UAF uses of the University of Alaska Graduate Survey

UAF values the consistency and continuity of the information provided in the annual survey by the McDowell Group, although we agree that a biannual survey would serve just as well. The Provost, Vice Provost, and Vice Chancellor for University and Student Advancement review each report for areas of concern, and share those with deans and student services staff as appropriate. Selected results of the survey are reported as one of UAF’s accreditation indicators. Continued favorable graduate assessments of their experiences is one of UAF’s objectives in the self-assessment required for accreditation. Currently student satisfaction is high and dissatisfaction is very low, 2-5%, in most categories. UAF’s survey results in recent years have been stable. Certainly, if there was a significant drop in satisfaction in any area, administrators would look into the area further and try to identify the problem. However, most of the questions are broad enough (e.g., How satisfied were you with your overall academic experience?) that the survey itself does not provide actionable information. It can only indicate that there is an area that needs to be examined further.

UAF has been working on ways to increase student engagement, which is known to foster both retention and graduation, and also tends to increase student satisfaction. These efforts include investments in undergraduate research, the Honors Program, and the Northern Leadership Center, as well as intensive advising in the Student Support Services Program model. Over the past two years UAF has invested activities beyond the classroom that enhance the quality of student life on our residential campus. These efforts include the creation of the Hulbert Nanook Terrain Park, UAF Climbing Wall, outdoor broom ball facilities, and renovations to the Student Recreation Center. Additionally, the quality of student life will be significantly enhanced in 2014 when construction is completed on the expansion of the Wood Center Student Union.

The area where graduates indicated the most dissatisfaction was "preparation for your career". Overall, 11% of UAF graduates were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 18% neutral, and 71% satisfied or very satisfied. Baccalaureate graduates were least satisfied. The Provost has discussed this issue with the College of Liberal Arts dean and charged him to work with faculty to develop materials describing how BA degrees prepare graduates for employment, as well as giving students specific advice on how to improve employment opportunities (e.g., choice of minor, co-curricular activities, internships and other work experiences while in college, post-graduate study, etc.). Career services at UAF are being completely revamped, and close ties are being developed with the Human Resources office.

A majority of UAF graduates (55%) responded that being able to work while attending school as very important to their being able to complete their degree, and 72% worked during the last year of their UAF studies. While this is the lowest % of the three universities, it is still a large part of the total student body. UAF continues to expand eLearning as a way of making programs more accessible to employed students.

A large proportion (52%) said that financial aid was very important to their degree completion. Over 40% of the graduates took out loans, for an average debt at graduation of $29,000. The results show that financial issues influence most of our students’ success. UAF has ongoing efforts to improve and expand financial aid advising. We are actively working with the UA System Office, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, and UAA and UAS on new marketing and outreach strategies related to the Alaska Performance Scholarship Program. In the winter of 2013 UAF Financial Aid and the Development Office will launch a new, integrated scholarship website so students have better access to privately funded scholarship information and application processes.

Although the Graduate Survey provides rather broad information about the experiences of graduates, it has been useful to UAF in choosing areas for improvement. We would like to see it continued, but with adjustments over time to gather more specific information in some areas.
The MacDowell Group’s University of Alaska Graduate Survey 2012
UAA Response

The MacDowell Group’s University of Alaska Graduate Survey 2012 begins by noting that UA graduate satisfaction remains high for the UA system and for the three universities individually. Reading through the detail of the report one notes little change in any of the indicators from the previous year’s report. (It would have been helpful if the trend lines for the major variables for the past seven years had been included as well as external benchmarks.) Overall, the system continues to deliver an education and experience that meets our customers’ expectations.

The report did not highlight any significant issues. Nonetheless, several interesting questions can be raised based on the responses. For example, 22% of UAA graduates (and 22% for UA as a whole) reported not knowing what field they wish to pursue after graduating. A related question asking whether they would choose the same field of study if they could start all over again only 54% of UAA graduates (and 53% for UA as a whole) said yes.

These two answers together suggest that better career advising needs to be provided early in the student’s tenure at the university. The “Career Paths” project that has been on-going at UAA for several years is one tool to address this issue. Not knowing where you are headed increased probability of failure to achieve the goal, wasted time to reach the goal and increased cost to the student and the system. Making the wrong choice can be a life-long issue for graduates. A missing piece of data that UAA is starting to gather is the percent of new students undecided about their field of study when they arrive who are successful, transfer or dropout.

A second example is the number of students who have found the Career Services Center helpful in their time at the university. The CSC provides services to support students seeking internships during the college career as well as employment upon graduation. Fewer than 60% of the graduates had found the CSC important during their tenure. Either the center is not performing its job well or it is not performing a function that adds value to the student’s educational experience. In either case, a closer look at how the center is operated, its services and outputs is warranted. We will be looking at the function as part of the prioritization effort currently on-going at UAA.

Two other items standout in that same category. First, less than 9% of UAA graduates found online classes important in helping them to attain their degree. It is difficult to tell whether this is a result of the number of courses/programs available online or just the student’s preference for face-to-face classes. Given the significantly higher percentage of UAS graduates who found online classes helpful, one might guess that it is the availability that makes a difference. The question needs further study given to push to move online and the increased cost associated with such a move.

Second, support from faculty was ranked less than 10% in importance for UAA graduates and close to 20% for UAF graduates. UAA faculty members have not been as actively engaged in advising as UAF faculty. This is changing as one of your SDI efforts to improve the overall advising and counseling of UAA students from initial contact through graduation. New faculty evaluation guidelines put more emphasis
on student advising. Training for faculty members is under development. We hope to see this number change significantly over the next decade.

Overall, the survey fails to provide actionable information. It does point out some deficiencies but without sufficient information to support decision making. UAA plans to implement a student satisfaction survey in the near future. In addition, small studies to get at the root of some issues, e.g. the lack of value placed on the Career Services Center, are being performed as needed.
University of Alaska Southeast
Response to UA Graduate Survey—McDowell Group 2012

UA Board of Regents—September 2013

UAS Highlights in McDowell Group Survey

The University of Alaska Graduate Survey 2012 confirmed that the University of Alaska Southeast is on the right track in supporting student learning and success in its academic and workforce development programs. UAS graduates expressed satisfaction with faculty and staff, with opportunities to take classes and programs online, and with their overall experiences as a student.

Highlights include:

**Student satisfaction:**
- 91 percent of all UAS graduates were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall academic experience (p. 10)
- 93 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall education, and intellectual and personal growth
- 85 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their preparation for a career
- UAS graduates were more likely to be very satisfied with their UA experience in every category (p. 4)
- UAS graduates were much more likely to cite support from faculty and the ability to take some or all classes online (p. 4)
- 88% of UAS graduates noted that “support from UA staff” was somewhat or very important (p. 18)

**Students putting their knowledge and skills to work:**
- UAS graduates were significantly more likely than the average to use their skills and knowledge daily in their job (p. 3)
- For those UAS graduates who had identified a career field, 7 in 10 reported they are currently working in that field (p. 4)
- UAS graduates were more likely to be satisfied than the average with career preparation (85 percent) (p. 8)
- UAS graduates reported the highest mean annual salary compared with all graduates (p. 39)
- UAS graduates were least likely of all UA grads to report a difficult or very difficult challenge in finding a job (p. 42)

**eLearning opportunities:**
- UAS graduates, more than others at UA, indicated that the ability to take some or all classes online was important to them (p.15)

**Improving trends in student satisfaction:**
- Net satisfaction levels among UAS graduates rose in all categories between 2011 and 2012
- Net satisfaction levels with UAS graduates’ overall academic experience rose from 87 percent to 91 percent

Future Actions Based on UA Graduate Survey

The UA Graduate Survey 2012 confirms that UAS is on the right track in focusing on student learning and student success. Our mission, vision, and core themes—coupled with UA Strategic Direction Initiative themes—are providing appropriate direction and encouraging results. Continuing this graduate survey over time will provide longitudinal data that will enable us to track our ongoing efforts.

With continuous improvement in mind, UAS will continue its focus on student retention, providing exceptional opportunities for students, and being a leader in offering innovative online/eLearning programs. To improve retention, UAS is implementing a new Early Alert system for at-risk students, and it now offers an Academic Recovery Program. We’re using EMAS Retention Pro and DegreeWorks to improve our advising and our communication with students. We continue to focus on development of our Honors Program, undergraduate research and creative expression, and student engagement in our communities (e.g. through internships, practicum experiences). And we continue to focus on improvements to our online program offerings, providing faculty training through iTeach workshops, peer review of eLearning programs and courses, and faculty mentoring.