

The Statewide Voice

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Faster and Cheaper at UAS

By Corinne Soltis

In the Fall of 2011, a call to action began to gain momentum in Higher Education. The focus: the math of on time graduation. 12 credits per semester, the average student full time enrollment, would require 5 years for a student to graduate with a BA degree, and 2.5 years to graduate with an AA. When calculated, that can equate to \$10,000 more in school related expenses alone. Those added costs can be alarming when you start adding in living and entertainment expenses, and yet, simple to reduce—15 credits a semester, one more class each term, could eliminate a whole year in school and school related expenses.

The University of Alaska took up the charge, promoting in a state wide campaign the Stay on Track program, designed to educate students and parents that to graduate in four years, required 30 credits a year. The program promoted working with an Academic Advisor, choosing a major carefully, and using Degree Works, a software program available to all enrolled students that helps track degree completion.

It was a paradigm shift for students who had long been led to believe that 12 credits would get them to graduation in four years. As with all big shifts there was some skepticism, but the University of Alaska weathered this knowing that it was our responsibility to share this truth with students and the public.

The University of Alaska chose a two pronged approach: educate the current student body and the future classes of the University of Alaska Southeast, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. To achieve this, information outreach was started in the high schools, while each of the three State universities reached out to their students.

At UA Southeast, the university with the largest population of students taking less than 12 credits each semester, administration knew it had to connect the dots between increased credit load, value, and financial savings. To do that, UA Southeast created the "Stay on Track: \$500 for 15" campaign. Qualified students would receive \$500 each semester they took 15 credits or more--\$500 being the average cost of taking that one extra class to get from 12 to 15 credits. The campaign was an amazing success in its first semester, with over 100

students participating, and 76% of those students completing at least 12 credits. The campaign—now with more word of mouth advertising thanks to the excitement level of UA Southeast students—grew in the spring semester, and had an astonishing 84% success rate! Moreover, calculations from the Fall semester showed that UA Southeast had the largest growth of students taking 15 or more credits than any other UA school, with 13.2% growth at UA Southeast, and 9.8% at all University of Alaska campuses.

But UA Southeast couldn't accomplish this task with just informative posters and financial incentives. Academic Advisors, faculty and staff, worked tirelessly to get the word out to students and show them the math. The State did its part as well by requiring second year Alaska Performance Scholarship recipients to complete 30 credits to maintain scholarship eligibility. A requirement that when married with UA Southeast's \$1000 a year Stay on Track award, can increase the financial value of the scholarship at UA Southeast to over \$5000 a year!

The Stay on Track campaign's message is simple, take 30 credits each year to graduate on time, save up to \$10,000 in college expenses and student loan debt, and get into your career faster. The university is committed to this campaign, and giving students the information they need to make smart choices about graduation and costs.

Izzy Martinez – 27 August 2013, Tuesday 15:18

