

## The college experiment: How one student at UAS battled mounting pressure

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By CALLIE CONERTON

Pressure. With each incoming class of freshman into the university system, pressures on college students seem to multiply tenfold.

It seems easy enough. Get good grades, make some friends, graduate on time and move into a fulfilling career. But no one is speaking about the hard issues like lingering student loan debt and how to land that great job right after walking off the graduation stage.

I am a life-long Alaskan. I've been in the Alaska educational stream since my first grade teacher, Linda Torgerson at the Juneau Community Charter School, opened my eyes to words.

I finished off my K-12 education by being an Exchange Student with Rotary International in Iserlohn, Germany and ultimately graduating from Juneau Douglas High School. I want to become an elementary education teacher, so I enrolled at the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau. Thankfully I found ways to ease mounting pressure and counter the cost of a college education while graduating as quickly as possible.

The average price of in-state tuition at UAS is about \$2,500 per semester for a 15-credit load. Since I live at home, my room and board expenses are minimal, saving me around \$3,600 each semester.

I also applied and received three scholarships to help offset costs as well: the Bill and Nell Biggs, Gastineau Rotary and Verna Carrigan scholarships totaling \$750 for last semester.

Considering I was trying to go through college with no debt, these scholarships made a big impact for me. I felt like I could breathe and begin to manage those pressures—the experiment to pursue higher education was becoming real.

Many students, like myself, also seek part-time employment in order to cover cost of college without taking loans. While this helps with overall total loan debt, it creates a problem too—less time for homework and classes.

There's a delicate balance between number of credit hours enrolled and number of hours available for employment, not to mention managing a social life and homework. The focus shifts to earning money instead of spending needed time on schoolwork. A vicious cycle begins.


When a student decides to take fewer classes, it seems like a good temporary fix to pressure. But this decision is actually detrimental since it leads to taking more time to finish school, costing more money in the long run. The decision can ultimately lead to dropping out of school completely because the more years students are in school, the less likely they are to graduate.

To combat this trend UAS offered a financial incentive to go along with the newly created Stay on TRACK program. If a student takes 15 credits or more a semester, they receive a \$500 waiver.

This is the first year that it has been offered and so far it has been a huge success. It has made an impact at UAS, with 199 students that received benefits from the waiver. The \$500 and the Stay on TRACK program made a difference in my decisions when signing up for classes since I knew I could get more bang for my buck, as well as more credits towards my education, if I signed up for at least 15 credits.

If this tuition waiver was offered at all University of Alaska campuses it would not only to keep students in Alaska but also help those students graduate by shifting focus more on school and education. Being a college student can be difficult and filled with pressure, but small choices, like taking 15 credits, can make a rippling impact that can start with that first semester and make graduation a timely and affordable reality.

- Callie Conerton is a true Alaskan to the core with Juneau being her home. She has been an active member at the University of Alaska Southeast as she has served on the Student Government in Juneau for the past two years as Senator and now Vice President, and is continuing on in her third year of service. She was a Rotary International Exchange Student in Iserlohn, Germany during 2009/2010 and continues to work with Rotary Exchange Students all over Alaska. She is currently one of the nominees for the Student Seat on the UA Board of Regents and has a passion in serving the community of Juneau, the Community at UAS, as well as the UA System and Alaska.

  
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