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Getting credits: University of Alaska launches effort to keep students on track

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Editorial

It seems simple enough, but not everyone who enrolls in college receives the clear and consistent message that a student has to average 15 credits per semester to complete a four-year degree in four years.

The new University of Alaska campaign encouraging students to “Stay on TRACK” will help communicate that message loud and clear.

One of the problems is for purposes of financial aid, “full-time” means 12 credits. There are all sorts of reasons why some students should limit themselves to 12 credits. They may have some catching up to do in class or they may be working a full-time job outside of school, for instance.

But for many students, “full-time” should be at least 15 credits.

For freshmen entering the university for a four-year degree, only about 10 percent finish in that time. The national average is 30 percent.

The graduation rate for those students after six years of college is 28 percent for the university statewide (the number is somewhat higher at UAF) and 55 percent nationally at public institutions.

UA President Pat Gamble is making the point that students can save money and accomplish the graduation goal by taking at least 15 credits. About 60 percent of the four-year degrees at UA require 120 credits, while the others require more than that. Even for those, “the idea that less time means less expense still applies,” Gamble says.

A new UA website, www.alaska.edu/stayontrack, contains details of the campaign.

“Eventually, staff and faculty working on the campaign would like to build in additional incentives — perhaps even tuition incentives — for students who make the promise and keep it. A second phase of the campaign will target students working on two-year associate degrees,” a UA press release states.

The University of Alaska has a long history of hosting nontraditional students who take longer to obtain their degrees. The mix of students, in fact, adds to the institution’s character and charm. However, there’s nothing charming about finding out you need an expensive additional year of school when you weren’t expecting it. The new campaign should help make such surprises less frequent.