

Opinion: Alaska's educational needs call for flexible solutions

By Denise Runge

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Buildings on the campus of the University of Alaska Anchorage. (Loren Holmes / ADN)

Alaska is at a pivotal moment. As industries evolve, job requirements shift and communities face changing economic pressures, the path from education to career is no longer straightforward. For many Alaskans, balancing work, family and education is a challenge — and traditional educational models don't always fit.

That's why the University of Alaska Anchorage's role as a dual-mission university is more important than ever. By combining technical and short-term training with traditional bachelor's and graduate programs, UAA provides flexible pathways for students to advance their education, gain job-ready skills and build their futures step by step.

At dual-mission universities like UAA, education is not a one-time event but a lifelong resource. A student can start with a certificate or associate degree, enter the workforce and return later to build on their credentials. This approach doesn't just reflect individual needs — it's necessary to meet Alaska's demand for a skilled and adaptable workforce.

But creating these pathways requires more than program design. UAA is improving internal processes and making thoughtful changes to how we support students and faculty at each of our campuses across Southcentral Alaska. Recent feedback from faculty, staff, students and industry leaders is helping us identify areas where we can be more efficient and responsive. Whether that means streamlining administrative processes or creating better support systems on individual campuses, the goal is to remove barriers so students can focus on learning and growth.

Our faculty and staff are central to this mission. Many faculty come to us directly from industry. Their expertise and dedication drive UAA's success and help guide decisions about how we can improve as an institution. By working together, we are making sure that UAA continues to meet the needs of our state and beyond.

We also know collaboration extends beyond our campus walls. UAA partners with dozens of local industries to ensure students gain hands-on skills needed to succeed in Alaska's key sectors, from health care and construction to information technology and natural resources. As Alaska's economy continues to evolve, these partnerships will be critical in addressing workforce shortages and creating opportunities for all Alaskans.

On Feb. 28, UAA will hold an [accreditation forum](#). We invite students, faculty, staff and community members to join this conversation. This is an opportunity to help shape UAA's future. We want to ensure all voices are heard as we strive to be the best university we can be for the people of Alaska and the Arctic region. The decisions we make today will determine how well UAA can meet the needs of Alaska's students and workforce in the years ahead.

Education in Alaska is about more than degrees. It's about making sure that every student, regardless of background, can access opportunities to succeed. By creating pathways that allow students to start, pause and restart their educational journeys, UAA is doing its part to meet that responsibility. However, success depends on the input and support of the entire community. Together, we can build an institution that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the people it serves.

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