

# Goal #4

## *Increase degree attainment*



UNIVERSITY  
of ALASKA  
*Many Traditions One Alaska*

### **BACKGROUND/CONTEXT**

The university's students are its most valuable constituency. Not only is it our responsibility to provide for student success, but we must encourage them to graduate in a timely manner. Degree attainment means inspiring more college-going, working to educate more skilled graduates, and providing degree programs that lead to future success. The educational success of students attending the University of Alaska is among its highest priorities.

The university is committed to preparing Alaskans to become educated members of our state's workforce and to meet the state's workforce needs. Our graduates will continue to find opportunity in many sectors of the Alaska economy – in research, teaching, engineering, nursing and for those who choose a career in the trades or innovation. But we face challenges. Our enrollment population is declining. We rank 49th out of 50 states in college-going. In 2017-18, of the 7,796 high school seniors, 46.4 percent continued on to college. Of those who went on to college 36.4 percent left the state. As of 2016, 28.8 percent of Alaskans have at least a bachelor's degree.

### **BENEFITS TO ALASKA**

#### **Increase the pool of skilled Alaskans**

- By 2025, 65 percent of the jobs in our economy are projected to require workers to have some postsecondary training. The last time this was measured, Alaska met 37 percent of this need.
- There is an opportunity to train thousands of adult Alaskans and provide them with training and credentials to meet Alaska's growing demand for skilled labor.
- Increased degree attainment means we can alter rising unemployment rates.
- For example, health care is the sector of the economy that will employ many of our graduates, and we expect that sector to continue to expand in the future.

#### **Improve the economy and community**

- People with college degrees earn more money, put more money into the economy and build ties to their alma mater. Communities grow when a thriving university attracts students who often remain there and become part of its economic and cultural fabric.
- Higher education is associated with greater employability, a stronger and more diversified economy, better health, more civic engagement and citizens who give back to the communities in which they live and work. That's great for families, business and for the future success of our state.
- UA graduates who remain in Alaska are well positioned to innovate and create new enterprises to serve our state for years to come.

#### **Improve the health and safety of Alaskans**

- Good jobs with higher incomes grant families the ability to purchase healthier foods, to live in safer homes, and to access better health care. These factors result in increased community health, especially in terms of decreasing incidents of chronic disease.
- Higher rates of degree attainment directly relate to decreased crime rates and incarceration. People in the age range of 16 to 24 who have dropped out of high school are 63 times more likely to commit a crime and to become incarcerated than people who have at least a bachelor's degree.

## CHALLENGES

- College participation rates for Alaska students from low income families are among the lowest in the country (less than 10 percent).
- UA's student headcount is down by more than 5,000 students from fall 2013 to fall 2017.
- UA's degrees, certificates, and endorsements are down more than 300 from FY14 to FY17.
- Many Alaskans would benefit from a low-cost alternative for post-secondary education - what states outside of Alaska provide through a community college system.
- Some still believe the myth that a long-term career employment in Alaska is possible without some level of post-secondary training or education. The truth is that almost all careers in Alaska, in all industries, require post-secondary training or education.
- Currently, there is not a high value placed on education, and well over half the students that start their college careers at UA do not finish their programs.

## SOLUTIONS

### **Expand access to affordable post-secondary education**

- UA continues to work on developing a low cost alternative for Alaskans to help them seek out and afford a post-secondary education through UA's community colleges. Most community college systems focus on helping individuals looking to improve their workforce skills, are not well prepared to enter a university environment or have limited means to pay for their post-secondary education.
- The FY19 budget includes a provision to provide a tuition discount for certain occupational endorsements and one-year certificates.

### **Change the narrative surrounding Alaska's employment trends**

- UA is working with state partners and industry leaders to develop compelling narratives for why training or education following high school is needed for careers in all industries in Alaska.
- UA is working with school districts and the state Board of Education, among others partners, to help Alaska grow a "Culture of Education" to foster a holistic approach to growing the value placed on education in our state.

### **Increase marketing and improve online services to attract adult Alaskans**

- UA is using targeted media and increased presence on radio and television across Alaska to reach out to potential students to encourage pursuing post-secondary education. The campaign is targeting adults with some college but no degree, teacher education, and attracting students looking to advance in their current careers.
- A new website has been created to simplify the experience for new, particularly adult, students.
- A task force is working on improvements to online services that will make it easier for new and returning students to register, enroll in courses, find financial aid and make payments, with extra emphasis on the ease of use of the online tools.

### **Increase completions at UA**

- Students are increasingly able to leverage the entire UA system to achieve their educational goals with greater collaboration across the system. This includes expanding e-Learning with institutions inside and outside the state.
- We are overcoming the assumptions that currently plague the transfer and acceptance of credit between UA campuses, standardizing general education requirements, and increasing cross-campus collaboration.
- UA is using analytics to identify common roadblocks to achieving degree completion and developing solutions to simplify those processes or add additional student support services where needed.