

UA changes focus from “Finish in Four” to “Finish in Your Time”



A poster on the fourth floor of the library for the “Finish in 4” campaign features some student graffiti that reads “Offer classes when I need them” and “Lo! And stop changing the degree requirements!” February 2, 2013. Elika Roohi/Sun Star

Brady Gross/Sun Star Reporter

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In the fall of 2012, the steering committee behind “Stay on Track“ changed its campaign motto of “Finish in Four” to “Finish in Your Time” as part of an evolving shift. This shift is meant to not only focus on students pursuing a traditional four year degree but also on students with goals other than a bachelors degree. The campaign’s goal overall is to combat the UA system’s four year graduation rate of 10 percent in comparison to the national average of 30 percent.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has emphasized over the last year that he would like to reward and create incentives for universities that build cultures around finishing school. Duncan also hinted that in the future, federal resources could be taken away from those colleges with a high concentration of students who fail to graduate.

UAF academic adviser Donald Crocker, said that the first year a student attends college is paramount in retention rates and how long it will take them to graduate. According to Crocker, most first-year students spend their time in developmental classes or exploring their options before even choosing their major.

UAF, like most colleges, has a large majority of non-traditional students. According to Complete College America, a non-profit that focuses on college data collection, 75 percent of all students across the nation are considered non-traditional. A non-traditional student is loosely defined, but includes individuals who attend college part-time, work full-time, have dependents other than a spouse or are single parents.

Juggling commutes, families and jobs all interfere with attending and accomplishing a full load of at least 12 credits each semester. Scheduling conflicts also hinder the amount of time it may take

to “Finish in Four.” According to Stay on Track’s website, the goal is to encourage students to make conscious choices about their education. Stay on Track also reminds students that 15 credits a semester or 30 credits a year is the “real” full time.

Mary Gower, Enrollment Services Director, said, “Students nationally have been accepting 12 credits a semester as the ‘norm’ for full time enrollment for years, despite the fact that anything less than 15 credits a semester will mean they will take more than four years to graduate.”

“The ‘Finish in Four’ motto was changed to ‘Finish in Your Time’ to help bring attention that there are many paths to graduation. It’s important to note that the original message was never intended to make students feel inadequate for taking less than 15 credits,” said Gower.

“I have been here two years taking at least 12 credits each semester. I want to graduate in four years, no matter what it takes.” said Alex Harrington, a criminal justice student. Harrington and Antonio Hamilton, an English student in his second year, both stressed that they will do what is necessary to finish as fast as possible because jobs are scarce. No matter if Stay on Track’s campaign is “Finish in Four” or “Finish in Your Time,” both students agreed that any push from UAF to help students achieve a degree faster is a good thing.

According to Gower, the campaign has evolved since “Finish in Four” was first introduced, because “Finish in Your Time” is now a clearer way to address graduation paths for not only four year students, but every type of student at UAF.

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