their postsecondary lives will look like. Likewise, having a contact at UA can make the difference as students navigate the college application process.

**Some student groups may be easy to capture with minor changes.** For example, high school counselors say that if UA accepted one transfer credit for an Alaska Native language course, more rural students would enroll.

**The admissions process needs to consider cost and the calendar.** UA's application fee is higher than many other schools, including the Common Application, according to counselors. Waiving or reducing the admission fee could encourage more students to apply. The admissions calendar for UA is also later than many other schools. By the time students need apply to UA, they may already have decided to attend an out of state school. Aligning UA application deadlines with competitor schools is one possible approach. UA could establish an early acceptance or honors track or a tiered admission process for interested students. High school counselors say that UA's financial aid and admissions calendars are not well aligned, and as a result, students must select a college prior to knowing the complete financial aid package available from UA. Finally, high school students make assumptions about college admissions that are not always accurate. UA should keep the process as simple as possible and should ensure that deadlines are consistent across campuses.

## **MEETING STUDENT NEEDS ONCE ENROLLED**

**UA plays many different roles for different types of students yet lacks a culture of accepting students as they are.** Students are drawn to UA for different reasons: for a four-year college degree, to complete general education requirements, for two-year degree, for certificate programs, etc. The University has the infrastructure to attract a range of student types. Counselors say this means the University should refrain from intensively advocating for four-year degrees and should support students finding their own best path. Counselors suggest UA's first priority should be to help students continue their postsecondary process, regardless of what the course of study looks like. Students need help understanding the most cost- and time-effective way to achieve their individual goals. Finally, counselors pointed to economic and demographic changes in Alaska (for example, fewer government jobs and a growing population of English Language Learners and suggested UA's "average" student may be changing. (NOTE: Concerns about the inclusiveness of UA culture were expressed by some students in open-ended survey responses.)

**To keep students on campus, mandatory and effective counseling and a positive campus experience are essential.** Counselors suggest that higher rates of graduation in 4 years at private schools are a result of aggressive counseling that supports students and also because of scholarships that are renewable for a 4-year cycle and not longer. Counselors suggest that the key to graduating from college is aggressive advising. Most high school counselors also say that the on-campus experience is very important, especially, for incoming freshman. The transition from a high school cohort to a dispersed campus is jarring, UA can off-set that by

emphasizing cohesive class experiences during the first year and finding ways to encourage students to live on campus.

**Counselors are concerned about the effectiveness and impacts of UA’s developmental courses.** Some counselors are skeptical that the courses are necessary and even wonder if the university sees them primarily as a revenue source. Others question whether placement tests appropriately identify students and whether the courses in fact lead to better academic performance. Nearly all counselors say developmental courses have negative emotional consequences for students and may influence them to stop out. They say enrollment in the courses can lower student morale, increase the time and cost of completing a program, and signal to incoming students that they “do not belong” at UA.

**The process of college preparation and application confuses high school students and requires support at both the high school and university levels.** While they are in high school, students need more help understanding the differences between Alaska’s high school graduation requirements and college entrance requirements, according to the counselors interviewed. Students think completing high school is sufficient qualification for attending college, when in many cases it is not. Later, when they begin to navigate the college and financial-aid application process, high school students again need support. To some extent, this can come from high school guidance counselors, but UA staff play an important role in making sure misinformation or lack of information do not derail the transition from high school to postsecondary.

## UA Student Advisor and Campus Representative Interviews

### ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT

**Most UA advisors do not think UA has an “enrollment problem.”** Nearly all advisors said UA’s enrollment fluctuates from year to year. Few have noticed significant declines in enrollment in their local areas, and several said their campus’ enrollment has increased. The majority think it’s more productive to work on broader student issues rather than focusing on enrollment.

**Advisors have noticed changes in UA’s enrolled student population.** Compared to five years ago, they describe UA students as more diverse, less involved on campus, taking fewer credits, and juggling more obligations outside of school. One advisor also noted that more students are “in crisis” and require support for mental health concerns and substance abuse issues.

**The average student’s UA course composition has shifted dramatically.** The perception of advisors is that students are much more likely than they were a few years ago to take cross-campus classes (or degrees), and nearly all complete some portion of their coursework online. Mapping out an on-campus schedule for a degree has become more and more challenging. These changes in course delivery have both positive (increased flexibility and course offerings that accommodate non-traditional schedules) and negative consequences (decreased connection with the university and limited interaction with faculty and other students). These changes in the student experience affect student populations differently (see E-Learning section below).

**Most advisors do not see evidence of a spring enrollment swing.** Where this pattern is observed, advisors suggest it has to do with seasonal employment, financial challenges, or lack of college preparedness

(academic and social). Some advisors say it is more common for students to attend for a year and then fail to return. At the same time, the fact that UA students who take 12 or more credits say they work an average of 30 hours a week means that work demands may well dictate which semesters those students can attend.

## **ON-CAMPUS CHALLENGES**

**Navigating the UA system, within MAUs and especially across MAUs, is significant challenge for many enrolled students.** Figuring out the systems of any university—how enrollment differs from registration, how to apply for financial aid, how to sign up for a course on another campus, what to do when a course is cancelled, how to map the courses necessary to complete a degree—is difficult and confusing. These challenges appear to be exacerbated by the geographic separation of, and lack of coordination between, the multiple entities within the UA system. Advisors described numerous pain points for students during their application, admission, and enrollment at UA from applying for scholarships to completing placement exams to registering for classes on multiple campuses, to dealing with developmental courses and more (see “One University,” below). Students expect help from the University, but not all students manage to find it, and many advisors say that they struggle to find information themselves.

Additional challenges mentioned by advisors include financial barriers; balancing the competing demands of family, work, and school; shallow connections to campus; and academic difficulties.

**Students often drop out or stop out for a combination of reasons, some personal, some procedural, some academic.** Most often, according to advisors, students fail to complete their degree because “life gets in the way.” Typically, that means an illness, transfer of a spouse, a baby, a death in the family or some other event moves a student from a situation where he or she was able to cope to one where they feel overwhelmed. Many students experience challenges financing their degrees, finding, for example, that available aid does not adequately cover non-tuition costs; they either ineligible (e.g., transfer or non-traditional students) or have lost eligibility (e.g., credit requirements, GPA requirements, or restrictions on the number of semesters) for financial aid. Poor financial literacy is a problem for many students. Repeated challenges navigating the UA system, limited or no advising support, and difficulty scheduling classes (due to limited available classes or courses cancelled for low enrollment) are other common causes of drop/stop outs. Finally, if a student gets off the academic main track—through developmental courses or academic probation—returning to that track can be very difficult. *(NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report identify and prioritize many of the factors that cause students to stop-out.)*

**Certain red flags signal a student may need additional help or be at risk for dropping out.** Low test scores and/or low high-school GPA, late enrollment, and late applications for admission and/or housing indicate to advisors that an incoming student may struggle on campus. Once on campus, advisors look to class attendance, SAP warnings, mid-term grades, frequency of online course logins, and participation in on-campus clubs as indicators of a student’s success. Other negative signals include an obvious lack of study skills or time management ability, alcohol and drug use, and conduct records. The challenge for advisors is noticing early enough to help students.

**Occasionally, students reach out to advisors to ask for help, but most often identifying students in need of support falls to professors or attuned advisors.** Systems for tracking the above student characteristics and other red flags vary by campus. No process is used university-wide. Advisors say most



students do not reach out directly to them and that struggling students are identified either by a concerned faculty member or advisor. Some campuses rely on an early alert system, SAP warnings, or the Map Works survey.

## **STOP-OUT STUDENTS**

**Advisors often suggested financial incentives as a strategy to re-engage stop-out students.** Possible options include incentivizing completion (“\$1,000 for a completed degree”), subsidizing a portion of the degree (“We’re going to pay x percentage of your degree if you complete these four classes” or “you pay 50\$ a class, we’ll pick up the rest”), or providing one-time forgiveness of outstanding account balances. One advisor suggested that expanding the types of credits offered for prior learning might attract students, particularly non-traditional students. (NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report show student responses to several possible incentives.)

**Retaining stop-out students will likely require flexible course schedules.** Nearly all advisors acknowledged that most stop-out students require flexible schedules, as their daily obligations can make a full-time course load impossible. One advisor recommended that UA “let people do it on their own timeframe and allow people to go part-time. Allow students to do what it takes for students to do what they need to be successful, not what the university says they need to do for a certain metric.” Likewise, diversifying the delivery methods of courses to include alternative course set-ups and timelines (such as in-person intensives) was a frequent recommendation for how UA could accommodate the schedules of stop-out students. (NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report address various aspects of course scheduling.)

**UA needs to be prepared to support stop-out students from recruitment through graduation.** Stop out students will likely require a significant amount of advising to successfully complete their degrees. Advisors say that advising may need to be improved substantially in order to help students know what they need to take in order to graduate and how to most efficiently do so across multiple campuses. Any improvements to streamline services across campuses—placement testing, admissions, registration etc.—will benefit stop-out students, especially if challenges navigating the system led to them dropping out in the first place.

**Advisors cautioned that a large number of stop-out students may be not be ready for the financial or time commitments necessary to finish a degree.** Providing incentives to students to return may initially result in more enrolled students, but some advisors wondered whether stop-out students would persist through to graduation. One advisor said, “Students will come to you when they are ready. There is a fine line between harassing them and wanting it on their timeline.” A percentage of stop-out students likely met their goals before stopping out and may not be interested in returning at all. Some advisors indicated that tactics to recruit stop-out students may be at odds with the desires of UA’s “bread and butter” students. For example, expanding online course offerings may appeal to non-traditional, stop-out students but frustrate traditional students who want to take courses in person.

**Recruitment of stop-out students will need to be strategic.** Students will need to know what courses and requirements they have left to complete and the cost of completion. Completing a degree needs to be framed in terms of what is best for the student. Advisors say that terminology is important. A marketing strategy should consider calling stop-out students “second scholars” or “regional scholars” to invite them back. Stop-out students may be most swayed by alternative schedules that accommodate their lives. Lastly, recruitment

will likely need to combat misinformation (such as the perception that credits won't transfer from UAF to UAA).

## **ATTRACTING NEW STUDENTS**

**Advisors shared numerous strategies to attract new students in their areas.** Many, such as increased offerings, improved advising, and expanded support services, are relevant both to first-time freshmen and stop-outs. Suggestions included create more healthcare-related degrees and credentials, offer professional terminal degrees (MD, DVM, JD), provide location-specific classes (such as ethnobotany), create more workforce endorsements and credentials, increase the number of degrees that can be completed online, improve residential options, establish a first-year mentor program, require comprehensive advising, utilize an alternative calendar that accommodates Alaska's seasons (quarter system, short intensives during the winter break), and provide more support services via distance.

## **ROLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL CLASSES**

**Like high school counselors, advisors are concerned about UA's developmental courses.** There is a general sense that these classes can be discouraging, costly, extend the time needed to complete a degree, and make students more likely to drop out. Many developmental courses are offered only via asynchronous, distance delivery. According to advisors, this is the most challenging delivery method for students, especially first-time freshmen. Advisors suggest that UA consider alternatives that do not "water-down" the requirements such as pre-coaching, workshops that coincide with courses, or allowing students to take open-source, free classes from other institutions. *(NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report also address the role of, and attitudes about, developmental courses.)*

## **STUDENT ADVISING PROCESS**

**UA needs more consistent, student-centered advising, according to advisors, themselves.** Advisors described an administrative labyrinth fraught with inconsistencies, tensions, and missing information for students and advisors alike. One advisor said students feel like "I'm paying UA thousands of dollars for no one to help me." Advisors would like more clarity and consistency across the university and an advising process that places student interests at the center. Because there is no central oversight for advising, it is impossible to know whether students receive the same messages or support through different advising channels. In addition to a more coordinated advising structure, advisors say advising processes should take a "whole student" approach and meet students where they are in their academic journey." For example, advisors feel pressured to advise a four-year degree when this is not always what is best for the student. *NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report address various aspects of the advising process in detail.)*

## **E-LEARNING CLASSES**

**UA's student population has mixed feelings about E-Learning, according to advisors.** Advisors say there are two different student populations with respect to E-learning. One prefers primarily face-to-face classes and the other distance courses. In general, traditional students prefer the interaction of the classroom and dislike online classes, while online classes are important for non-traditional students. Many students who do

not like online classes must take them to complete a degree. *(NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report highlight this mix of attitudes toward online courses.)*

**Not all online classes are created equal.** The quality and structure of online classes varies throughout UA. Advisors emphasize that quality instructional design matters in online classes. For example, students should not be able to complete a full-semester online course during finals week and pass. Well-designed classes have interaction built in, deadlines, and are appropriately rigorous. Class size makes a difference for online courses as well in terms of the amount of interaction students have with professors and other students. One advisor recommended that online courses have size caps. There is also a large difference between synchronous classes that meet at a specified time and asynchronous that can be completed at any time. Synchronous classes tend to be more rigorous and have more interaction than asynchronous courses.

**Advisors say students struggle more when taking mostly online classes.** According to advisors, students tend to be more successful in classes that have structured meeting times versus asynchronous classes, especially during their first semester. "It's a unique individual who can take online classes; it requires commitment and drive."

**Distance and in-person student populations have many of the same needs, but supports must be delivered in different ways.** For example, distance students need specific methods to access advising, tutoring services, writing support, and financial aid support.

**Internet speed is a major challenge for remote communities.** Advisors who work with students of branch campuses say many do not have internet at home and have limited internet access outside of normal business hours. Some campuses must rely on audio instead of streaming courses. Limited internet access results in drop-outs, according to advisors. One advisor said, "Ensuring adequate access to even the most remote parts of the state is crucial to do justice for distance delivery." *(NOTE: Lack of dependable, affordable internet access has been an issue noted in multiple McDowell Group surveys and other studies involving rural postsecondary students.)*

## **FINANCES**

**Like high school counselors, UA advisors say students are increasingly hesitant to take out loans to pay for their education.** Many work or attend part-time to avoid loans altogether. *(NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report address the proportions of UA students who use loans to finance a portion of their education.)*

**Financial aid availability is a problem for some students, but not all.** Several advisors said that funding is not a challenge for their students. This is particularly true in rural Alaska, where multiple kinds of scholarship support are typically plentiful. At the same time, advisors who work with non-traditional and transfer students, say that most funding targets first-time freshmen, rather than the more complex demographics of UA's student population. *(NOTE: Interviews conducted by the research team for other studies support the view that traditional postsecondary students in rural Alaska communities typically have good access to scholarship funding.)*

**The value of UA differs for students completing four-year versus two-year degrees.** Advisors say the cost of a four-year degree at UA is modest but that two-year programs are more expensive relative to competitor institutions.

**Advisors anticipate increased interest in dual credit courses for high school students.** Students value the head start on postsecondary training that dual enrollment offers.

**Fees upset students most.** While students are concerned about UA's overall price tag, advisors hear more complaints about fees. Fees make it difficult for students to estimate the cost of attendance. Fees are billed later than tuition, and the amounts are difficult to predict because they differ by campus. If a student takes classes from multiple campuses, as many do, s/he must often pay fees at every campus. This catches students off guard. Some advisors also mentioned concerns about requiring incoming students to pay for placement tests. *(NOTE: Survey results elsewhere in this report address attitudes toward the various components of student cost in detail.)*

## ONE UNIVERSITY

**Although many students are cross-campus students, UA does not have systems in place to make it easy for students to navigate multiple campuses.** Many aspects of the student experience are made more difficult by lack of coordination among campuses. Advisors described numerous policies that confuse students and complicate their educational paths, for example:

- **Transcripts.** A student cannot order a single, all-inclusive transcript from UA, rather s/he must order one from each MAU.
- **Admission Fees.** Students must pay an admission fee for each campus, not for the university as a whole. It is free for students add another degree from an MAU they currently attend, but if a student adds a degree from a different MAU, the student must pay an admission fee again.
- **Disability Services.** Disability services do not coordinate well across campuses. Allowed accommodations differ by campus, which makes it challenging for students to know what supports are available class to class.
- **Payment Deadlines.** Payment deadlines differ from campus to campus.
- **Testing and Proctoring.** Testing and proctoring policies differ by campus. Often students end up confused; they think they completed required testing only to find out they must complete tests for the other campuses as well. As one advisor put it, "We should have one center, one policy, one place to go."
- **Pre-requisites and Degree Requirements.** In spite of improvements, similar programs at different universities can still have different course requirements. Classes offered at multiple campuses with similar titles may not fulfill the same requirements.
- **Credit Transfer.** While this has improved, advisors say there are still challenges. For example, biology classes from a two-year fisheries technology degree do not transfer identically to UAF and UAS.

- **Degree Works.** Advisors are not able to look up programs from a different MAU.
- **Advising.** There is often an information divide between campuses. For example, it can be difficult for advisors to know who their students are when they are taking cross-regional classes. If a local student is taking an online class from another campus, the student's local campus may not know, even though the student is nearby and could benefit from supports offered on the local campus.
- **Buying Books.** There are four different bookstores, but they have different payment policies. Only one allows students to bill their accounts directly.

**"Students do not understand or care that we are three universities, they care that they can find help when they need it."** As one advisor noted, "We need to recognize that our students are doing academic programs not just from all three, but they are taking courses from all three academic units to complete their degrees. We need to have tools and actual people able to make this happen."

**Competition among campuses is a disincentive for advisors to respond to a student's best interests.** Advisors acknowledged the tension between keeping a student on their campus versus sending him or her to a different one, even when that might make more sense for the student. Similarly, campus recruiters are most familiar with the programs of a single campus even though students should be directed to the best-fit program, even if that means another campus.

# Surveys of Current and Former UA Students

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## Survey Purpose

The purpose of the survey of current students is to better understand the needs, preferences and priorities of currently enrolled students.

The primary purpose of the survey of former students is to better understand the segment of Alaskans who have some postsecondary education but no degree or credential, both those who have attended UA and those who haven't.

## Overview of Sample Demographics

The sample of current students represents as closely as possible the mix of current UA students. It includes students who were registered at UA during either the fall 2016 or spring 2017 terms. The sample of former students was more targeted. It was designed to represent as closely as possible a population of major interest for this research, namely Alaskans who have some postsecondary education but no degree. The sample frame for former students therefore does not contain UA students who received a degree or credential from UA at any point recorded in UA's information system, which covers years 1989 to 2017. Also eliminated from the sample were students who are current UA staff, and are therefore able to take courses under the employee tuition benefit, and former UA faculty or graduate assistants.

The table below compares the survey samples (student responses) for each survey to the sample frames (the lists of students invited to participate) from which the samples were drawn. Although the response rates, as expected, were relatively low (15 percent for current students and 4 percent for former students), both samples are closely representative for most parameters of interest and statistical weighting of the results was determined to be unnecessary and undesirable. Differences between the samples and sample frames include:

- For both surveys, a higher percentage of females responded than the corresponding percentage in the sample frame. This is often the case with email surveys because women are generally more willing to respond to them than men. When there are significant differences in male and female responses, it is pointed out in the text. For the most part, however, responses did not vary significantly by gender.
- Non-degree-seeking (NDS) students are somewhat under-represented among current students, but the sample size is adequate, and the focus of the survey is primarily on degree-seeking students.
- There are no students under age 18 in the sample of former students because PFD records were used to update email addresses for former students, and those records are not available for individuals under 18 years of age.

When considering survey responses by age, note that the ages for current students are within 6 months of their ages when they last attended UA. However, the ages for former students are as of spring 2017 and may be as much as 10 years older than their ages when they last attended UA.

**Table 2. Selected Student Sample Characteristics**

Category	Current Students Responses n = 3,928	All Current Students N = 25,767	Former Students Responses n = 2,512	Former Students Data Set N = 58,038
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	30%	41%	34%	44%
Female	70	59	66	56
<b>Age</b>				
Under 18	1	2	0*	0*
18 - 25	44	42	19	17
26 - 35	29	30	33	36
36 - 45	13	13	16	17
Over 45	13	14	33	30
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	60	59	61	58
Alaska Native	16	16	18	15
Other	24	25	21	27
<b>MAU</b>				
UAF	34	30	25	31
UAA	55	61	61	58
UAS	11	10	14	12
<b>Declared Degree Program</b>				
Associate	17	18	18	16
Bachelor	54	47	26	26
Certificate/License/Endorsement	4	3	3	3
Masters/Doctorate	11	9	1	5
NDS	14	23	51	49

\* The sample of Former Students was intentionally limited to students over age 18 as of May 2017 when the sample was drawn. This is because PFD records were used to update student emails, and those records are only available for individuals over 18.

## Survey Analysis

Following is a detailed breakdown of responses to both surveys. Subgroup differences are noted where they are both statistically significant and suggest strategic marketing implications. Tables include question numbers to make them easier to find and discuss.

### UA Current Students

When interpreting differences among students from the three MAUs, note that some differences may be primarily the result of age, rather than any particular characteristic of the MAU. The average age of UAA respondents is 22, UAF 23, and UAS 26 years old.

**NUMBER OF CREDITS**

Overall, 45 percent of current students took 12 credits or more in their most recent semester at UA, while 39 percent took 4 to 11, and 16 percent took less than 4.

**Table 3. CQ1. How many credits did you take in your most recent semester at UA?**

Estimated Number of Credits in Most Recent Semester	% Students
Less than 4	16%
4 to 11	39
12 or more	45
Median	10 credits

Base=3,928

Over half (56 percent) of males took 12 credits or more in their previous semester, compared to 41 percent of females. Students ages 18 to 35 took the most credits, median = 13/mean = 12). 39 percent of students over 45 years old took fewer than 4 credits. Sixty-three percent of juniors took 12 or more credits, the most for any class level.

**CERTIFICATE OR DEGREE PURSUED**

Over half (56 percent) of current students are pursuing a bachelor’s degree, while 16 percent are pursuing an associate’s and 12 percent a master’s. Three percent are pursuing a doctorate or professional degree and 2 percent a one-year certificate. Seven percent report not pursuing a certificate or degree at this time.

**Table 4. CQ2. What is the highest educational degree you are currently pursuing at UA?**

Type of Credential	% Students
One-year certificate	2%
Journeyman/Master Trade	<1
2-year degree (Associate)	16
4-year degree (Bachelor’s)	56
Master’s	12
Doctorate or Professional	3
Not pursuing a certificate or degree at this time	7
Don’t know	3

Base =3,928

Three quarters of students 25 years old or younger are working to earn a bachelor’s degree. The percentage falls off as students age, with 50 percent of students 26 to 35, 41 percent of students 36 to 45 and 31 percent of students over age 45 pursuing a bachelor’s. Students 36 to 45 years of age have the highest percentage seeking an associate degree, 22 percent. 10 percent of students age 36 to 45 and 23 percent of those over 45 are not pursuing any kind of degree or certificate at this time.

Slightly less than half (47 percent) of UAS students are pursuing bachelor’s degrees, compared to 54 percent at UAF and 60 percent at UAA. Eighty percent of student who took 12 or more credits in the previous semester are pursuing bachelor’s degrees.



Eight percent of respondents who are pursuing a degree have not officially declared doing so. Female students are more likely to be undeclared, 9 percent compared to 6 percent of males. 15 percent of students over age 45 who are working toward a degree have not declared that intention to the university.

**DECISION TO ATTEND UA**

Among a list of factors impacting current students’ decisions to attend UA, approximately three-quarters cite affordability/cost (77 percent) and programs/degrees offered (74 percent) as very important. Other factors reported as very important by over half of current students are quality of academics/faculty (64 percent) and convenient location (57 percent).

**Table 5. CQ4. How important were each of the following in your decision to attend UA?**

Decision Factors	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Don’t Know
Affordability/ Cost	77%	16%	6%	2%
Programs/ Degrees Offered	74	18	6	2
Quality of Academics / Faculty	64	26	7	3
Convenient Location	57	26	15	2
Near Family/ Friends	45	24	29	2
Good Reputation	45	39	13	4
Courses Required for Work	44	19	29	8
Beauty of Campus	19	38	40	3
Alaska Performance Scholarship	35	12	39	14
UA Scholars	28	17	40	15
Financial Aid Packages	48	21	26	6

Base =3,956

Students 25 years of age and younger are the most sensitive to cost, with 83 percent reporting cost is very important, compared to 70 percent of students over age 45. Graduate students are slightly less sensitive to cost than undergraduates. The APS and UA Scholars scholarships, as well as other types of financial aid packages, were all more important to students under 25 and somewhat more important to female students than male.

Students over age 25 were more likely to report online courses as very important, roughly 60 percent compared to approximately 40 percent of students 25 years old and under. Alaska Native students also expressed more interest in online courses, likely because many live in rural areas.

Convenient location was more important to students over age 35 than to younger respondents. This is likely driven by the fact that a higher percentage of older students work at a job and must schedule around that commitment.

Students over age 26 rated quality of academics/faculty and good reputation as more important, on average, than younger students. Alaska Natives were especially sensitive to both quality and reputation, with 72 percent saying quality is very important and 53 percent saying reputation is very important compared to 60 percent and 41 percent respectively of white students. Seven percent of all students re academic and faculty quality was not important.

The types of programs and degrees offered were rated very important by three quarters of all students. Eighty-two percent of 26-35 year olds rated them very important, as did 80 percent of 36 to 45 year olds.

Approximately half of students 26 years of age or older report courses required for work was a very important reason for attending UA, compared to roughly 40 percent for those 25 years old or under.

Being near family and friends was important to approximately three-quarters of students under 26, compared to a rating of not important by 38 percent of students over 45 years old.

## INFORMATION SOURCES

School websites (67 percent), parents or family members (52 percent), and friends or significant others (52 percent) were somewhat or very important to over half of current students when making their decision on which school to attend. Coaches and teachers were somewhat or very important to 45 percent.

**Table 6. CQ5. When you were making your decision about which school to attend, how important were each of the following information sources?**

Information Sources	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Did Not Use	Don't Know
School websites	39	28	22	10	1
Parents or family members	29	26	25	18	2
Friends or significant others	26	29	26	16	2
Coaches or teachers	24	21	28	25	2
Email or texts from schools	16	21	36	26	2
School guides/rankings	15	26	30	26	3
Brochures, catalogs, or mailings	13	26	36	24	2
College or technical fairs	11	18	36	32	3
High school counselors	11	14	39	34	2
Alumni	10	17	39	30	4
School recruiters	7	13	41	36	2
Social media	7	16	44	31	2

Base =3818

School websites were an important source of information for all subgroups. Social media were not an important source for most students, though they were used by a larger percentage of students under 26 years of age. (NOTE: The research team did not evaluate the quality of UA's social media or any of its marketing tools. All marketing must be done well to be effective, and social media in particular is a challenging and rapidly evolving environment for marketers.)

College/technical fairs and school recruiters were not important sources for most students, though they were used most by students under 26 years of age and by Alaska Native students. Among students under 18 years old, half identified high school counselors as an important source. Only approximately 5 percent of students over 25 years of age said high school counselors are a very important source of information.

Predictably, parents and family were a very important or somewhat important source of information for nearly three-quarters of students under 26 years old. Even among older students, approximately one-third reported

parents and family as either important or very important. Younger students also placed more stock in friends and significant others than older students.

The influence of UA alumni did not vary significantly among subgroups. Somewhat surprisingly, neither did that of coaches and teachers. Brochures/catalogs and mailings from schools and school guides/rankings were rated somewhat or very important by approximately 45 percent of students under age 26 and by 36 percent of those over 45. School guides and rankings are most valued by minority and foreign students, with 50 percent and 64 percent, respectively, saying they were important sources of information.

Roughly the same proportion of students in all subgroups rated emails and text messages as an important information source, with a quarter of every group saying they did not use them to make their decision.

For comparison to the above ratings, following is a partial list of the recruitment strategies colleges nationally believe are most effective *for first-time freshmen*, according to data from the National Association for College Admission Counseling and reported by The Chronicle of Higher Education:

**Table 7. National Ratings of College Recruiting Strategies**

Recruiting Strategy	% Colleges Attributing "Considerable Importance" to the Strategy
Website	84%
Email	83
Hosted campus visit	77
High school counselor	61
High school visit (by college representative)	59
Direct mail	55
College fairs	53
Social media	40

**SATISFACTION WITH UA EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Nearly three-quarters of respondents said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their UA educational experience.

**Table 8. CQ6. Overall, how satisfied are you with your UA educational experience?**

Satisfaction Level	% Students
Very Satisfied	25%
Satisfied	47
Neutral	19
Dissatisfied	9

Base =3,801

Students over age 45 were the most satisfied, with 42 percent saying satisfied and 40 percent saying very satisfied. However, the satisfaction level of students over 45 should be interpreted in light of the fact that 42 percent of them took just 3 or fewer credits in their most recent semester (see next paragraph). Students under age 26 were slightly more likely to be neutral (22 percent) or dissatisfied (10 percent) than older

students. Somewhat more Alaska Native students said they were very satisfied (30 percent) than white students (23 percent) and other ethnicities (24 percent).

Overall satisfaction varies inversely with the number of credits students are taking. One third (32 percent) of those who took less than 5 credits in the previous semester were very satisfied with their educational experience, while 27 percent of those who took 5 to 11 credits and 20 percent of those who took 12 or more credits were very satisfied. This result may reflect, in part, the ability of students taking just one or two courses to pick their favorite professors and schedules, while those taking a full load have less flexibility.

For a more overarching look at satisfaction, the table below shows all respondents divided into two groups: those who said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their education experience at UA and those who said they are dissatisfied. Roughly 2,000 students meet the definition of “satisfied” for this comparison; 340 are defined as “dissatisfied.”

There are subtle but persistent differences between these groups in answers to some other survey questions. This result suggests some dissatisfied students may be less engaged with the university and/or their educations and that they have been since they first applied to UA. For example, dissatisfied students are less likely to report that any of the factors or information sources were very important in their decision to attend UA. The table shows other comparisons.

**Table 9. Satisfied and Dissatisfied Current Students, Selected Comparisons**

Question or Topic	Satisfied Students	Dissatisfied Students
When you first enrolled at UA, did you plan to attend full-time or part-time?	65%	82%
Why are you not attending full-time now? (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup> most important combined)	20%	38%
Are you confident you can find the support you need in each of 9 areas?	65%	38%
I am comfortable contacting my advisor when I need to.	63%	38%
How confident are you that you will have the financial resources to complete the educational goals you have for UA?	41%	25%
How likely are you to transfer to a different school (not part of UA)?	10%	29%
Why do you think you might stop attending UA (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup> most important combined)	3%	34%

**PREPARATION FOR UA**

Seventy-two percent of current students felt well prepared in reading comprehension when they first started classes at UA, the largest percentage reporting they felt well prepared in any area included in this question. Sixty-one percent felt well prepared in computer skills, followed by 54 percent in writing papers, 46 percent in study skills, and 45 percent in managing daily responsibilities. Less than 40 percent felt well prepared in math (39 percent), science (38 percent), and managing financial aid (32 percent).

**Table 10. CQ7. When you first started classes at UA, how well prepared did you feel in each of the following areas?**

Preparedness Level	Well Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Unprepared	DK/NA
Reading comprehension	72%	2%	4%	3%
Computer skills	61	31	5	3
Writing papers	54	35	8	3
Study skills	46	40	12	2
Managing daily responsibilities	45	34	8	13
Math	39	36	17	8
Science	38	38	11	13
Managing financial aid	32	36	19	13

Base =3,757

The fact that fewer than half of all students say they felt well prepared in 5 of 8 categories when they began at UA underscores the need for robust student support services such as advising, tutoring, and financial aid counseling. Alaska Native students are more than twice as likely as white students to say they felt very unprepared for writing (15 percent compared to 6 percent). Similarly, 59 percent of white students said they felt well prepared compared to 43 percent of Alaska Native students.

Alaska Native students also felt less well prepared than white students in math, but the differences were less pronounced, with 60 percent of Alaska Native students saying they felt very or somewhat unprepared compared to 50 percent of white students. Younger students on average felt better prepared in math than older students.

The same ethnicity patterns seen in math emerged for science, study skills, and especially for reading. In reading, 79 percent of white students said they felt well prepared compared to 57 percent of Alaska Native students and 66 percent for students of other ethnicities. With respect to study skills, more than 50 percent of students over 35 years old said they were well prepared, compared to 41 percent of those under 26.

In the areas of managing daily activities such as childcare, transportation and housing and managing students' financial aid, older respondents and white respondents again felt better prepared, but the differences for managing financial aid were relatively small.

**DEVELOPMENTAL CLASSES**

Current students were asked if they were placed in development classes:

**Q10. When you first enrolled at UA, did your test results place you in one or more developmental (no-credit) classes in order to be better prepared for your required classes?**

Based on test scores, roughly half of all first-time freshmen at UA are placed in one or more developmental courses. Twenty-nine percent of the sample tested into at least one developmental class. 83 percent of those took a developmental math class, 40 percent took a developmental English or writing class, and 8 percent took another type of developmental class. A higher percentage of Alaska Natives and other non-white ethnicities took developmental classes, 41 percent and 33 percent respectively, compared to 27 percent of white students.

Over half of students who took a development English/writing or math class found it very useful (57 percent for English/writing and 53 percent for math). Thirteen percent found the English/writing course not useful, while 14 percent report the math course was not useful.

**Table 11. CQ10b. Did you feel the developmental class you took was very useful, somewhat useful, or not useful to you as a student?**

Preparedness Level	English/ Writing (n=427)	Math (n=885)
Very useful	57%	53%
Somewhat useful	27	28
Not useful	13	14
Don't know	3	4

Base =1,065

**FULL OR PART-TIME ENROLLMENT**

**Q11. When you first enrolled at UA, did you plan to attend full-time or part-time?**

As discussed earlier in this report, in question 1 of the survey, 45 percent of respondents said they attended full-time (12 or more credits) in their most recent semester, 39 percent said they took between 4 and 11 credits, and 16 percent took 4 or fewer credits. In this question, 68 percent of respondents report they intended to attend full-time when they first enrolled, while 22 percent planned to attend part-time, 8 percent only planned to take one or two courses, and 2 percent said they had "other" plans.

Fewer older students intended to attend full-time, especially those over 45 (37 percent of them planned to attend part-time and 23 percent only planned to take one or two courses.) The percent of students at UAS who planned to attend full-time is lower (55 percent) than at UAA or UAF (70 and 71 percent).

Combining the results of questions 1 and 11 indicates that many students who planned to attend full-time when they first enrolled did not end up doing so. One-third of students who took less than 5 credits and one-half of students who took between 5 and 11 credits in their most recent semester had planned to attend full-time when they first enrolled.

When students who are not attending full-time were asked why not, 40 percent responded they were too busy with their job, 19 percent had taken all the classes they wanted/needed, 18 percent report classes did

not fit their schedule, 15 percent did not attend full-time because UA is too expensive, and 10 percent said their desired classes were not offered. Less than 10 percent of students cited a variety of other reasons as shown in the following table.

**Table 12. CQ11a. Why are you not attending full-time now?**  
 (Base = Respondents who said they took fewer than 12 credits in their most recent semester – Q1. Multiple answers allowed)

Reasons for Not Attending Full-time	All Mentions (n=1,955)	Most Important Reason (n=915)
Too busy with my job	40%	23%
Took all the classes I wanted/needed	19	5
Class schedule won't fit my schedule	18	9
UA too expensive	15	11
Desired classes not offered	10	5
Problems with my financial aid	9	3
Burned out/lost interest/need a break	8	3
Family issues	8	4
Not performing well academically	5	2
Unable to find childcare	5	3
Medical/mental health reasons	5	3
Not satisfied with quality of classes/instructors	4	2
Don't like online class format	4	1
Lack of clear information about what I need to do to graduate	3	1
I wanted to use my money for other things	3	0
Moved out of Alaska	2	1
Transferred to another school	2	1
Other	35	23

Base = 1,955

In general, students under age 26 experience the following diversions from full-time enrollment somewhat more often than older students, but the differences are not large:

- Class schedule won't fit my schedule
- Problems with financial aid
- Burned out or lost interest
- Lack of childcare
- Not performing well academically
- Lack of information about what I need to do to graduate
- Transferred to another school

Alaska Native students are somewhat more often diverted by family issues, problems with financial aid lack of childcare, and not performing well academically than white students, though the job factor is similar for both (25 percent of Alaska Native students said it was the most important factor). Fewer respondents of "Other" ethnicities (15 percent) said "too busy with my job" was the most important reason for not attending full-time.

When responses by students who would like to be attending full-time but are not are combined for most important, second most important and third most important, “too busy with my job” is a factor for half of them, and for 60 percent of the students in that group who are between ages 36 and 45.

**Table 13. CQ13. Which of the following is closest to your main goal for attending UA at this time?**

Main Goal at this Time	% Students
To keep attending classes until I earn a degree or certificate at UA	73%
For personal growth or interests	5
To make progress toward a degree or certificate at UA, but I may take time off before I finish	5
To prepare myself to enter a degree or certificate program at another school (not UA)	4
To get training or skills applicable to my current or future work (but not required)	4
To explore a possible new career	3
To fulfill a credential/course requirement for my current job	3
Other	3

Base = 3,680

The over-45 age group was the only subgroup with a significantly lower than average percentage of respondents seeking to earn or make progress toward a degree or certificate (55 percent).

**Table 14. CQ14. Which ONE of the following course-delivery methods is your favorite?**

Preferred Types of Classes	% Students
In-person classes	42%
A mix of different delivery methods that works best for my schedule	17
Classes I can access on my own any time during the day by logging onto a website	15
It depends on the type of class	12
It depends on how good the instructor is	6
Online classes at a scheduled time, where I can interact with the instructor and other students	6
Other	1

Base = 3,670

Students age 36 to 45 and UAS students had somewhat lower-than-average preferences for in-person classes (32 percent and 40 percent respectively). A greater portion of males than females said in-person was their favorite delivery method (54 percent and 36 percent respectively)

## STUDENT SUPPORT

A number of support measures are important to two-thirds or more students. 83 percent report help in planning what courses to take is important, 80 percent cite help getting registered for the right courses, 74 percent cite help with academics, 74 percent help with financial aid, and 68 percent help with finding affordable text books. Among these support needs, approximately the same or a larger percent of students are confident they can find that support, aside from affordable text books where only 52 percent are confident in finding support.



**Table 15. CQ16. For each kind of support below, please tell us whether it is important to you and whether you are confident you can find the support when you need it.**

Areas for Extra Help or Support	Support Is Important	Confident I can Find Support
Help planning what courses to take	83%	86%
Help getting registered for the right courses	80	86
Help with academics	74	78
Help with financial aid	74	73
Help finding affordable text books	68	52
Help with life skills (time management, money management, being organized)	44	45
Help with housing	33	49
Help with living in an unfamiliar place	26	43
Help with childcare	19	28

Base = 3,188

The percentage of students under age 26 who said help was important was 5 to 10 points higher than average in all areas except “help with childcare.” Confidence in finding support did not vary substantially by subgroup.

## ADVISORS

Among current students who report having an advisor, 88 percent agree or strongly agree they are comfortable contacting their advisor when they need to, 88 percent agree or strongly agree their advisor gives them information they need about their degree program, and 85 percent agree or strongly agree their advisor responds promptly when asked for information. The strongest level of disagreement expressed in the table are 17 percent who disagree or strongly disagree that their advisor gives them needed information about other UA campuses and 16 percent that their advisor gives them needed information about courses outside their program.

**Table 16. CQ18. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your UA advisor?**

(Base = Respondents who said they have an advisor – 78 percent of respondents)

Level of Agreement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK/NA
I am comfortable contacting my advisor when I need to.	57%	31	6	3	2
My advisor responds promptly when I ask for information.	50	35	7	4	4
My advisor gives me the information I need about my degree program.	54	34	5	3	4
My advisor gives me the information I need about my primary UA campus.	43	35	3	3	14
My advisor gives me the information I need about courses outside my program.	34	28	11	5	22
My advisor gives me the information I need about other UA campuses.	27	22	11	6	35

Base = 2,776

Attitudes about advisors were slightly less positive for UAA than for the other two MAUs on most of the parameters in the table above.

## AFFORDABILITY

When asked how affordable students consider elements of UA, 64 percent find tuition somewhat or very affordable, while 36 percent find it somewhat or very unaffordable. Of all the other aspects of UA, the two with the highest percentage of students reporting very unaffordable are text books (31 percent) and housing (30 percent).

**Table 17. CQ19. How affordable do you consider the University of Alaska to be in each of the following areas?**

Types of Student Expense	Very Affordable	Somewhat Affordable	Somewhat Unaffordable	Very Unaffordable	DK/N A
Tuition	17	47	24	12	14%
Course and lab fees	11	51	26	12	19
Text books	4	31	34	31	16
Housing	6	30	34	30	55
Student activity fees	14	46	25	16	28

Base = 3,956

The following subgroup differences were noted:

*(NOTE: Age is an important driver of cost perceptions. The average age of UAA respondents is 22, UAF 23, and UAS 26 years old.)*

**Tuition**– Two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents under age 26 consider tuition somewhat or very affordable. UAF and UAS respondents consider tuition more affordable than UAA students (68 and 70 percent affordable or very affordable compared to 60 percent at UAA). The same pattern holds true for course and lab fees.

**Course/lab fees** – Females are slightly more sensitive to course/lab fees than males. No significant differences were noted for other subgroups.

**Textbooks** – Students age 18 to 25 are the most sensitive to text book costs, with 34 percent saying they are very unaffordable and another 33 percent saying they are somewhat unaffordable. Seventy percent of UAA students said textbooks were somewhat or very unaffordable, compared to 53 percent of UAS students and 60 percent of UAF students.

**Housing** – Sensitivity to cost of housing is high for all age groups, though slightly lower for those 36 to 45 years of age.

**Student activity fees** – 44 percent of UAA students, 37 percent of UAF students, and 31 percent of UAS students said student activity fees are either somewhat or very unaffordable, as did 52 percent of students over age 45. Survey comments indicate that older students don't utilize student activities often and as a result, they are more sensitive to activity fees than younger students.

Students taking 12 or more credits tend to think UA is somewhat more affordable in most categories than do students taking fewer credits. The distinction is not true of textbooks or housing, however, with only 3 percent of full-time students saying books are very affordable and 6 percent saying housing is very affordable.

**FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

**Table 18. CQ20. Which of the following kinds of financial resources did you use to cover the cost of attending UA during your most recent semester.**  
(Multiple answers allowed.)

Sources of School Funds	% All Students	% Full-time* Students
Personal savings	58%	59%
Job earnings	46	45
Loans	30	34
Scholarships other than UA Scholars or Alaska Performance Scholarship	27	36
Money from parents/other family members	26	37
Alaska Performance Scholarship	22	37
UA Scholars	13	22
Military benefits	6	10
UA College Savings Plan	6	9
UA tuition waiver	3	1
Employer benefit	2	0
Other	22	19

Base = 3,515  
\* Full-time = 12 or more credits

Predictably, students taking fewer than 5 credits typically do not use loans and most are not eligible for scholarships. Job earnings and personal savings are their primary sources.

Student confidence that they will have enough financial resources to complete their educational goals at UA varies: 76 percent are somewhat or very confident, while 20 percent are not confident.

**Table 19. CQ21. How confident are you that you will have enough financial resources to complete the educational goals you have for UA?**

Level of Confidence	% Students
Very confident	37%
Somewhat confident	39
Not confident	20
Don't know	3

Base = 3,078

Male students are more confident than female, with 45 percent and 33 percent respectively saying they are very confident they have enough resources. UAF students are somewhat more confident than those from the other MAUs, with 41 percent very confident versus 35 percent for UAS and UAF.

**DEGREE BEING SOUGHT**

**Associate Degree**

Among students who are pursuing an associate degree, 41 percent report they will decide if they need more education after completing the AA and 30 percent report an AA is the degree they need for the degree they will pursue. Eight percent state they cannot afford to continue past an AA.

**Table 20. CQ22. You said earlier that you are currently pursuing an Associate Degree. What are the top two reasons you decided an Associate Degree is the highest level of education you need at this time?**

(Base = Respondents who said they are pursuing an Associate Degree)

Top Two Reasons for an Associate Degree	% Students
After I complete my AA I will decide if I need more education.	41%
That is the degree I need for the career I will pursue.	30
I can't afford to keep going to school past the Associate Degree.	8
I don't want to spend more time in academic classes.	3
I don't think I have the academic preparation to complete a higher degree program.	2
Other	17

Base = 554

Those who said "Other" described a wide variety of personal situations.

Students were asked about their highest educational goal.

**Table 21. CQ23. What is the highest educational degree you hope to earn at any time in the future from any institution?**

Type of Credential	% Students
One-year certificate	1%
Journeyman/master trade	0
2-year degree (associate)	4
4-year degree (bachelor's)	37
Master's	33
Doctorate or professional degree (medicine, law, architecture)	18
Don't know	2

Base = 3,062

**Q24. How important is it to you to complete the degree or certificate you just identified?**

Nearly two-thirds of students between the ages of 18 and 45 said achieving their highest educational aspiration is very important. The proportion falls to slightly over half for students older than 45 years of age.

45 percent of students taking less than 5 credits said completing their program was very important, while 64 percent of students taking 5 or more credits said completing their program was very important.

**TRANSFERRING**

Nineteen percent of students are somewhat or very likely to transfer to a different UA Campus to complete their program. One-quarter are somewhat or very likely to transfer to a different school.

**Table 22. CQ25. How likely are you to transfer to complete your certificate or degree program?**

Likelihood of Transferring	To a Different UA Campus	To a Different School (not UA)
Very likely	7%	12%
Somewhat likely	12	13
Unlikely	71	65
Don't Know	10	10

Base = 3,050

The percentage of students who say they are likely to transfer either to a different campus or a different institution does not vary substantially by subgroup except that 40 percent of those under 18 say they are very likely to transfer out of the UA system compared to 12 percent for all students.

The top reasons students who plan to transfer overall are that they want to leave Alaska (34 percent) or they cannot get the education they desire at UA: their desired program is not offered at UA (37 percent) or their desired courses are not offered at UA (32 percent).

**Table 23. CQ25a. Why do you plan to transfer from UA?**  
(Base = Respondents who are very likely or somewhat likely to transfer)

Reason for Transferring	% Students
Desired program not offered at UA	37%
Want to leave Alaska	34
Desired courses not offered at UA	32
Want school with better academic reputation	23
Financial reasons	22
Faculty is better elsewhere	18
Social reasons/campus life	16
Better class schedules available elsewhere	13
Want to be closer to home	6
Medical/mental health reasons	4
Other	17
Don't know	4

Base = 891

Getting a degree not offered at UA is a reason to transfer for somewhat more than one-third of most subgroups. At UAS, more than half the students who expect to transfer say that accessing a program or courses not offered at UAS is one of the reasons.

Half (50 percent) of students who plan to transfer outside of UA do not know where they will transfer to. Most who do identify a school identify schools in the West, including University of Washington (8 percent) and Washington State University (6 percent). Other than an affinity for schools in nearby states, there is little unanimity about where students think they might transfer.

**Table 24. CQ25b. Where do you plan to transfer to?**  
(Base = students who plan to transfer outside the UA system)

College or University	% Students
University of Washington	8%
Washington State University	6
Colorado State University	5
University of Hawaii	5
University of Oregon	4
Oregon State University	4
University of Portland	3
Arizona State University	3
Western Washington University	3
Eastern Washington University	2
Fort Lewis College	2
Montana State University	2
University of Idaho	2
Western Oregon University	1
Northern Arizona University	1
Brigham Young University	1
Gonzaga University	1
Other	29
Don't Know	50

Base = 890

For students who aspire to complete an associate or bachelor's degree and plan to transfer outside UA, the strongest incentive to complete a UA education provided in the survey question is a three-credit tuition waiver for every three courses completed toward a degree in a single term (39 percent). 28 percent of students report none of the incentives suggested would affect their decision.

**Table 25. CQ25c. Which of the following incentives would most influence you to complete an education program at UA?**

(Base = Respondents who said they plan to transfer out of the UA system (Q25) and that they aspire to an associate or bachelor's degree (Q23))

Type of Incentive	% All Students	Declared Associate Candidates (n=191)	Declared Bachelor's Candidates (n=268)
A three-credit tuition waiver for every 3 courses completed toward your degree in a single term	39%	36%	38%
A \$150 cash payment for every 3 courses completed toward your degree in a single term	10	15	10
A \$200 credit toward future UA costs for every 3 courses completed toward your degree in a single term	9	12	11
\$300 credit toward future UA costs for enrolling and completing 12 or more credits in a single term	7	7	9
A \$300 parking pass	7	6	9
None of these would affect my decision	28	24	22

Base = 604

Sixteen percent of full-time students said they would most value a parking pass, compared to 7 percent of students overall. Twenty-nine percent of students are somewhat or very likely to stop attending UA for at least one semester without transferring to another school before completing their program at UA. Half of students who would “stop out” report they would do so for financial reasons.

**Table 26. CQ26. How likely are you to stop attending UA for at least one semester without transferring to another school (“stop out”) before completing your degree/certificate at UA?**

Likelihood of “Stopping Out” at Least One Semester	% Students
Very likely	10%
Somewhat likely	19
Unlikely	38
Don’t Know	33

Base = 3,495

Alaska Natives and student over 45 years old are the two subgroups most likely to “stop out,” with 14 percent of Alaska Native students and 14 percent of students over 45 saying it is very likely.

**Table 27. CQ27. Why do you think you might stop attending UA? Temporarily?**  
(Base=Likely or Somewhat Likely to stop out without transferring to another school)

Reasons for Stopping	All Mentions (n=1,012)	Most Important (n=630)	Most or Second Most Important (n=630)	Most or Second or Third Most Important (n=630)
Financial reasons	50%	35%	52%	59%
Burned out/lost interest/need a break	29	9	19	30
Too busy to attend classes	27	9	21	29
Class schedule won’t fit my schedule	24	9	21	28
Desired classes not offered	23	8	17	24
Problems with my financial aid	16	2	10	14
Not satisfied with quality of classes/instructors	12	4	8	12
I took all the classes I wanted/needed	12	3	4	9
No longer living in Alaska	11	2	4	9
Not performing well academically	10	2	6	9
Medical/mental health reasons	10	4	4	10
Family issues	9	2	5	7
Lack of clear information about what I needed to do to graduate	7	1	3	5
Don’t like online class format	6	2	3	7
Unable to find childcare	6	2	4	5
Issues with other students	1	0	1	1
Other	14	7	11	11

Base = 1,012

Among students under age 35, 39 percent say the most important reasons for stopping out are financial. For students 35 or older, financial reasons are still the most common “most important” reason, but only to approximately 27 percent. Approximately 19 percent of that older group said the most important reason would be “too busy to attend classes.” Not finding a class schedule that fits got nearly as many “most

important” responses among students 35 and older (13 percent. Scheduling was less an issue at UAS (3 percent said it was most important) compared to UAF (9 percent) and UAA (10 percent). Among full-time students, 40 percent said the most important reason they might stop attending UA would be financial and 61 percent included financial reasons among their top three.

## WORKING WHILE IN SCHOOL

Sixty-eight percent of respondents said they worked at a job while attending UA (three quarters for students over age 35). The table below shows the number of hours those students estimated they spent at their jobs. The average is 31 hours a week (median: 30 hours). UAS students estimated they work more (median 40 hours), on average than students at the other two MAUs (median 30 hours).

**Table 28. CQ29a. During your most recent semester at UA, how many hours a week did you work?**

(Base = Students who said they worked while attending UA)

Job Hours per Week	% Students
Less than 20	19%
20 to 29	24
30 to 39	16
40	29
More than 40	13

Base = 2,378

Full-time students were less likely to work; 43 percent did not have a job in their most recent semester. Among full-time students who did work, one-third worked less than 20 hours.

## CHILDCARE

Seventeen percent of current students relied on someone to provide childcare while they attended UA.

**Table 29. CQ30. Did you rely on someone to provide childcare while you attended UA in your most recent semester?**

Type of Childcare	% Students
An unpaid family member or friend	10%
A paid childcare provider	7
No childcare	78
Other	1

Base = 3,486

Nineteen percent of female students and 13 percent of male students used childcare, either paid or unpaid. 34 percent of Alaska Native students used some kind of childcare, compared to 19 percent of white students. Older students used less childcare, with 84 percent of those over age 45 saying they did not use any type of childcare.



## UA Former Students

Among the former student sample, 11 percent attended UA for credit in 2016-2017, 41 percent between 2013-2015, 28 percent between 2010-2012, and 20 percent less recently.

**Table 30. FQ2. What was the most recent year during which you took a for-credit UA class?**

Year	% of Respondents
2016-2017	11%
2013-2015	41
2010-2012	28
Before 2010	20

Base = 2512

As one would expect, nearly all (94 percent) of students under age 18 took their UA courses very recently. Between 70 and 75 percent of students in the other age groups took their most recent UA course during the period from 2010 to 2015.

### LIKELIHOOD OF ENROLLING AT UA IN THE FUTURE

Over half (57 percent) of former students are somewhat or very likely to attend UA in the future for credit.

**Table 31. FQ3a. How likely are you to take a for-credit class at UA at some time in the future?**

Year	% of Respondents
Very likely	22%
Somewhat likely	35
Unlikely	14
Very unlikely	19
Don't know	10

Base = 2512

The age group most likely to return to UA for at least one for-credit class is ages 36 to 45, with 28 percent saying they are very likely and 30 percent saying likely to return.

### REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING UA

One quarter (24 percent) of former students stopped attending UA because of financial reasons: UA was too expensive. Other reasons students stopped attending are they took all the classes they wanted/needed (22 percent), too busy with their job (20 percent), the class schedule didn't fit their schedule (18 percent), and desired classes were not offered (16 percent).

**Table 32. FQ4. What were the main reasons you stopped attending UA?**  
(Multiple answers allowed)

Reasons for Stopping	All Mentions	Most Important	Most + Second Most Important	Most + Second + Third Most Important
UA too expensive	24%	15%	26%	33%
I took all the classes I wanted/needed	22	5	11	13
Too busy with my job	20	9	18	24
Class schedule won't fit my schedule	18	7	18	24
Desired classes not offered	16	7	15	20
Burned out/lost interest/need a break	15	6	13	19
Not satisfied with quality of classes/instructors	13	6	14	17
Family issues	11	5	9	12
Problems with my financial aid	9	4	9	11
Transferred to another school	9	3	7	10
Not performing well academically	9	2	6	11
Medical/mental health reasons	9	5	9	11
Couldn't get clear information about what I needed to do to graduate	7	2	6	9
Didn't like online class format	6	2	5	8
No longer living in Alaska	6	2	5	6
I wanted to use my money for other things	6	1	3	5
Unable to find childcare	3	1	3	4
Issues with other students	1	0	1	1
Other	21	15	21	22

Base = 2512

A wide variety of reasons impact student decisions to stop attending UA temporarily. Students under age 26 were most likely to say cost was the most important reason, with “burned out/lost interest/needed a break,” “transferred to another school,” “no longer living in Alaska,” and “desired classes not offered” also important to many. Responses from older students place cost, “too busy with my job,” “class schedule won’t fit my schedule,” and “desired classes not offered” all at roughly the same level of importance. While only 4 percent of students overall said finding childcare was an important reason for discontinuing their studies, that percentage doubles for the 26 to 35 age group, and women are three times as likely to have childcare challenges as men (6 percent compared to 2 percent).

Among all former students surveyed 58 percent, 1,452 students, said they had completed a degree or certificate program beyond high school, either at UA or at some other institution. Because of the way the sample was drawn, those who said they completed a degree at UA, must have earned them prior to 1989.

**Table 33. FQ6. Which of the following postsecondary degree or certificate programs have you completed, either at UA or elsewhere?**

(Base = respondents who have completed a degree or certificate program anywhere)

Type of Credential	Completed at UA (n = 509)	Completed Elsewhere (n = 1,207)
One-year certificate	25%	17%
Journeyman/Master Trade	1	5
2-year degree (Associate)	24	20
4-year degree (Bachelor's)	39	58
Master's	15	22
Doctorate or Professional	4	5

Base = 1,452

Some students said they have earned degrees or certificates both at UA and elsewhere, which is why the two columns add to more than 1,452.

### INVESTMENT IN A DEGREE/CERTIFICATE

Among respondents who do not have a certificate, most are somewhat confident or confident investment in one would be good for them. One-third (32 percent) of respondents are not confident about a one-year certificate, while approximately one-quarter are not confident about an associate degree (25 percent) or a bachelor's degree (23 percent).

**Table 34. FQ7. How confident are you that each of the following would be a good investment for you?**

(Base = Respondents who said they do not have a degree or certificate)

Type of Degree	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident	Don't Know
Associate degree	40%	26%	25%	9%
Bachelor's degree	45	21	23	10
1-year certificate	31	23	32	14

Base = 1,036

### LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

The next two questions address living arrangements and job activity. To make the responses relevant to current economic conditions, they were asked only of students who had attended UA at some time since 2012.

**Table 35. FQ8. During your most recent semester at UA, what were your living arrangements?**

(Base = Students who attended UA in 2012 or thereafter)

Type of Housing	% Students
On-campus housing	6%
Off campus, alone	19
Off campus, with roommates	10
Off campus, with family	60
Other	6

Base = 1,548

Among students 18 to 25 years of age, 19 percent lived off campus with roommates (double the proportion for other age groups).

Among students who attended UA at some time since 2012, 79 percent said they worked at a job while attending. The table below shows the number of hours those students estimated they spent at their jobs. The average is 37 hours a week (median: 40 hours a week). A smaller proportion of Alaska Natives (70 percent) worked at a job than whites (82 percent) and other ethnicities (80 percent).

**Table 36. FQ9a. During your most recent semester at UA, did you also have a job?**

(Base = Students who attended UA in 2012 or thereafter and who said they worked while attending)

Job Hours per Week	% Students
Less than 20	8%
20 to 29	11
30 to 39	16
40	47
More than 40	18

Base = 1,220

## REASON FOR ENROLLMENT AT UA

One-quarter (26 percent) of former students report they enrolled at UA in their most recent semester to obtain a degree or certificate, while 22 percent enrolled to make progress toward a degree or certificate.

**Table 37. FQ10. Which of the following is closest to the main reason you enrolled in your most recent semester at UA?**

Reason for Enrolling	% Students
To obtain a degree or certificate at UA	26%
To make progress toward a degree or certificate at UA	22
For personal growth or interests	14
To fulfill a credential/course requirement for my current job	13
To get training or skills applicable to my current or future work (but not a required credential or course)	11
To prepare myself to enter a degree or certificate program at another school (not UA)	6
To explore a possible new career	5
Other	4

Base = 2,461

A greater proportion of UAA and UAF students enrolled to obtain or make progress toward a degree (approximately half) than UAS students (approximately a third). Older students, especially those over age 45, were more likely than others to have enrolled because of a job requirement (27 percent for over 45 and 18 percent for 36 to 45). Students over 45 were also most likely to have enrolled because of personal growth or interests (24 percent). 20 percent of students under 18 and 10 percent of 18 to 25 year-olds enrolled to prepare themselves to enter a program at another school (not UA).

**FINANCIAL SOURCES**

While at UA, 42 percent of respondents used personal savings, 28 percent used job earnings, and 20 percent used loans, typically in combination with other sources of payment.

**Table 38. FQ11. During your most recent semester at UA, how were you paying for school?** (multiple answers allowed)

Sources of School Funds	% Students
Personal savings	42%
Job earnings	28
Loans	20
Scholarships other than UA Scholars or Alaska Performance Scholarship	11
Savings from parents/other family members	9
Military benefits	5
Alaska Performance Scholarship	3
Employer	3
UA Scholars	3
UA College Savings Plan	2
UA tuition waiver	1
Other	17

Base = 2,442

Scholarships and family savings were used by a larger proportion of younger students. Older students were more likely to use job earnings and personal savings. However, all age groups used a broad combination of resources. 7 percent of students age 36 to 45 had help from their employers and another 9 percent of that age group received military employment benefits. The age group with the most student loans was 26 to 35 year-olds (31 percent).

**SATISFACTION WITH UA EXPERIENCE**

***Academic Experience***

Sixty-five percent of former students are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of education at UA, while 12 percent are dissatisfied and 22 percent are neutral.

Among a list of elements of the UA academic experience, the highest percent of students satisfied or very satisfied was for interactions with instructors (64 percent), followed by courses and programs offered and schedule of course (both at 56 percent). The highest dissatisfaction rate was 22 percent with academic advising/help.

**Table 39. FQ12. Based on all your past experience as a UA student, how satisfied are you with the following aspects of your UA academic experience?**

Type of Experience	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	DK/NA
Interactions with instructors	25%	39%	22%	12%	1%
Courses and programs offered	14	42	27	15	2
Schedule of courses	16	40	27	14	3
Availability of required courses	13	35	27	20	4
Academic advising / help	13	24	27	22	14
Overall quality of education	19	46	22	12	1

Base = 2,434

In most of the academic areas above, a slightly higher proportion of students 36 and older said they were satisfied than younger students. Students at UAS and UAF were slightly more satisfied than those at UAA.

**Table 40. FQ12. Based on all your past experience as a UA student, how satisfied are you with the following aspects of your UA administrative and campus experience?**

Type of Experience	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	DK/NA
Overall university supportiveness/ friendliness	16%	37%	27%	14%	6%
Admissions process	13	40	27	10	10
Class registration process	14	45	24	12	3
Financial aid process	5	16	23	15	41
Transferring credit for courses	8	18	20	13	40
Housing availability	3	8	18	6	66
Cost and availability of text books	4	18	28	41	9
Social life and extracurricular opportunities	5	17	26	8	43
Overall satisfaction with UA experience	15	45	22	17	1

Base = 2,399

Approximately 70 percent of students 36 and older said they were satisfied with their UA experience, compared to roughly 52 percent of younger students. The older students were also less sensitive to the cost and availability of text books (30 percent satisfied compared to approximately 18 percent for younger students.) There was little variation by subgroup in the other categories of the above table, however.

In Q145, 15 percent of respondents (311 students) said that during the past 3 years they had completed one or more online, college-level courses for credit through a school or university outside Alaska. Those students were then asked for the main reason they did not take that course through UA. Thirty-one percent said the course was not offered at UA, 17 percent cited scheduling, 15 percent cost, and 14 percent quality of the school.

**Table 41. FQ145a. What is the main reason you did not take the course or courses through the University of Alaska?**

(Base = Respondents who took an online course through a school outside Alaska)

Reason for Taking a Course Elsewhere	% Students
Course not offered at UA	31%
The course schedule at the other school worked better for me	17
The other school was less expensive	15
Quality at the other school was better	14
I plan to apply the course(s) to a degree program at the other school	7
The other school has a better reputation	3
Other	12

Base = 311

(NOTE: Subsamples for this question are small, and the results are therefore subject to somewhat more variation than in most other survey questions.) 29 percent of Alaska Native students said they took the course outside UA because it was less expensive, compared to 13 percent of non-Native students. Among students 18 to 25 years of age, 22 percent said they took the course outside UA because the quality was better. Approximately 15 percent of students 25 or younger said they took the outside course because they plan to apply to a degree program at that school.

### LIKELIHOOD OF PURSUING A DEGREE IN THE FUTURE

The next three tables show students stated likelihood to pursue a degree in the future for a variety of subgroups. These tables are far from an exhaustive subgroup analysis, however they begin to suggest where, in UA’s existing student records, some of the most promising groups for targeted marketing may lie. For example, non-white students indicate a stronger likelihood of returning to school than white students. Students at UAF and UAA are somewhat more likely than students at UAS. And students who already have a vocational or associate degree or who have taken developmental courses also indicate they are more likely than average to pursue a future degree.

**Table 42. FQ15a. How likely are you to enroll at some point in the future to complete a degree or certificate, either at UA or at some other school?**

(All students and by student age group)

Likelihood of Pursuing a Degree or Certificate	% All Students	Under 18	18 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	Over 45
Very likely	30%	49	39	35	31	15
Somewhat likely	31	33	33	32	32	28
Somewhat unlikely	15	10	11	13	14	22
Very unlikely	15	4	10	11	14	26
Don’t know	8	3	7	9	9	9

Base = 2,378

**Table 43. FQ1a. How likely are you to enroll at some point in the future to complete a degree or certificate, either at UA or at some other school?**

Likelihood of Pursuing a Degree or Certificate	White	Alaska Native	Other Ethnicity	UAF	UAA	UAS
Very likely	28	32	36	29	33	21
Somewhat likely	29	39	31	34	29	34
Somewhat unlikely	18	10	12	16	13	21
Very unlikely	19	9	10	13	15	17
Don't know	7	9	11	8	9	7

Base = 2,378

**Table 44. FQ15a. How likely are you to enroll at some point in the future to complete a degree or certificate, either at UA or at some other school?**

Likelihood of Pursuing a Degree or Certificate	Last Enrollment for Personal Growth	Last Enrollment to Explore New Career	Have Vocational Degree	Have Associate Degree	Took a Developmental Class	More than 3 Developmental Credits Passed
Very likely	43	28	34	39	35	40
Somewhat likely	31	34	33	27	37	38
Somewhat unlikely	11	9	14	14	10	7
Very unlikely	12	14	9	13	9	4
Don't know	4	15	11	6	9	11

Base = 2,378

Former UA students who now live outside Alaska also expressed a high degree of interest in pursuing a future degree. 47 percent said it was very likely and another 23 percent said somewhat likely. These students, 10 percent of the survey sample, may primarily intend to enroll in out-of-state institutions, however anecdotal evidence indicates many Alaskans who enroll out of state ultimately return for a variety of reasons, in particular lower overall cost. Marketing efforts that highlight that UA advantage might therefore be effective.

## UA STOP-OUT STUDENTS

UA stop-out students who do not expect to pursue a future degree gave the following reasons:

**Table 45. FQ15b. What are the two main reasons you don't expect to complete a degree or certificate in the future?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were Somewhat Unlikely or Very Unlikely to complete a degree or certificate in the future – Q15)

Reason for Taking a Course Elsewhere	% Students
I already have all the education I need	44%
I don't think additional education is worth the cost	24
I can't afford to take time off from work	17
I learn better on the job	9
Too old/retired	8
It's too frustrating dealing with teachers and administrators	6
Other	29

Base = 721



In results for Q15a above, there may be marketing opportunities among those who do not think education is worth the cost (they could be exposed to evidence otherwise) and those who say they cannot afford to take time off from work (they could be offered flexible programs that allow them to keep working).

## RETURNING TO UA

One-quarter (26 percent) of respondents who are likely or very likely to complete a degree or certificate in the future say they are sure they will do so at UA, while another 47 percent would consider UA, and 18 percent are sure they would go to another school.

**Table 46. FQ16. If you did continue your education, would you consider returning to UA?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were Very Likely or Likely to complete a degree or certificate in the future)

Likelihood of Pursuing a Degree or Certificate	% Students
I'm sure I would go to UA	26%
I would consider UA	47
I am sure I would go to some other school	18
Don't know	9

Base = 1,653

The fact that nearly half of former UA students who want to return to school for a degree would not necessarily return to UA suggests there is work to be done in the areas of both marketing and student satisfaction. One quarter of students age 25 and younger say they are sure they would go elsewhere, but for as many as three quarters of those students, this mainly reflects a desire to attend school outside Alaska (next table).

**Table 47. FQ17. Why do you think you would choose another school over UA?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were likely to complete a degree - Q15 - but were sure they would choose another school, not UA - Q16)

Reason for Choosing another School	% Students
The program I want is not offered at UA	37%
Want a school with better academic reputation	35
Desired courses not offered at UA	30
Faculty is better elsewhere	28
I don't live in Alaska anymore	27
Financial reasons	24
Want to attend school outside Alaska	20
Want a school with better social/campus life	14
The class schedule I need is not available at UA	13
Want a school with more people	7
Other	22

Base = 289

*(NOTE: Subsamples for this question are small, and the results are therefore subject to somewhat more variation than in most other survey questions.)*

UAS is the MAU with the most students who said they cannot get the program they want at UA (61 percent compared to 36 and 34 percent for UAF and UAA respectively). Students age 26 to 35 were most likely to give

the reason “financial reasons” (36 percent). 22 percent of the same age group said the class schedule they need is not available at UA.

Among those who are sure they would return to UA if they return to school, two-thirds (67 percent) do not know (or the question is not applicable) how many estimated credits they would need to complete their program.

**Table 48. FQ18. If you were to return to UA to complete a degree or certificate, about how many credits do you think you would need to take in order to complete your program?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Estimated Number of Credits to Complete	% Students
Less than 10	6%
10 to 19	6
20 to 29	5
30 to 39	6
40 or more	4
DK/NA	67
I am not interested in completing a program	5

Base = 1,361

The fact that two-thirds of these former students (three quarters of Alaska Natives in this subgroup) do not know how many credits they would need suggests most have not carefully considered a return to school.

Just 16 percent of respondents represented in the table above anticipated attending full-time if they returned to school.

**Table 49. FQ19. If you were to return to UA to continue your education, about how many credits do you think you would take each semester?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Estimated Number of Credits to Complete	% Students
Less than 4	7%
4 to 11	30
12 or more	16
Don't know	48
Median	7 credits

Base = 1,284

Students have a wide range of needs and preferences with respect to class schedules and structures. There were no clear trends by age, ethnicity, MAU or other readily definable subgroup.

**Table 50. FQ20. If you were to return to UA to continue your education, which of the following types of classes would you prefer?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Preferred Types of Classes	% Students
A mix of different delivery methods that works best for my schedule	31%
In-person classes	26
Classes I can access on my own any time during the day by logging onto a website	18
It depends on the type of class	14
Online classes at a scheduled time, where I can interact with the instructor and other students	7
It depends on how good the instructor is	2
Other	1

Base = 1,284

Roughly three-quarters of students who indicated they might return to UA said they would need extra help or support in at least one area. Math was the most frequently cited area, at 35 percent, followed by applying for financial aid at 25 percent.

**Table 51. FQ21. If you were to continue your education at UA, would you need extra help or support in any of the following areas?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Areas for Extra Help or Support	% Students
Math	35%
Applying for financial aid	25
Financial planning	20
Program and course selection	18
English/writing	17
Childcare	15
Science	14
Life skills (time management, money management, being organized)	13
Long-term planning	12
Computer skills	10
Study skills	10
Housing	8
Interactions with faculty	7
Reading/comprehension	6
Transportation assistance	5
Living away from home/family	2
Other	2
None of the above	22
Don't Know	9

Base = 1,278

**Table 52. FQ23. Assuming they both cover the same material and earn the same credits, which type of class schedule would you prefer if you continued your studies?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Preferred Types of Classes	% Students
All online classes	24%
All traditional in-person classes	20
A mix of in-person and online classes	38
Intensive or “block schedule” classes where you take one class at a time	9
Don’t know	8

Base = 1,279

Women, students 26 to 35 years old, and students at UAS are all somewhat more likely to prefer all online classes, but no single type of schedule meets the needs of more than a quarter of all students who say they will or might return to UA. Two-thirds of students whose most recent reason for attending UA was to fulfill a job requirement prefer either all online or a mix of online and in-person classes, but that is not substantially different from the preferences of students in general.

**Table 53. FQ24. Which of the following kinds of financial resources would you expect to use if you returned to UA?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Areas for Extra Help or Support	% Students
Personal savings	51%
Job earnings	46
Loans	31
Scholarships other than UA Scholars or Alaska Performance Scholarship	22
Alaska Performance Scholarship	7
Savings from parents/other family members	6
UA Scholars	6
Military benefits	4
UA College Savings Plan	2
Other	12
Don’t Know	8

Base = 1,232

Among students who said they attended UA most recently in order to obtain or progress toward a degree, approximately 48 percent said they would use personal savings, 47 percent job earnings, 35 percent loans and 25 percent scholarships other than APS and UA Scholars. Other sources were of much less importance to the group as a whole.

Students under age 26 are roughly twice as likely as other students to say they will use scholarships (all three types). 45 percent of Alaska Natives and 32 percent of UAF respondents say scholarships other than the APS and UA Scholars would be a source of funds. (Note that 24 percent of all respondents from UAF are Alaska Native, compared to 15 percent for UAA and 21 percent for UAS.)

## AFFORDABILITY

(NOTE: Due to an error in survey programming, question 25 below was answered only by students who said they were either sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school. The questions were intended for all respondents.)

**Table 54. FQ25. How affordable do you consider the University of Alaska to be in each of the following areas?**

(Base = Respondents who said they were sure they would return to UA or would consider UA if they returned to school - Q16)

Type of Cost	Very Affordable	Somewhat Affordable	Somewhat Unaffordable	Very Unaffordable
Tuition	10%	48%	29%	13%
Course / lab fees	9	51	29	11
Text books	4	31	37	27
Housing	5	31	35	28
Student activity fees	10	48	26	16

Base = 1,120

**Tuition** – 26 percent of postgraduate students and 22 percent of students who last attended for personal growth reasons said UA tuition is very affordable.

**Course and lab fees** – 51 percent of Alaska Native students said course and lab fees are somewhat or very unaffordable. Other subgroups were close to the overall averages in the table.

**Text books** – 34 percent of students 18 to 25 years old said text books were very unaffordable, compared to 27 percent of students overall.

**Housing** – Students under 18 years old (76 percent) and students at UAS (70 percent) were most likely to say housing is either somewhat or very unaffordable.

**Student activity fees** – Students 36 to 45 years old (49 percent) and students over 45 years old (46 percent) were somewhat more likely to say student activity fees are somewhat or very unaffordable. This may be because older students are less likely to avail themselves of activity opportunities.

## HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION PLANNED

Answers in the table below suggest students who would consider returning to UA have high educational aspirations.

**Table 55. FQ26. What is the highest educational program you plan to complete at UA or anywhere?**

(Base = Respondents who did NOT say in Q22 that they are not interested in completing a degree or certificate at UA)

Type of Credential	% Students
One-year certificate	4%
Journeyman/Master Trade	2
2-year degree (Associate)	18
4-year degree (Bachelor's)	31
Master's	17
Doctorate or Professional	9
Don't know	14

Base = 1,285

The next table shows student preferences for several types of incentives that might influence them to continue with their courses of study. One column shows preferences for all 814 respondents. The second column shows respondents who are in the UA data system as declared associate degree candidates, and the third column shows declared bachelor's candidates.

**Table 56. FQ28. Which of the following incentives would most influence you to complete an education program at UA?**

(Base = Respondents who said they plan to return to school – Q16 and plan to complete an Associate or Bachelor's degree – Q26)

Type of Incentive	% All Students	Declared Associate Candidates (n=191)	Declared Bachelor's Candidates (n=268)
A three-credit tuition waiver for every 3 courses completed toward your degree in a single term	39%	36%	38%
A \$150 cash payment for every 3 courses completed toward your degree in a single term	10	15	10
A \$200 credit toward future UA costs for every 3 courses completed toward your degree in a single term	9	12	11
\$300 credit toward future UA costs for enrolling and completing 12 or more credits in a single term	7	7	9
A \$300 parking pass	7	6	9
None of these would affect my decision	28	24	22

Base = 814

## Open-ended Comments

Open-ended comments in both surveys tended to underscore already established themes, including the following:

- Affordability is important, but it is more than tuition. Fees and books play an important role, and students struggle with a whole package of life-demands that influence their capacity to engage and succeed in higher education. For example, cost and availability of parking can be a major challenge.

- Effective academic advising and availability of needed courses are the two factors that most influence students' ability to anticipate and plan for a successful program of study.
- Non-traditional (especially older) students have particular needs, including advisors who understand their academic and financial needs, flexible scheduling, and for some, childcare.
- Uncertainty about UA's financial stability and its potential effects on them is troublesome to students.

Current students were asked how UA could work better for them. Respondents offered the following suggestions:

**Table 57. CQ31. If you could change one thing about UA to make it work better for you as a student, what would it be?**

Suggested Improvement	Number of Suggestions
Lower costs	307
Better/more supportive/more responsive teachers	179
Availability of courses/programs	175
Lower fees/books	175
Better academic advising/access to teachers	172
Schedule for working students/parents/other scheduling ideas	166
Be more helpful/supportive, improve culture/social life	120
Help with housing/transportation/parking	117
More/better online	114
Financial assistance/better financial aid counseling	111
Improve facilities/access to library/better websites	76
Childcare	61
Improved admissions/registration/tuition payment system/staff	58
My program is underfunded/being cut back	45
Better food/flexible meal plans	39
In-person classes	22
Academic support groups/tutoring	17
Accept more transfer credits/easier transfer among campuses	13
Career counseling/job placement	9
Work more closely with military	7
Assorted other suggestions	332

Former Students were asked what UA could do for them (or students like them) to encourage them to complete a degree or certificate program. They offered the following suggestions:

**Table 58. FQ22. What is the most important thing UA could do to encourage people like you to complete a degree or certificate program?**

Suggested Improvement	Number of Suggestions
Lower costs, including books and fees	139
Courses/programs available	63
Schedule for working students/parents	62
Financial assistance/better financial aid counseling	60
Advertise	44
Better academic advising	35
More or all courses for a degree online	27
Improved admissions/registration system	20
Better/more supportive teachers	15
Accept more transfer credits	12
Adapt systems for older students	12
Social/cultural/life-skills support	12
Help with housing/transportation/parking	11
Childcare	11
Academic support groups	8
Career counseling/job placement	7
Build campus community	5
Assorted other suggestions	128

### Other Possible Analysis

The two survey data sets developed for this analysis, together with the full scope of student data available in UA records are capable of producing an extremely detailed picture of UA’s students, their needs and their preferences. An almost unlimited variety of analyses could be undertaken to amplify the foundation for future marketing strategies and ultimately form a long-term marketing plan for UA as a whole and one that would help inform local MAU marketing as well.

- One first step might be to use the data to expand the segmentation matrix developed during Phase 1 of this project.
- The expanded segmentation matrix likely would suggest additional data analysis, possibly including multivariate testing.
- The matrix could then be expanded into a more detailed segmentation map that explores how segments overlap and interact with each other. This would help prioritize potential marketing and product development (improvement) steps UA could take.
- If additional primary research is contemplated, one candidate might be MaxDiff, conjoint or other processes designed to get subjects to reveal price points for various packages of products and benefits through forced pair exercises.



- A simple research program that might provide useful, ongoing guidance might be to ask every student who enrolls each semester just two or three questions about their educational goals, intentions, or needs during the registration process. The key would be developing a cost-effective method for aggregating and analyzing the data.

One way to determine whether any or all these steps would be useful is to begin to develop a comprehensive marketing, product development, and communications plan for UA. If key unknowns remain, that process should identify them.

## Introduction

Enrollment at UA declined 13 percent between fall 2011 and fall 2015. Enrollment of first-time freshmen dropped 18 percent during that period. Enrollment by full-time students declined by 10.4 percent and by part-time students 14.4 percent.

**Table 59. Enrollment by MAU between 2011 and 2015**

MAU	2011 Enrollment	% Enrollment	2015 Enrollment	% Enrollment	Change in # Students	% Change
<b>UA Anchorage</b>						
Full-time	8,549	41%	7,861	43%	-688	-8.0
Part-time	12,150	59%	10,255	57%	-1,895	-15.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,699</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>18,116</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>-2,583</b>	<b>-12.5</b>
<b>UA Fairbanks</b>						
Full-time	4,737	42%	4,165	42%	-572	-12.1
Part-time	6,412	58%	5,705	58%	-707	-11.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,149</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9,870</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>-1,279</b>	<b>-11.5</b>
<b>UA Southeast</b>						
Full-time	1,150	28%	967	28%	-183	-15.9
Part-time	2,893	72%	2,429	72%	-464	-16.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,043</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3,396</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>-647</b>	<b>-16.0</b>
<b>UA System</b>						
Full-time	14,029	40%	12,569	41%	-1,460	-10.4
Part-time	20,954	60%	17,927	59%	-3,027	-14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,983</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30,496</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>-4,487</b>	<b>-12.8</b>

Source: *UA in Review 2016*

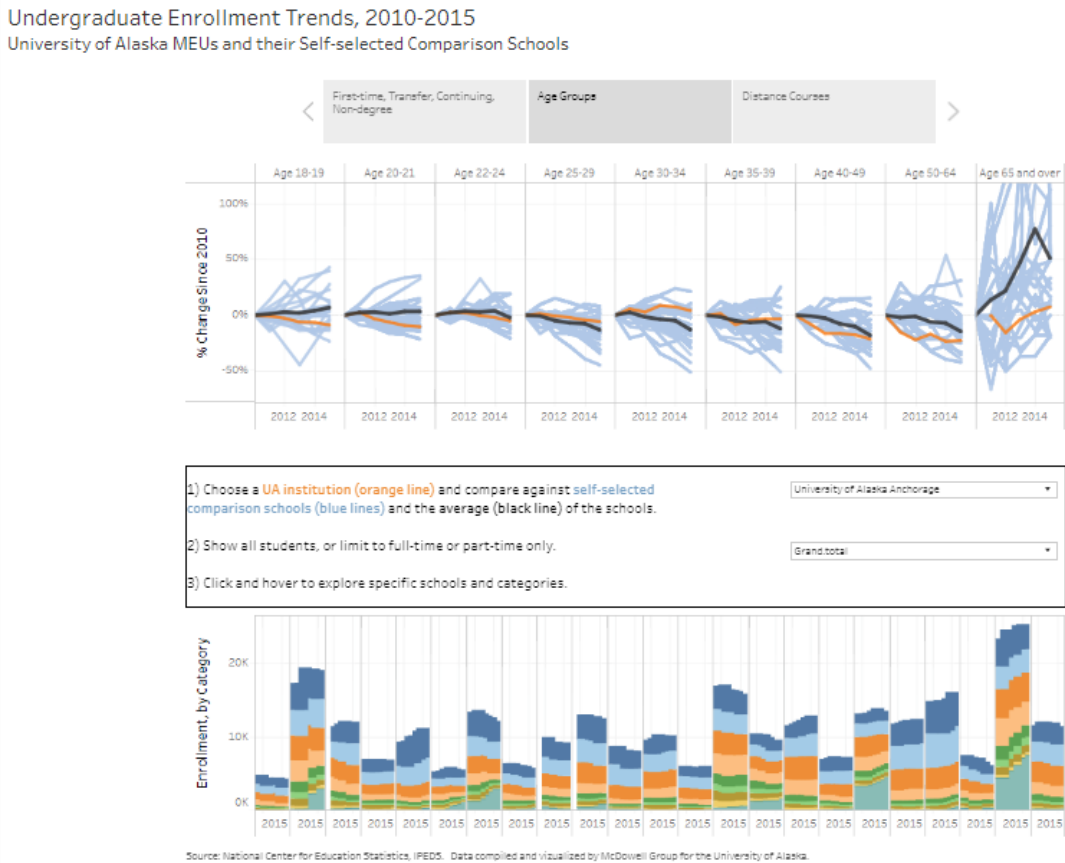
The largest percentage declines were in part-time students at UAA and both part-time and full-time students at UAS. However the largest net change in students was by far among part-time students at UAA, a decline of nearly 1,900 students, a 16 percent decline.

The enrollment figures raise three main questions:

- How much of the enrollment decline between 2011 and 2015 reflects demographic and other changes beyond the control of UA?
- What, if anything, could UA do to address those external factors?
- How much of the decline is due to factors within UA, such as cost, program and course offerings, marketing effectiveness, etc.

# Methodology and Technical Notes

In addition to search of national literature and review of the UAR for 2015 and 2016, McDowell Group’s analysis of enrollment trends included a review of enrollment data downloaded from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).<sup>2</sup> IPEDS data is collected via an annual survey of all postsecondary educational institutions in the United States. Data for Fall Enrollment (2010 through 2015) was compiled for UA MAUs and their self-selected comparison institutions, including 45 institutions in total. Enrollment data was broken down by part-time versus full-time, source (first-time, continuing, transfer, and non-degree), age, and use of distance education courses. An interactive visualization of the data was created in the data analytics software program Tableau and is available online.<sup>3</sup> The interactive visualization allows for exploration of the data, comparison of trends between institutions, on-the-fly filtering to remove or include outliers, and a visually-prominent comparison between each MAU and the average of their self-selected comparison institutions (orange and blue lines, respectively, in example image below).



<sup>2</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://public.tableau.com/profile/dan.lesh#!/vizhome/UAEnrollmentTrends2/Story1>

## Alaska Demographics

As Table 57, above, shows, enrollment at UA has declined since 2011. A look at the year-by-year figures would show the decline in overall number of students has been rather steady during that time. An obvious question, then, is what has happened to the overall Alaska population during the same period, and the answer is that it has grown. However, it has grown very slowly. The table shows trends from 2005 to 2015. One observation is that population growth has slowed nearly to a standstill since 2012. At the same time, out-migration (which includes college-age adults) has accelerated. Finally, the years prior to 2011-2012 showed consistent growth, with peak in 2009-2010.

These population figures are not the only factor in UA's enrollment, and other factors may be more important. However, it is clear that using 2011 as a benchmark for enrollment sets the stage for disappointment from a purely demographic perspective.

**Table 60. Changes in Alaska Population, 2005 - 2015**

July 1 to June 30	End of Period Population	Population Change	Growth Rate	Net Migration
2005-06	674,583	7,437	1.11	-56
2006-07	680,169	5,586	0.82	-2,023
2007-08	686,818	6,649	0.97	-1,111
2008-09	697,828	11,010	1.59	3,009
2009-10	714,031	16,203	2.30	8,564
2010-11	722,886	8,855	1.23	1,005
2011-12	731,238	8,352	1.15	1,105
2012-13	735,859	4,621	0.63	-2,711
2013-14	736,818	959	0.13	-6,512
2014-15	737,183	365	0.05	-6,679

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Annual Components of Population Change for Alaska, 1945 to 2016.

The next table shows the population trend for college-age youth, 17 to 25 years of age, between April 2010 and July 2016. All but one age group declined.

**Table 61. Alaska College-Age Youth Population, 2010 - 2016**

Age	April 2010 (Census)	July 2016 (Estimate)	Net Change
17	10,777	9,961	-816
18	10,498	9,237	-1,261
19	9,964	8,514	-1,450
20	10,628	9,117	-1,511
21	10,577	9,578	-999
22	10,859	10,141	-718
23	10,787	10,528	-259
24	11,568	11,291	-277
25	11,575	12,244	669
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,233</b>	<b>90,611</b>	<b>-6,622</b>

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

UA’s core college-age market, above, lost more than 6,000 people during the period. This age group represents approximately 43 percent of UA’s student body. The sub-segment of 17 to 21-year-olds shrunk the most.

A UA market segment that grew during this time period is adults 26 to 35. This age group represents approximately 30 percent of current UA students. However, as the survey results and interviews demonstrate, this group has complex needs and priorities, discussed in detail in other parts of this report. Attracting them in larger numbers will require a strategic approach.

**Table 62. Alaska Residents Age 26 to 35 Population, 2010 - 2016**

Age	April 2010 (Census)	July 2016 (Estimate)	Net Change
26	11,198	9,961	385
27	11,311	9,237	91
28	10,766	8,514	748
29	10,569	9,117	568
30	10,733	9,578	1,670
31	9,453	10,141	2,048
32	9,628	10,528	1,698
33	9,012	11,291	2,562
34	8,880	12,244	1,978
35	9,396	11,198	1,802
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,946</b>	<b>114,496</b>	<b>13,550</b>

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

The population increases plateau by age 38, and declines in population over this period are projected for age groups from 38 to age 56. The Alaska population over 56 already shows the growth predicted to result in a near tripling of elderly Alaskans between 2015 and 2030.

## National Trends<sup>4</sup>

Nationally, major demographic drivers of enrollment include:

- Growth in the number of graduating high school students in the South and Rocky Mountain states.
- Growth in the number of Hispanic high school graduates, and corresponding decline in the number of whites.
- A growing economic divide between families that can afford to send children to college and those that can’t.

The third trend is particularly relevant to Alaska, and it echoes survey responses that clearly identify financial issues as the most important influences on whether students enroll or complete postsecondary programs.

<sup>4</sup> Much of the information about national trends used in this section is taken from *The Future of Enrollment*, published recently by The Chronicle of Higher Education.

A development negatively affecting many parts of the country but trending favorably in Alaska is that between 1998 and 2004, according to IPEDS data reported by the Chronicle of Higher Education, the number of freshmen leaving their home state to attend college has declined in Alaska by 22 percent. Only 3 states showed a bigger decline, and the great majority of state experienced increased out-migration of college freshmen, more than 100 percent in some cases. This reflects well on Alaskan's perceptions of UA over that time period.

Finally, a trend, or rather condition, that must be addressed by open-enrollment institutions generally, but demonstrably in Alaska, is the gap between high school graduation requirements and the level of preparation needed to perform college work. At UA, 47 percent of first-time freshmen test into developmental courses. Developmental courses cost money, delay graduation, and disincentivize students, as discussed elsewhere in this report. Since there is no indication this gap will significantly diminish in the foreseeable future, UA needs a strategy to address the issue better in order to maximize both enrollment and graduations.

## Conclusions

Examining UA enrollment in the context of national trends suggests that the modest declines in recent annual enrollment totals likely are due in large part to the same environmental factors seen in other states. The Tableau data set developed by the research team will enable UA staff to explore a large range of institutional comparisons in much greater detail than may be addressed here.