

Building a Better Path for Student Success Shifting Tier 1 GER Courses from the College of Arts and Sciences to the Community and Technical College

The 1986-87 restructuring of a set of institutions that were serving South Central Alaska at that time created a blended institution within which certain organizational/administrative structures were established to facilitate the merger with limited attention to supporting student success. Some of these practices continue today and negatively affect the students who are at the heart of University of Alaska Anchorage's (UAA's) mission to serve as an open-access institution. As set out in UAA 2020, the University is committing to a student success and completion agenda. This shift in perspective, from input to outcomes, does require a rethinking of how we are organized and how we operate. Our university needs to focus on the success of our students rather than on our administrative practices and preferences.

Mastering college-level skills as reflected by Tier 1 GER courses (math, written composition, oral communication) is a fundamental premise for student success. Facilitating successful completion of these courses, for all intents and purposes the trivium of today's curriculum, is foundational for subsequent success. Developing college-level mastery will allow students to progress into the Tier 2 courses and their programs, majors, or degrees with greater success.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, UAA's regional accreditor, has stated that these basic skills are essential both to bachelor's degrees and associate degrees, where they are called 'related instruction.' Furthermore, recent research has shown that student difficulties in general education courses, as well as in pre-general education developmental courses, are often tied in with institutional barriers, student loan or financial difficulties, scheduling problems, or work-life balance hardships as well as with academic skill deficiencies. Dealing with these barriers in effective manners typically require changes in institutional structure and culture.

Creating a Front Door for UAA

The Community and Technical College's (CTC's) creation of a 'front door' for UAA in the Learning Commons does provide UAA an opportunity to overcome major obstacles to student success. Recently, the unit accomplished a reorganization around a Student Success focus. This couples with the units embrace of student-centered alternative delivery models such as the ASD Summer Bridge Program, the Writing Center and Math Emporium, the new Speaking Center, Supplemental Instruction, adaptive learning, the UNIV A194 on-boarding course, peer success coaching, and related adaptive innovations. All of these are offered to meet students where they are in their academic development.

To best capitalize on these developments, it is time to shift responsibility for the Tier I GER's from the College of Arts and Sciences to CTC. This will permit more direct integration of the delivery of this critical set of courses with the institution's commitment to developmental education and the related robust support services provided.

While not directly tied to this, making this change will integrate well with the work UAA will be doing under the Student Success Collaborative. Led by the Vice Provost for Student Success, the institution will be developing an advising program that will serve every first-time student,

outlining a path they can follow into a major and advising at the college level. Integrating advising within this reassignment of administrative responsibility clearly strengthens the model.

Creating the University and Technical College

As this move is made, the Community and Technical College will be renamed the University and Technical College. While the name CTC has served the institution well, changing the name at this point in time signals the commitment of the University to move forward in new ways with fulfilling its role as an open-access institution with a renewed commitment to student success.

Recommendations

The following key steps need to be taken:

- Shift Tier 1 basic skills general education courses to the University and Technical College (UTC).
- Define the student admission pathway into and out of UTC for students whose major resides in other colleges.
- Increase support for the Learning Commons as ‘front door’ to guided pathways into programs and majors.
- Expand alternative delivery models for GER basic skills courses using best-practice models such as stretch, bridge, supplemental, block, HIPs, and late start or ‘salvage’ courses.
- Coordinate with Title III efforts.

I have asked Provost Hrcir and Deans Runge and Stalvey to establish a working group to review this organizational change and to outline an implementation plan. This work should be completed by midsemester. It is expected that Tier 1 GER classes offered Fall 2018 will be offered under the auspices of UTC (CTC).