



## Accreditation Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report

### Executive Summary

#### INTRODUCTION

UAA's *Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report* to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) covers activities from 2010 to 2017. The cycle coincided with the UAA 2017 Strategic Plan, adopted in 2007, that included UAA's current mission statement, the university's vision and core values, and five strategic priorities. These five priorities align with the five core themes selected for accreditation and provide the framework for measuring UAA's success in fulfilling its mission.

Throughout this seven-year period, UAA refined measures, collected data, and assessed performance on each of the measures. The Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report provides a detailed and honest appraisal of how well UAA has succeeded in achieving its mission. The self-evaluation process yielded valuable insights that have informed decisions that will enable UAA to continue to make significant improvement.

This Executive Summary provides a review of UAA's Mission Statement and the Five Core Themes plus a synthesis of key elements and findings from the report.

#### MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of the University of Alaska Anchorage is to **discover and disseminate knowledge** through teaching, research, engagement, and creative expression. Located in Anchorage and on community campuses in Southcentral Alaska, UAA is committed to **servicing the higher education needs of the state, its communities, and its diverse peoples**. The University of Alaska Anchorage is an **open access** university with academic programs leading to occupational endorsements; undergraduate and graduate certificates; and associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees in **a rich, diverse, and inclusive environment**.*

#### UAA'S FIVE CORE THEMES

- 1) Teaching and Learning
- 2) Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity
- 3) Student Success
- 4) UAA Community
- 5) Public Square (Community Engagement)

## **BACKGROUND**

The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is the largest accredited institution in the University of Alaska System with urban and community campuses in Southcentral Alaska. UAA's campuses were formed independently in the 1950's and 1960's to serve unique regions of the state—Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the Prince William Sound area. A University of Alaska system reorganization in 1987 began the process of merging these institutions into today's UAA.

Through its five campuses and several extended sites, as well as a robust suite of distance education offerings, UAA delivers a wide range of courses and programs, from adult basic education to graduate and professional education, and confers awards ranging from occupational endorsements to associate, baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees. The university continues to develop offerings to meet the needs of the state and to provide opportunities for UAA's diverse student body of more than 17,000 students.

As the designated health campus for the University of Alaska System, UAA delivers programs critical to the well-being of communities across the state. The associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral nursing programs collectively generate more degrees than any other program at UAA except the associate of arts degree.

Consistent with its mission, UAA was one of the first institutions granted the "Community Engagement" classification in 2006 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The university successfully gained re-approval of the designation in 2015.

In 2010, the last comprehensive NWCCU self-evaluation, UAA was experiencing enrollment growth, accompanied by the development of new programs, new buildings, and major renovations of existing spaces. By 2013, student enrollment at UAA began to decline due, in part, to demographic shifts. With a decline in oil prices that began in 2014, the fiscal environment for the State of Alaska and the university became more challenging. UAA had anticipated and prepared for these changes through comprehensive review and planning. By implementing a combination of strategies including program reorganization, staffing adjustments, implementing efficiencies, and increasing revenue from other sources, UAA is managing these changes.

## **UAA STUDENTS**

Given UAA's open access mission and Alaska's unique social and economic structure, the majority of the institution's students are "nontraditional." UAA students are largely from Alaska, slightly older than the traditional 18-24 year-olds. The majority attend part-time and do not live on campus. Nearly one-third did not enroll in a degree program at admission. In addition, two-thirds enrolled in a remedial math or English class their first semester indicating that they were not prepared for college level work in those areas. UAA's student population has become increasingly diverse. Minority students are now 33.4 percent of all students.

Understanding the complex array of student populations at UAA and their variable educational goals is critical to helping students succeed. As this self-evaluation revealed, UAA struggled to improve student retention and completion rates over the last several years. Now, with enhanced ability to collect and analyze data and a new set of strategic goals, UAA is well-positioned to achieve significant progress on these measures of student success.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

With the expiration of *UAA 2017*, UAA created a new strategic plan, *UAA 2020*. Recognizing a new, more fiscally constrained operating environment in the state of Alaska and its impact on UAA, this plan has a shorter timeframe and a reduced set of priorities. In a broad, inclusive process, the *UAA 2020* planning effort coincided with the Accreditation Self-Study Open Forums held to review UAA's success in meeting its accreditation measures. The combination of looking back and looking ahead helped the institution identify four core values and a limited set of goals that focus on student success.

In 2017, the UA System funded the newly created position, the Interim Vice Provost for Student Success to lead the implementation of the *UAA 2020* plan. UAA's participation in the EAB Student Success Collaborative will provide additional support to achieving the *UAA 2020* goals.

The institution also completed a *Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan*. The product of a multi-year, campus-wide effort, it represents a significant commitment to bring diversity and inclusion to the forefront of campus planning and activities, including hiring an Associate Vice Chancellor for Alaska Natives and Diversity. Resources are being allocated to engage this plan's recommendations, including actions to improve retention and graduation for Alaska Native students and others from underrepresented backgrounds, including economically disadvantaged, international, and veteran students.

Fulfilling the goals of these plans will dominate UAA's planning and fiscal allocations for the next three years, including the goal that UAA will be a leaner, more focused institution that understands the needs of its students and places all elements of student success first.

## KEY FINDINGS

NWCCU requires institutions to demonstrate in the self-evaluation report that they are fulfilling their mission with sufficient resources, conduct adequate and appropriate planning, regularly assess their effectiveness and take action to improve as needed, and that the institutions are sustainable.

UAA reviewed staffing and faculty levels, academic programs, library resources, facilities, and technology and determined that it has adequate resources and capacity to fulfill the mission. UAA planning is broad, inclusive, updated regularly, occurs at the institutional and unit levels and generally aligns with UAA's mission and core themes.

UAA measured its effectiveness and improvement through a number of objectives and indicators related to each of the five core themes.

- **Teaching and Learning:** UAA faculty have created a culture of learning on campus with students surpassing program learning outcomes and earning credentials in fields that meet the needs of our communities and state. Program assessment is robust and exemplary, as are programs for faculty development through university-wide initiatives led by the Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence and the Center for Community Engagement and Learning. Further efforts are needed to measure the success of all students and develop metrics that provide a deeper understanding of the learning that occurs at UAA.

- **Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity:** UAA met the goal of increasing externally funded research, fulfilling the mission of discovering and disseminating knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression, especially in meeting the needs of the state. Research at UAA has grown since 2010, with increased success in winning grants, grant-related expenditures are up 37 percent, and funding is more diverse with funding from private sources more than doubling during the study period. UAA also saw an increase in number of patents awarded to faculty and students. New measures are needed to more fully capture UAA's excellence in non-funded research projects and creative activities, as well as the successes of undergraduate research.
- **Student Success:** UAA students successfully complete their studies, earning degrees and certificates in record numbers during the study period, though the majority do not follow the traditional path to complete in four or six years. However, UAA's six-year graduation rate remains low, averaging 26 percent over the seven-year study period. The newly adopted *UAA 2020* goals focusing on student success through improved academic advising, first year orientation, and academic remediation are expected to improve the traditional graduation rate and the completion rate of all students. While UAA's student population has become more diverse, Alaska Natives are still under-represented.
- **UAA Community:** UAA provides a safe place to learn and work, is becoming more diverse, and offers a rewarding and fulfilling environment for students, faculty, and staff. More work is needed to improve the diversity of university faculty and staff, particularly in the representation of Alaska Native peoples. Employees indicate a high level of pride in the institution, but budget reductions and fiscal uncertainty over the past three years have eroded satisfaction overall. And, even in the face of fiscal challenges, UAA continues to post positive fund balances and plan new programs, reflecting awareness of future conditions and advance planning in response to changes in the environment.
- **Public Square (Community Engagement):** UAA has created an environment that values and encourages collaboration and engagement between the University and our surrounding communities. UAA has assembled a Partnership Portfolio demonstrating 21 partnerships with local community organizations and academic programs in six theme areas (Healthy Communities, Positive Child and Youth Development, Access to Social Justice, Food Systems, Arts, Language and Culture, and Designing for Alaska). These partnerships show how UAA is positively impacting the lives of students, faculty, and people in the community in a deep, pervasive, and inclusive way. UAA is a national leader in developing this method of measuring university/community partnerships.

Ongoing assessment and planning enable UAA to be resilient and adaptive. UAA's horizontal planning structure ensures broad-based participation for institution-wide planning. This planning, relying on the verifiable and reproducible data developed by an enhanced Institutional Research capacity, allows UAA to identify strengths and weaknesses and to develop informed responses.

UAA is closely connected to its communities through a variety of local and professional advisory boards. It has demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing environments whether those are shifting demographics that mean fewer students or developing new workforce programs to fill state needs.

## CONCLUSIONS

This self-study year arrived shortly after UAA marked its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and coincided with work on UAA's new strategic plan, *UAA 2020*, as well as the UA System's Strategic Pathways initiative. The synergy created by the accreditation review and *UAA 2020* planning enhanced both efforts, and provided valuable context for the Strategic Pathways work. UAA's goals align closely with the recently drafted UA Board of Regent's Strategic Priorities that focus on enrollment, completion, increasing degrees awarded in STEM areas, increasing research and invention disclosures, and lowering costs for students.

The institution has improved systems to enable UAA to be more data-informed than it was seven years ago, with the new *IR-Reports* 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 more accessible and more finely filtered data is also enabling the institution to identify more meaningful measures and indicators than simple quantitative measures such as total student credit hours.

Perhaps the greatest challenge UAA faces is helping all students succeed in their educational goals. Many of these students arrive at UAA underprepared for college-level work, attend part-time, and are first-generation college students. Many succeed, but UAA's low six-year graduation rate signals that many more struggle. As an open access university, it is essential that UAA works with its students on their terms. As a public higher education institution, it is also essential that the institution does better in making the student academic journey shorter and more affordable. And the *UAA 2020* goals are focused on addressing those needs.

UAA's accreditation self-study has demonstrated that the institution is fulfilling its mission to discover and disseminate knowledge, and to serve the higher education needs of Alaska in an open access, rich, diverse, and inclusive environment. The year long, self-evaluation process revealed both areas of strengths and areas that need work.

Our findings around mission fulfillment and core theme objectives, the lessons learned as we implemented assessment and improvement around these objectives, our enhanced data and analysis capacity, and our strong and continued commitment to student success moving forward will serve as the foundation to begin the next accreditation cycle.