

Alaska PEAK (Purposeful Engagement, Assessing Knowledge)

is a reflective assessment approach and supervision framework for the on-campus student employment experience.

The UAA Student Affairs Assessment Team (A-Team) established Alaska PEAK to elevate on-campus student employment as an intentional and high-impact practice that will enhance students’ personal development, professional growth, and academic success. Alaska PEAK uses brief, structured conversations between student employees and their supervisors to support students to reflect and connect learning from their diverse campus experiences.

History of Alaska PEAK

With over 850 students employed at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) annually, Student Affairs (SA) at UAA recognized the valuable opportunity to make student employment a high impact practice. In 2015, the A-Team began establishing a foundation for the creation of a comprehensive on-campus student employment program. The A-Team collected baseline data on the student employment experience, prioritized the identification of student learning outcomes for on-campus student employees, and began the creation of a systematic student employment program and assessment process.

Student Outcomes Survey

The A-Team conducted two student surveys to collect baseline student employment data. The A-Team administered the UAA Student Employee Student Outcomes Survey in August 2015 to collect information on how students perceive their employment experiences and articulate growth and development. The survey was administered to the 726 students employed on the UAA Anchorage campus in spring 2015; 34% (n=248) responded. Survey results showed that student employees identified personal accountability, working cooperatively with diverse populations and responding to the needs

of others as the top three skills gained from working on campus.

Project CEO

The A-Team administered the Project CEO (Co-curricular Experience Outcomes) survey in May 2016 to examine the impact of co-curricular and other outside-the-classroom experiences on students’ development of employment skills. The survey was administered to a 3,000 UAA student sample and received an 18% (n=537) response rate. The survey highlighted the ten most desirable skills for new college graduates to possess, as identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in its annual Job Outlook survey.

Project CEO helped the A-Team to identify the top skills that students were gaining from their various campus experiences and how UAA graduates are building skills to support Alaska’s workforce. As identified in the table below (table 1), the survey evaluated the degree to which students felt they achieved each of the career competencies desired by employers and which experiences contributed to their learning and development. This table illustrates how the different learning outcomes and co-curricular experiences work in concert to create a well-rounded and informed student.

	CLASSES	INTERNSHIPS	CO-CURRICULAR	JOBS (ON-CAMPUS)	JOBS (OFF-CAMPUS)
1 ST	Writing & Editing Reports	Career Knowledge	Teamwork	Verbal Communication	Problem Solving
2 ND	Quantitative Analysis	Decision Making	Verbal Communication	Decision Making	Decision Making
3 RD	Information Processing	Problem Solving	Decision Making	Problem Solving	Workflow Planning

Table 1. Knowledge/experience gained from Project CEO survey defined by University engagement area.

Student Employee Learning Outcomes

The A-Team then drafted the UAA Student Affairs Student Employee Learning Outcomes (SELO). These learning outcomes were informed by the survey data collected and grounded in the learning and development outcomes identified by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS).

Intended as a guide for supervisors to support the professional development of individual student employees, the learning outcomes prioritize the following categories. As a result of on-campus student employment at UAA, students will have the opportunity to develop:



PRACTICAL SKILLS

Demonstrating competency in customer service, project management, technical skills, effective communication, time management and goal setting and attainment.



COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY SKILLS

Articulating an application of resources, referrals, and federal/state/university policies and regulations, and an awareness of transferable skills.



INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Sustaining collaborative teamwork opportunities, an appreciation and awareness of diverse communities and practices, and implementation of conflict resolution and mediation.



INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS

Recognizing individual development evidenced by a commitment to ethics, integrity and realistic self-appraisal.

After creating a sound assessment foundation, the A-Team researched best and promising practices for student employment programming to help inform the creation of a student employment program at UAA. The A-Team would like to recognize the University of Iowa for their leadership in student employee assessment and Iowa GROW® for providing inspiration for Alaska PEAK.

Alaska PEAK Program Elements

The resulting Alaska PEAK program provides a structure for meaningful interactions to occur between supervisors and student employees, a venue for students to reflect and create connections between learning occurring in the classroom and through on-campus employment, and an opportunity for students to gain skills that will be valuable to future employment. This structure ensures that all student employees have an equitable and consistent experience regardless of the department in which they work.

Students and supervisors participate in Alaska PEAK during each fall and spring semester that a student is employed on campus. At the beginning of each fall semester, students and supervisors participate in Alaska PEAK orientation sessions. The student employee orientation introduces Alaska PEAK and SELO as part of the Student Affairs culture—evidence that supervisors truly care about what students are learning through their UAA experiences. Similarly, the supervisor orientation provides Alaska PEAK as a structure for the role supervisors can play in helping students make connections between work and academics.



Alaska PEAK uses brief, structured conversations between student employees and their supervisors to support students to reflect and connect learning from their diverse campus experiences. The program requires supervisors to host two Alaska PEAK conversations with their student employees (either as individual or small group conversations) each semester. These conversations foster a relationship between student employees and their supervisor and provide a venue for supervisors to help student employees to effectively articulate their learning experiences and goals while at UAA and beyond.

Each conversation includes core questions about what students are learning and how they are applying their learning (table 2). Supervisors ask two standard questions during the first meeting of the semester and a different three questions during the second meeting of the semester. Students reflect on and respond to these questions in advance of their in-person conversations through the Blackboard Learning System. Supervisors are encouraged to ask additional follow-up questions based on the functional area in which the student works or the personal or professional goals of the student.

In addition to the two Alaska PEAK conversations per semester, supervisors assist each student employee to produce a well-developed resume by the end of the spring semester. This resume illustrates the student's accomplishments and skills developed from their on-campus employment positions. Each spring, students also complete in an End-of-year Student Employee Survey, which evaluates key outcomes of student employment and work-academic connections.

Five Core Questions

- 1 Often student employees make connections between their job and their studies. What are you learning in class that you can apply here at work?
- 2 What skills would you like experience developing that you feel would better prepare you for the future?
- 3 What skills are you gaining in your job that you can apply to your future career and personal life?
- 4 What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment in your position this semester?
- 5 How has your time in this role impacted your student experience at UAA?

Table 2. The five core questions supervisors ask students to reflect on during meetings.

Evolution of Alaska PEAK

Alaska PEAK's development process and implementation phases were structured for the purposes of collective buy-in from students and staff. The roll-out process was set in stages to occur over the course of three years to ensure enough time to course correct or incorporate input from both students and supervisors.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, four SA departments participated in the Alaska PEAK pilot; more than 60 students and nine supervisors participated. Year one closely followed the Iowa GROW® program model. The A-Team evaluated resulting feedback of students and supervisors from the pilot year and adapted the program to better meet the needs of students at UAA. The A-Team designed new conversations questions to engage students and supervisors in a greater variety of educational elements, introduced Blackboard as

a systemic mechanism for recording conversations and reflections, incorporated a resume component to assist students in creating tangible documentation of their learning and accomplishments, instituted monthly supervisor discussion groups, and created Alaska PEAK instructional materials for supervisors.

The A-Team expanded participation during the 2016-2017 academic year and invited all Student Affairs departments to participate in Alaska PEAK; more than 30 SA professionals and over 100 student leaders engaged with the program. At the end of the academic year, the A-Team will review data collected within Blackboard and solicit feedback from Alaska PEAK participants for continuous improvement and year three implementation of the program. Alaska PEAK will expand again in the 2017-2018 academic year to include participation across UAA and throughout the University of Alaska System.



Program Impact

Through Alaska PEAK, UAA can now capture learning and development occurring through the on-campus student employment experience. Student employees develop their ability to build connections between and articulate learning occurring through their on-campus employment, academic coursework, career preparation, outside-the-classroom activities, and daily life.

Through Alaska PEAK and reflective learning, UAA students are able to communicate their transferrable skills and share their amazing stories. Following is a compilation of excerpts from Alaska PEAK student reflections.

“ Being an RA helped me to get my life on track. I was a mess before I came into the Res Life position – failing classes, having bad influences for friends, never able to hold onto a position for very long. Res Life has helped me prepare for my future and helped me get to graduation by being a strong and positive influence on me. Being an RA helped **motivate** me to get amazing grades – the best they've ever been – connect positively with coworkers that I will remember forever, create **positive connections** with residents, and encouraged me to achieve more for myself in my undergraduate than I ever thought would be possible. None of this would have been possible if I had not had an understanding, compassionate, and effective supervisor. ”

– Emma, Health Sciences
Resident Advisor, Department of Residence Life

“ My greatest **accomplishment** this semester would have to be my hallway and the inclusive environment my wing has created. Some people have told me that I am overachieving and trying too hard however, having the hallway that everyone talks about makes me feel as if the hard work Twyla and I put into it was worth it. Having people tell me that my hallway is so welcoming and inviting is the reason I will continue to do what I do. The third floor lounge always has my residents in it and it makes me feel really good that they are all friends studying **together**. Another accomplishment I have is the **inclusive** vibe my hall has. The doors are always open on my floor which means my residents feel at home. ”

– Ashley, Biology Major
Resident Advisor, Department of Residence Life

“ I've learned a lot about **emotional intelligence** in this job and I think that will help me in my job as an officer [in the Air Force]. Being able to **recognize** the emotional state of a resident or coworker is a valuable skill that has been **developed** in my position at [Residence Life]. ”

– Andy, Management/Economics
Resident Advisor,
Department of Residence Life

“ I am currently in a social psychology course, and I can definitely **apply** a fair amount of what I am learning in class to my work as an RA. We discussed self-fulfilling prophecies today, for example. In social psychology, self-fulfilling prophecies are not solely the work of one person. They are, actually, the work of someone treating someone else a certain way. The second person then may **internalize** the way they are being treated, and become that way even if they were not that way beforehand. I try my best to be **objective** and treat all residents the same way. I would never want to imply someone is a certain way (even if they are!) because by doing so I could be feeding a loop where they are told (whether explicitly or not) they are that way and then become it. Out of all my courses, social psychology by far is the most relevant to this question. Understanding peoples' motivations is crucial. I believe Hide brought up, in a one-on-one, considering why residents will say something to us/someone. Social psychology tries to **understand** peoples' motivations, emotions, attitudes, etc. ”

– Janessa, French and Philosophy (Pre-Med)
Resident Advisor, Department of Residence Life

“ This role has helped me by exposing me to **diversity** that I hadn't previously experience. This has helped me **grow** as a Christian and helped me to listen to others, challenging me to put myself in other individual's shoes. It has also helped me with **time management**, which has made me a better student, being able to handle more challenges throughout the semester. I am gaining skills in **leadership, communication, and listening**. These skills have helped me receive a fellowship with the Center of Excellence here at UAA the Arctic Domain Awareness Center (ADAC). I have been told by engineering professionals that these skills are very valuable in this field. ”

– **Matthew, Civil Engineering**
Resident Advisor, Department of Residence Life

“ One thing that I have **learned** in class is how to **construct and derive** ideal circuits, and I never thought about it until my rehire interview but in a sense everything can be viewed as a circuit and if one thing doesn't work then the whole circuit won't work. If I connect that to my hall I think that there are a lot of things that can go wrong and the only way to make sure it works, is to make sure that all the components/factors are working correctly. ”

– **Miguel, Electrical Engineering**
Resident Advisor, Department of Residence Life

Supervisor Impact

Alaska PEAK supervisors also expressed positive impacts through participation with Alaska PEAK. Monthly Alaska PEAK supervisor roundtable discussions, introduced in the 2016-2017 academic year, have created a support network among student supervisors. These monthly discussions provide an opportunity for professional staff to connect as student supervisors, discuss the progress of Alaska PEAK and strategies for supervision, share experiences or challenges as supervisors, and learn together through structured professional development offerings. Discussion topics include, developing soft-skills among employees, fostering professionalism, identifying personality traits, managing conflict, developing resumes, and navigating human resource policies.

Alaska PEAK provides supervisors the opportunity to connect with other professional staff across campus in a shared student-centered experience. This on-going network enhances the professional development of both senior and novice student supervisors. Through the roundtable discussions, many supervisors highlight the impact student supervision is having on their professional awareness and the benefits of intentional student supervision. Some supervisors also report incorporating Alaska PEAK style conversation questions into their interview process for student staff. Following is a compilation of Alaska PEAK supervisor reflections.

“ PEAK has helped me as a supervisor in helping me **reflect** on what kind of **role model** I want to be to my staff and how I can **help them gain** the professional skills they need and to be able to articulate these skills when it comes to job applications, interviews, internships or other opportunities. PEAK also helps me reflect on my staff as a whole and helps me fill in gaps or areas where some might be struggling and where others are strong. ”

– **Carmen, Residence Coordinator**
Department of Residence Life

“ As a supervisor, Alaska PEAK has acted as a comprehensive tracking mechanism for the **meaningful conversations** I have been having with my staff; offering a more complete way for us to reflect **classroom impacts**, and how their role as a student leader has shaped their collegiate experience. Furthermore, PEAK has created the opportunity for student staff to articulate their **learned soft-skills**, and relate those skills to their chosen career fields. ”

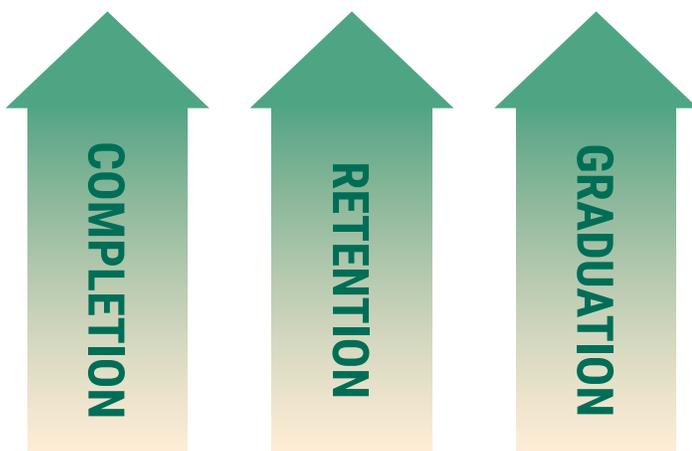
– **Heather, Residence Coordinator**
Department of Residence Life

Institutional Impact

Student employment shows strong promise at UAA as a high impact practice and a key indicator for student persistence and success. Tinto's Theory on (college student) transition states that students are more likely to persist if they are connected to at least one person at their college or university. Through the facilitation of the Alaska PEAK program, students not only learn life skills that will support their post-graduation employment outlook, but they are also establishing a connection with a campus administrator and affinity to the institution.

While the long-term impacts off Alaska PEAK are yet to be determined as the program is in year two of its development, analysis of UAA student employment data proves that on-campus student employees persist, academically perform, and complete at higher rates than their non-student employee counterparts. Following is a compilation of student employment data.

Approximately 831 students were employed on campus in FY16. While UAA enrollment has declined over the past five years, the number of students employed has remained constant. In FY16, 26% of international students and 21% of on-campus residential students were employed on campus.



On-campus student employees are more successful at completing credits than comparable non-employed students; student employees achieved at a 0.88 success ratio, compared to 0.83 among non-employees. This variation is particularly evident at earlier stages of their degree progress; first-time freshmen student employees achieved a higher average success ratio of 0.83 in FY16, compared to 0.73 among non-employees.

On-campus student employees within the IPEDS cohort graduate at over twice the rate of non-employees; of the 2011 cohort, 55% of students employed on-campus during at least one semester graduated within 6 years, compared to 19% of students never employed on-campus.

Students within the IPEDS cohort who have worked on campus for at least one semester are retained at higher rates; 78% freshman to sophomore retention among on-campus student employees compared to 66% among non-employees.

CONTACT

Please direct any questions concerning this report to:

Whitney Brown

*Assessment and Strategic
Projects Director
Office of Student Affairs
wabrown3@alaska.edu*

Ryan-Jasen Henne, Ph.D.

*Director
Department of Residence Life
rhenne@alaska.edu*

