

## Background

The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is the largest accredited institution in the University of Alaska System. With five campuses in Southcentral Alaska, it offers courses and programs from adult basic education to graduate and professional education, and confers awards ranging from occupational endorsements to doctoral degrees.

Its open access mission means any person with the ability to benefit is eligible for admission. The majority of the institution's students are "non-traditional" and many have at-risk characteristics. Most attend part-time and do not live on campus. Nearly one-third did not enroll in a degree program at admission. Two-thirds enrolled in a developmental math or English class their first semester indicating they were not prepared for college level work in those areas. More than a third are Pell eligible, and 28% are first-generation college students.

Understanding the complex array of student populations at UAA and their different educational goals is critical to helping students succeed. As the accreditation self-evaluation revealed, there is work to be done, and UAA has laid the groundwork for improving student retention and completion rates moving forward. With a new set of strategic goals and enhanced data collection and analysis capabilities, UAA is focused on achieving significant progress on these measures of student success. Data for 2018 demonstrate progress. For example, UAA has seen a 6-point increase in the 6-year baccalaureate graduation rate.

## New Strategic Plan Addresses Student Success

Improving student success is the core of the *UAA 2020* strategic plan, now in its first year of implementation. A broad-based participatory process identified institution-wide goals and objectives built around four key values: Student Success, Excellence, Access, and Affordability. The goals focus on removing barriers to student success, improving student persistence, building enrollments to graduate more students, and increasing the graduation rate. This plan builds on efforts Student Affairs began early in this accreditation cycle. Use of software programs, such as MapWorks to identify at-risk students for academic intervention and DegreeWorks to help students plan and check progress toward completion, has helped students and faculty track academic progress. To complement these tools, UAA received additional state funds to expand advising staff within colleges, and build a framework that centralized advising resources, processes, and support to help students. At the same time, faculty worked hard to align the general education component of all associate and baccalaureate degrees, creating articulated pathways with clearer off and on ramps for students.

A new interim vice provost for student success position was created to coordinate student success efforts related to *UAA 2020*. Hired in November 2017, Dr. Claudia Lampman is aligning all current efforts on student success and reorienting the campus so that every faculty and staff member understands and embraces his/her role in supporting student success.

Major actions taken in the first year since the adoption of *UAA 2020* include: 1) Implementing *Seawolf Tracks*, a student-facing mobile app and an advising platform developed by the EAB Student Success Collaborative (EAB SSC); 2) Creating a First-Year Advising program; and, 3) Establishing a campus-wide Steering Committee to develop Academic Pathways or maps for advising first year students in a way that meets their overall interests and level of preparedness.

## Introduction

In response to the query sent by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) regarding enrollment, retention, graduation rate, and cohort default rate, UAA reviewed the data provided by NWCCU and its own data. The following pages present a brief situational overview on each topic, followed by the data, and the steps UAA is taking to improve its performance on these measures.

## ENROLLMENT

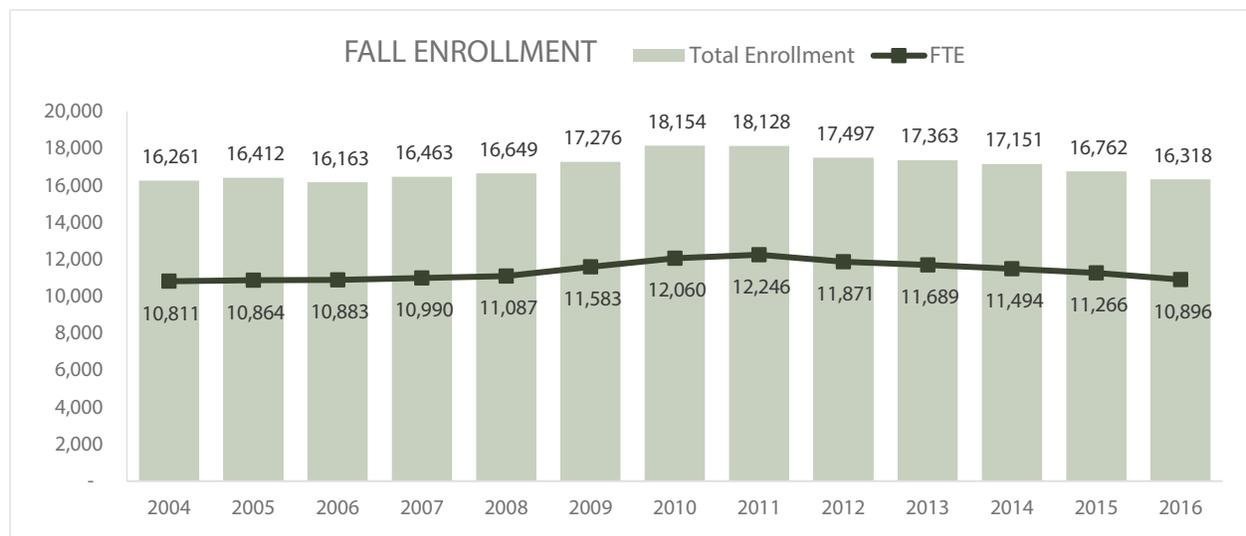
As shown in the table below, enrollment grew gradually then peaked in fall 2011. That peak was followed by a slow decline each subsequent fall, with 2016 enrollment at about the same level as it was in 2004. Because UAA attracts most of its students from the surrounding areas, changes in local population and economic conditions make a difference in enrollments. Alaska’s recent economic downturn at worst, and stagnation at best, along with a forecasted decline in the population of college-age residents, have been major factors in the declining enrollments. Below is a quick look at areas of declining enrollment:

**First-time freshmen:** Part of the peak enrollment in 2011 was due to a surge in the number of first-time freshmen fueled by a demographic bubble in this age group. The number of area high school graduates has fallen since, contributing to the decline of first-time freshmen enrolling at UAA. *(Enrollment Management, Report to Board of Regents, June 2017)*

**Non-degree seeking:** The percentage of entering non-degree seeking students fell from 41% in fall 2004 after the university adopted a policy that required even non-degree students be admitted and the subsequent move to priority registration for degree-seeking students. Non-degree seeking students now make up less than 30% of all students, including auditors.

**Continuing students:** Continuing students represented 57% of the student population in fall 2017, below the 61% peak achieved in fall 2013.

**Graduate students:** The total number of students enrolled in graduate level studies declined 27% from fall 2010 to fall 2017, reaching its lowest level of the accreditation period.



SOURCE: NWCCU-Provided Student Achievement Data from IPEDS, August 2018. NOTE: NWCCU totals do not include auditors.

## NEW STEPS TAKEN TO ADDRESS ENROLLMENT

### **New students:**

- Early in fall 2017, Enrollment Services redesigned new student recruitment strategies and admissions processes, merging the New Student Recruitment Office and Admissions Office into one unit under the direction of an executive director of Admissions.
- Enrollment Services created a four person communication team, developing a robust communication plan including a 35 piece high school senior communication plan.
- In 2018, Enrollment Services successfully completed its second year of Enhanced Search Strategies (ESS), a targeted marketing and recruitment program for high school sophomore, junior and senior markets both in and out of state.
- Enrollment Services, in conjunction with Institutional Research, developed application/admission dashboards on the IR-Reports website so staff can track progress toward enrollment on a weekly basis, adjusting recruitment activities accordingly.
- In consultation with a team from Ruffalo Noel Levitz, University Advancement and Student Affairs staff are developing 145 new academic program webpages that are search engine optimized to provide more targeted information to prospective students.
- New Advising and Registration Days, developed by Student Affairs and the colleges, began in 2018. This program provides in-person assistance to new students with collaborative presences from faculty and staff during these events. In total, 223 students benefitted from a convenient, one-stop approach to enrollment, course placement, advising, registration, and financial aid support. The next step is to track these students to assess the program.
- A new, streamlined registration process will be active for new student registration in fall 2019.
- UAA is developing a set of intentional dual enrollment strategies, with each campus featuring locally responsive approaches, ranging from concurrent enrollment courses taught in the high schools to middle colleges open to high school juniors and seniors and operating on several campuses.

### **Continuing students:**

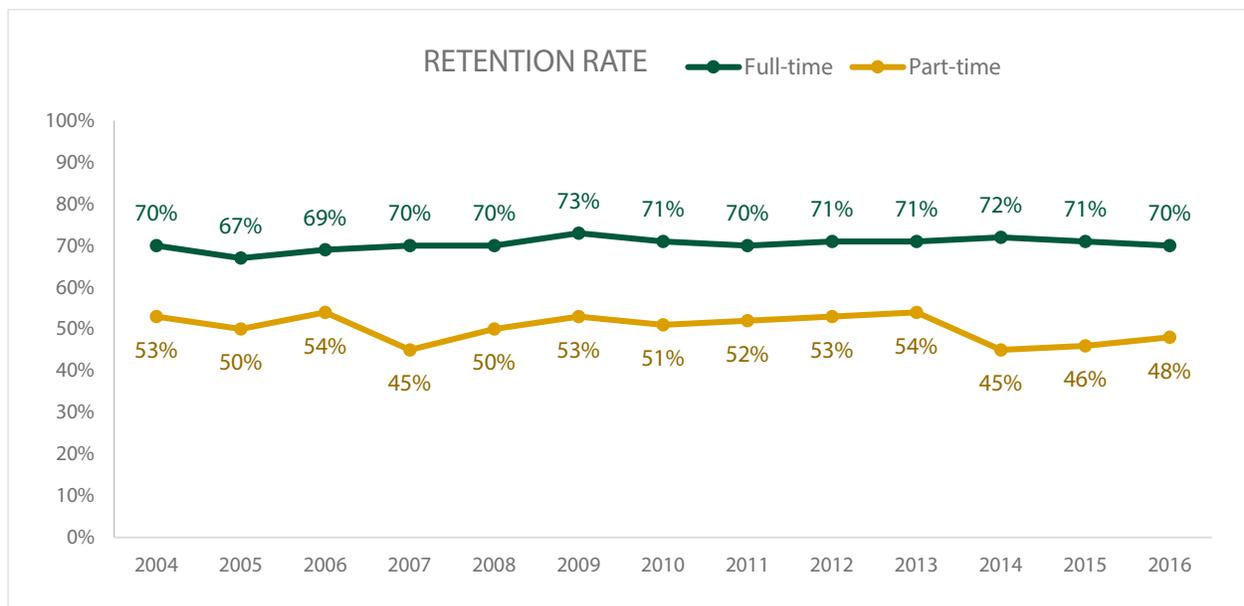
- In fall 2018, UAA implemented enhanced advising and earlier academic intervention with assistance from the Education Advisory Board (EAB) Student Success Collaborative (SSC). This strategy for reaching the *UAA 2020* goals will increase retention of all students from first to second year, and second to third year, improving overall enrollment. The SSC advising tool will ensure a more complete and structured transfer of students from their first-year advisors to academic advisors within the colleges. The goal of this comprehensive advising approach is to increase overall retention.

## RETENTION

UAA tracks the retention rate of all entering students regardless of credit load or degree-seeking status. The retention rate for first-time, full-time baccalaureate degree seeking students, a nationally recognized metric, has been a long-term institutional measure, and is shown below as the full-time data line. UAA’s first-time, full-time baccalaureate degree seeking student retention rate has been an area of strength for the institution with rates in the 70% range, and generally above the average of the institution’s peers. However, these students represent only 28% of all students entering UAA for the first time.

The number of students enrolled in developmental education courses (36% of the fall 2016 first-time, full-time cohort seeking any degree) impact retention rates. These students return at a much lower rate than those who did not enroll in developmental education (56% for those enrolled in developmental education compared to 70% for those who did not enroll in developmental education courses their first year).

Another area of concern is the retention rate for Alaska Native students. Their retention rate for the entering fall 2016 cohort was 44.7%. These students made up 17% of the entering first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen in fall 2016 but only 12% of the total returning cohort.



SOURCE: NWCCU-Provided Student Achievement Data from IPEDS, August 2018.

## NEW STEPS TAKEN TO ADDRESS RETENTION RATES

- **New tools:** Improved data collection and analysis in the Institutional Research Office are increasing UAA’s understanding of student behavior and the barriers to success.

## NEW STEPS TAKEN TO ADDRESS RETENTION RATES (continued)

- **First-Year Advising:** UAA launched a comprehensive First-Year Advising program in AY19, devoting approximately \$500,000 to this effort. Additional funding has been invested in tools, described below, to support effective advising practices. In April 2018, UAA hired its first director of First-Year Student Advising and Success. A team of seven First-Year Advisors (FYAs) was hired in summer 2018, and an eighth FYA focused on Alaska Native Student Success is being hired in September 2018. Focus areas are outreach to all new degree-seeking students, holistic transition advising to help students through their first 30 credits, and academic advising to students who place into pre-GER level writing and/or math. First-Year Advising has an integrated web and physical presence that is both welcoming and accessible. Co-located in Suite 206 of the Professional Studies Building near General Education faculty offices, they have walk-in and appointment hours. In their first month, the FYA team completed 14 training events, and logged 291 student interactions—248 in the two weeks before classes began. They also assisted with the middle college program, Bootcamp, Campus Kick-off, *Seawolf Tracks*, and the Alaska Native Early Transition program.
- ***Seawolf Tracks*:** In fall 2018, UAA is launching *Seawolf Tracks*, a suite of interconnected electronic tools developed by EAB as part of its Student Success Collaborative. The *Seawolf Tracks* mobile app for students streamlines the UAA experience through content that highlights university traditions, upcoming registration deadlines, and personalized “to-dos”. Students can connect with university resources through their network and access a comprehensive directory of student services. UAA launched the app at student orientation August 1, and reached the goal of 1,000 downloads of the app in the first month.  
*Seawolf Tracks* also includes an advising platform based on 10-years of historical data on UAA student success. A dashboard gives advisors a clear view of how a student is progressing in their chosen degree path, and when and where intervention should be targeted. *Seawolf Tracks* also streamlines appointment scheduling in concert with the mobile app. It allows advisors to identify and target at-risk students, and record session notes easily accessible by others in a student’s coordinated care network. UAA trained nearly 65 professional and academic advisors in August 2018, and expects the tool to be online and ready for spring 2019 registration.
- **Academic Pathways:** This initiative, launched in fall 2018, has two goals: 1) develop first year course maps to help students complete key milestone courses in their first year based on their level of preparation and career interests; and, 2) expose students to multiple fields of study within their selected Academic Pathway. The Academic Pathway Steering Committee began meeting in fall 2018 to lead UAA through this process, with the goal to have the course maps developed in time for students registering for fall 2019 courses.
- **Advising within the colleges:** UAA’s colleges are also taking steps to enhance advising and student success. For example, the Community and Technical College created a new associate dean for University Studies position as well as a team of four “student success coaches” assigned to first and second year students according to their career interest/major. This team is focused on student recruitment, academic and career advising, and retention support. Likewise, in summer 2018, the College of Health created a new position and hired a director of student success.
- **Peer Led Reviews:** In spring 2017, partially funded from a UAA Fund for Excellence award, UAA began offering “supplemental instruction” style support for high enrollment, high attrition general education courses: physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology, later expanded to psychology. The funding has ended but these services continue at no charge to students through the Learning Commons.

## NEW STEPS TAKEN TO ADDRESS RETENTION RATES (continued)

- **Student Success Courses:** In spring 2018, faculty created the new course prefix UNIV and launched three credit and variable credit versions of these student success-focused courses. These courses help students transition from high school, home, or the workplace to college.
- **Tier 1 General Education Requirements (GER):** The strategies of correct student placement to improve success rates in Tier 1 GER enrollments as students enter UAA and improved assessment processes were implemented to improve retention and ultimately time-to-degree.
  - **Placement:** UAA has implemented several changes in how it assesses whether students are ready for college level math and English.
    - In fall 2016, the operation of UAA Testing Center shifted from Student Affairs to the Community and Technical College to better support student placement, credit accumulation, and retention.
    - In April 2017, UAA began using the ALEKS Placement, Preparation, and Learning for mathematics placement. Because PPL allows students to retake the exam multiple times, and provides specific feedback with online tutoring for improvement, there has been a 28% reduction in students enrolling in preparatory and developmental math in fall 2018 from fall 2017.
    - In July 2018, UAA began using NextGen Accuplacer for writing placement, while simultaneously expanding the use of “multiple measures” placement options for students who felt their initial Accuplacer score was not satisfactory. A result of these efforts has been a 9% reduction in students enrolling into developmental writing in fall 2018.
    - In fall 2018, a cross-disciplinary, cross-unit Placement Council was charged to develop a plan for clear and consistent implementation of and communication about placement.
  - **Centralized administration** of Tier 1 GERs established in July 2018 in the Community and Technical College has resulted in several key initiatives that should improve retention and completion.
    - Closely coordinated scheduling of all developmental and Tier 1 GER classes that permits students to easily switch their enrollment during the first week of classes if warranted by an updated placement. (Previously many students simply “dropped” their math or writing class the first semester and waited until spring to take it.)
    - Tightened embedded academic supports by having all developmental and Tier 1 classes visit the Learning Commons. In many cases tutors or graduate assistants working for the Learning Commons visit and/or support individual classes.
    - Expanded use of Mathematics Emporium pedagogy to Tier 1 classes, previously available only for developmental mathematics. The developmental Emporium is a powerful tool for many students to improve their course pass rate and success with math.
    - Expanded use of co-requisite model for writing classes, currently offered only for lower level developmental courses, to Tier 1 courses will begin spring 2019.
    - Scheduling faculty teaching assignments, across the spectrum of developmental and Tier 1 classes, to allow students to take both classes from the same instructor in subsequent semesters if they desire. This allows for a seamless transition into college-level coursework.
    - Creation and launch of the new Communication Center within the Learning Commons, which provides peer-to-peer support for students’ oral presentations, public speaking assignments, and group/team work assignments at every level.

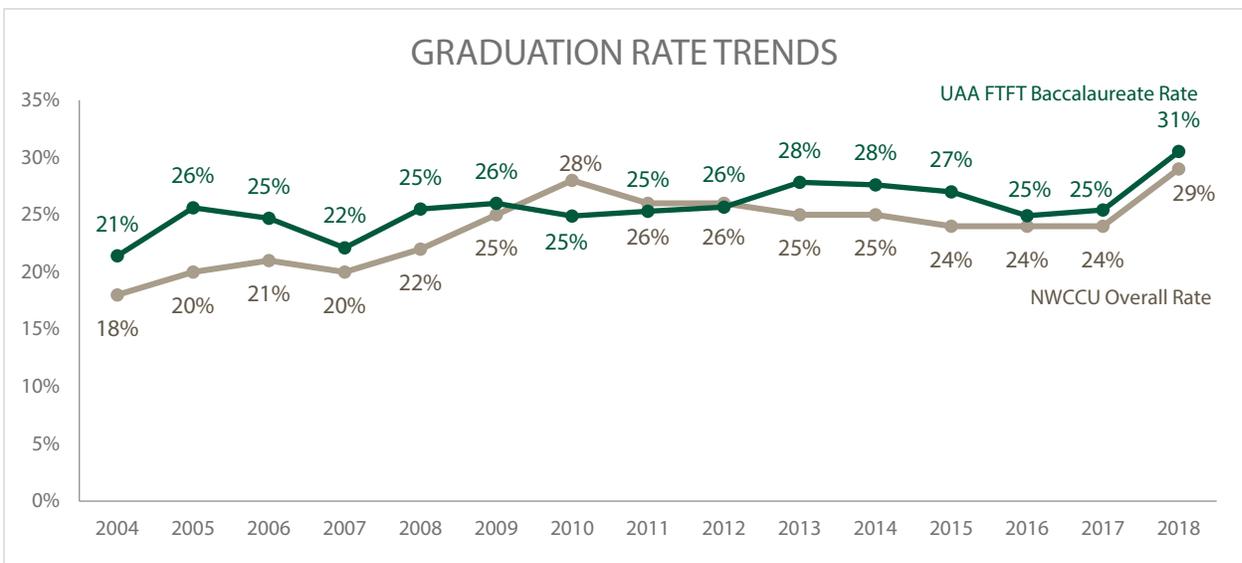
## GRADUATION RATE

UAA students successfully earn degrees and certificates, though the majority do not follow the traditional path to complete in four or six years. One result has been a persistently low 6-year graduation rate over the seven-year accreditation period, though UAA is cautiously optimistic about the significant increase in the rate for 2018. UAA has tracked the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time baccalaureate degree-seeking students since 2011, and it is an indicator for UAA Core Theme 3, Student Success. In the chart below the top line shows the 6-year rate for students who entered UAA as first-time, full-time baccalaureate seekers, with the 2018 rate at 31%, a full 6-points higher than 2017. The second line tracks the rate of first-time, full-time students who earn any degree within 6 years, a slightly lower rate than the baccalaureate-only line, but mirroring the 2018 increase from 2017.

UAA has multiple challenges in addressing the low graduation rate, including:

- **Multiple outside demands:** UAA students work off campus in higher numbers than their counterparts at other large public and urban universities. The freshmen also spend more time caring for dependents than their peers at other institutions. (*NSSE 2016 report*)
- **Underprepared:** 45% of the 2017 graduating cohort were identified as not ready for college-level writing or math. Of these students, 13.9% percent graduated within 6 years.
- **First generation college students:** 25% of the 2017 graduating cohort were first generation college students. Of these 21.8% graduated within 6 years.
- **Alaska Native:** 16% of the 2017 graduating cohort were Alaska Native. Of these students, 14.8% graduated within six years.
- **Transition from full-time to part-time:** 11% of the first-time, full-time baccalaureate degree-seeking cohort entered as full-time students in fall 2016, but transitioned to part-time by their second semester at UAA
- **Stop out at least one semester:** 68% of graduates in AY17 stopped out at least one semester before earning their degree.

Based on these challenges, UAA must increase college readiness for high school students and ensure students have strong advising and a clear academic path if they stop out then return.



SOURCES: NWCCU-Provided Student Achievement Data from IPEDS, August 2018 for NWCCU Overall Rate 2004-2016. IR-REPORTS for UAA FTFT Baccalaureate Rate and 2017 and 2018 NWCCU Overall Rate. NOTE: The NWCCU rate is an overall rate. It counts all degrees earned by each entering cohort.

## STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE GRADUATION RATES

### College Readiness

- The Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) Acceleration Academy provides a five-week residential program that prepares students for college. Students can earn college credit taking classes by university faculty. ANSEP also offers the Acceleration High School program at the Mat-Su and Anchorage campuses, offering students the opportunity to earn up to a year of college credits in various degree programs. This program received a \$500,000 general fund allocation in FY19.
- This year ACT testing for high school juniors and seniors will be funded by UAA through a \$275,000 reallocation. This early assessment will help educators support students to become more ready before they enter college.
- The middle college program added a third UAA site (the Anchorage campus) in fall 2018 through a UA Board of Regents' allocation, increasing the number of high school students acquiring college credits.

### Retention

- The newly expanded and improved advising and support focus on students as they earn their first 30 credits should increase the first year retention rate. This should also lead to increased second-to-third year retention, as students learn to be successful in a university environment and transition to their academic advisors.

### High Impact Practices

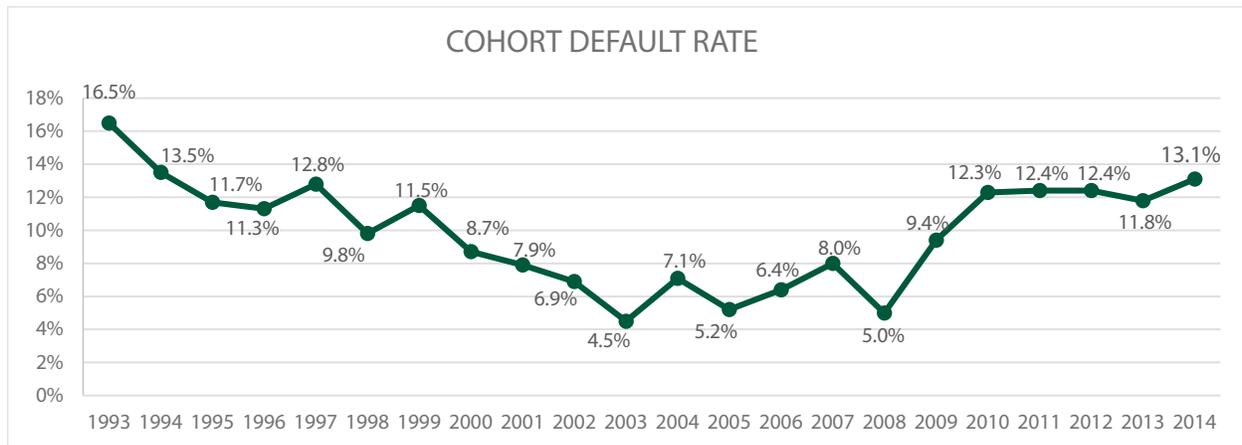
- While individual faculty, staff, programs, and offices have employed high-impact practices over the years, UAA recognizes the need for an institutional-level framework for implementing, supporting, and assessing the effectiveness of these practices. A team of six faculty and staff applied for and was selected to participate in the AAC&U High-Impact Practices Institute in summer 2017. Upon their return they have presented workshops and created videos to support faculty and staff to incorporate these practices in their curriculum and activities. The institution will leverage current strengths in the high-impact practices currently used, including service learning and community engagement, undergraduate research, and ePortfolios.

### Completion by Alaska Natives

- Kodiak College received a \$10,000 planning grant to participate in a two-year Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) project, "Reducing the College Completion Gap for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Linking Policy and Practice." This new collaborative project involving Native-serving institutions and funded by the Lumina Foundation will cultivate a network of 26 colleges and universities to help improve outcomes for Native students.
- The new UAA Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan includes recommendations to improve the success of Alaska Native students and other underrepresented populations. Examples include co-locating Alaska Native serving academic programs, incorporating diversity in the classroom and the curriculum with newly hired diverse post-doctoral positions, and expanding senior leadership to include a position dedicated to Alaska Native student success.
- A general fund allocation of \$130,000 made for FY19 will support a distinguished visiting scholar to work with Alaska Native faculty and staff, the Chancellor's Advisory Committee for Alaska Native Education and Research, and Native serving programs to design a student success model based on the indigenous leadership model of Graham Smith.

## COHORT DEFAULT RATE

UAA processes federal, state, and private loans for eligible students. Since FY12, UAA's cohort default rate (CDR) has been slightly higher than the national average. Recent steps taken, as outlined below, should show an impact starting with the FY15 CDR rate.



SOURCE: NWCCU-Student Achievement Data, August 2018. NOTE: Data after FY10 reflect a change in the federal calculation that resulted in an increase in every institution's CDR.

## STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE COHORT DEFAULT RATE

- The *Savvy Seawolf, Financial Literacy @ UAA* program, implemented in 2014, promotes and supports learning outcomes that build responsible money management skills and develop healthy financial behaviors among UAA students, especially those with student loans. Through the *Savvy Seawolf* program, students can access a range of free financial literacy workshops throughout the academic year, often offered through partnerships with other UAA student support offices and faculty members. *Savvy Seawolf* workshops focus on budgeting, credit, and student loan education, and are offered multiple times every semester. Students with questions or concerns regarding their loan indebtedness are encouraged to schedule time with UAA's Financial Literacy and Outreach Coordinator for individualized counseling. The *Savvy Seawolf* program also sends out annual student loan debt notices informing students of their cumulative loan debt and estimated payment information to supplement federal loan entrance counseling.
- In spring 2018, UAA Office of Financial Aid partnered with Inceptia to conduct a Cohort Repayment Analysis of federal student loan defaulters in UAA's 2014 3-Year Official and 2015 3-Year Draft Cohort Default Rate History Reports. Of the 5,892 students represented, 749 defaulted, a 12.7% default rate. The analysis identified common institutional characteristics that most positively correlate to a high likelihood of future default. These fell into three areas: academic, financial, and retention. Several factors were identified that can be used proactively to identify current UAA students at greatest risk of default based on enrollment points at or before the beginning of the student's first semester, during the first semester, and after the first semester. Guided by these findings, the Office of Financial Aid will partner across campus and provide targeted outreach, academic support, and financial education to students with identified risk characteristics while they're still enrolled at UAA.
- For FY19, UAA made an internal allocation of \$35,000 to fund a contract with a third party vendor to provide outreach to UAA borrowers who are delinquent on their student loan payments. The vendor will let them know their loan status, repayment options, provide financial literacy on budgeting and other money management skills, and connect them with loan services to help them avoid default. This work is expected to reduce default rates beginning with the FY17 rate.

## Summary

As the institution moves forward with *UAA 2020*, enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and cohort default rates are a top priority. The institution has invested time, effort, and funding in improving performance on these measures, and this report provides some specific examples that demonstrate this commitment. Budget requests submitted to the UA System reflect the priority UAA is giving and will continue to give to student success. The *UAA 2020* goals also align closely with the recently drafted UA Board of Regent's Strategic Priorities that focus on enrollment, completion, as well as increasing degrees awarded in health and STEM areas.

The institution has improved systems to enable UAA to be more data-informed than it was seven years ago, with the new *IR-Reports* webpages covering a broad range of institutional data. This ability to better understand the varying characteristics and educational goals of our students has already made an impact with new, more targeted approaches to recruitment, advising, retention, and completion initiatives. This accessible and more finely filtered data capability allows anyone at the institution to look more deeply at issues and use the information to make improvements.

A strength of UAA is the degree to which faculty and staff care about students and their success. When presented with a challenge, the response is positive, as demonstrated by the number of programs implemented in a relatively short period to improve retention and completion. Across the university, evidence is clear that UAA is proving its commitment to improving student success, now and into the future.