

The Effectiveness of UAS Financial Aid Stay on Track Awards Fall 2012 and Spring 2013

During initial state-wide efforts to inform students about the long-term cost- and time-saving benefits of taking at least 15 credits each semester, UAS asked students who were in 12-14 credits why they weren't taking more credits. According to the UAS retention study¹, 23% of respondents said financial reasons prohibited them from taking a full 15 credits. UAS responded not only to the long-term cost advantage of taking more credits, but also to student concerns about the immediate cost of taking additional credits. Full-time undergraduates (with sophomore, junior, or senior class standing, who were taking fewer than 15 credits, who were in good standing, and who submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid to take advantage of available federal funding) were offered \$500 in tuition waivers (the cost of a lower division three-credit class) if they enrolled in a total of 15 credits per semester during Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. There were 130 tuition waiver recipients enrolled for Fall 2012, and 126 for Spring 2013.

Improvements to full enrollment and persistence metrics for performance across UAS were attributed in large part to the strategic leveraging of the financial aid tuition waivers². The percentage of undergraduates taking 30 credits over the course of the year increased by 4.5 percentage points from FY12 (11.3% of undergraduates) to FY13 (15.8%). Of the full-time students enrolled in Fall 2012, 49.4% (n=154) were enrolled in 15 or more credits for the first time. The Fall 2012 to Spring 2013 persistence rate was at 81.4%, an all-time high for UAS.

Encouraged by this success, UAS conducted an analysis of student success measures to determine whether the academic performance of students receiving the waiver was negatively impacted by their greater enrollment load. To the contrary, the results of this analysis clearly show that fully enrolled undergraduates (those in 15 or more credits per semester) consistently out-performed students who were minimally full-time (in 12-14 credits), possibly due to a greater level of engagement³. Furthermore, of the high-performing fully enrolled undergraduates, those receiving the tuition waiver did even better.

¹ McDowell Group, 2012, *University of Alaska Southeast Student Retention Study*, p. 5, http://www.uas.alaska.edu/student_services/docs/uas_mcdowell_retention_study2012.pdf.

² UAS 2013 Performance Review, p. 6-7, http://uas.alaska.edu/provost/ie/docs/Performance_Review/UAS_Performance_Review_FY13.pdf.

³ For example, the 2013 National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE, reports that across the nation, "students who were enrolled full-time... interacted most often with faculty members," <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/11/14/nsse-2013-measure-student-engagement-and-learning-outcomes>

Student Characteristics

Of the 1,630 full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates at UAS over Fall 2012 and Spring 2013, 38.4% (n=626) were fully enrolled in 15 or more credits. Stay on Track tuition waiver recipients represented 15.7% (n=256) of full-time undergraduates. Of those receiving the waiver in Fall 2012, 32.6% (n=42) were taking 15 or more credits for the first time⁴.

Compared to minimally full-time undergraduates, fully enrolled students were more frequently freshmen (32.1%, n=201), seeking baccalaureate degrees (72.5%, n=454), living in on-campus housing (36.7%, n=230), and generating more credits at the upper division course level (27.9%, n=2328). Compared to non-recipients, tuition waiver recipients were more frequently of sophomore (38.3%, n=98) or senior (35.2%, n=90) class standing, and even more were seeking baccalaureate degrees (84.4%, n=216), living on campus (39.8%, n=102), and generating more upper division credits (34.7%, n=1194)⁵.

Student Success Performance Metrics

The relative success of the full-time degree-seeking undergraduates was analyzed by the two enrollment load levels (minimally full-time and fully enrolled) and student groups (tuition waiver recipients and non-recipients) for five measures: successful course completion rates, UAS and UA semester GPAs, fall-to-spring persistence rates, fall-to-fall retention rates, and the percentage who were awarded endorsements, certificates and degrees. For every performance measure, students who were fully enrolled out-performed students who were minimally full-time. Of just the fully enrolled students, those receiving the tuition waiver out-performed those who did not.

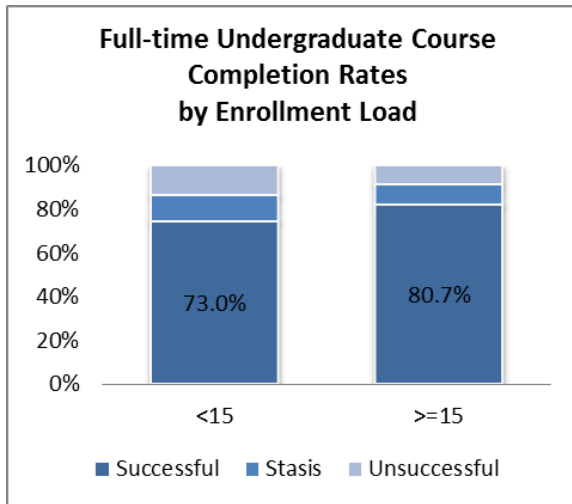
Successful Course Completion

The successful course completion metric was adopted as an indicator to support the objective of Academic Excellence, under the core theme of Teaching and Learning in the UAS Strategic and Assessment Plan⁶. Course completion categories are based on whether an earned grade meets prerequisite requirements for a subsequent course. Successful course completion is defined as the number of courses that were successfully completed with a C/Pass/Credit grade or higher. “Stasis” grades represent credits attempted but not completed and do not impact the GPA; they include incompletes (“I”), no basis (“NB”), withdrawals (“W”) and deferred (“DF”) grades. Unsuccessful grades include C-/No Pass/No Credit or lower. The course completion success rate is the percentage of all non-missing grades that were successful.

⁴ Data sources: UA Decision Support Database (DSD), compiled by UAS Institutional Effectiveness from closing extracts, and live financial aid data from the FAIJMGR schema. Data is term-based, and duplicated for students enrolled in both Fall 2012 and Spring 2013.

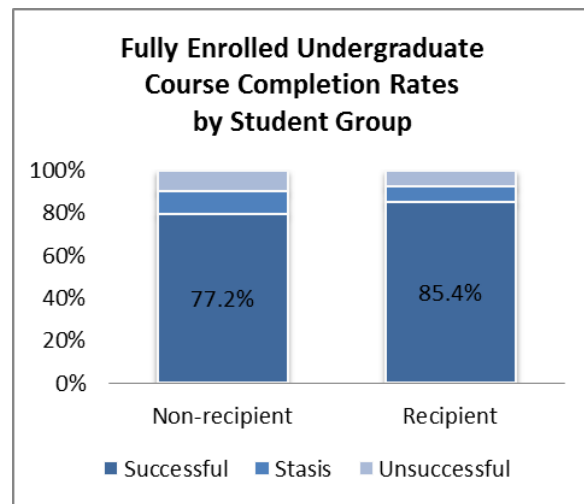
⁵ Additional descriptive statistics are listed in the Appendix.

⁶ Outline of UAS Strategic and Assessment Plan 2010-2017 Objectives and Indicators, http://uas.alaska.edu/UAS_StrategicPlan/docs/sp-indicators-outline.pdf.

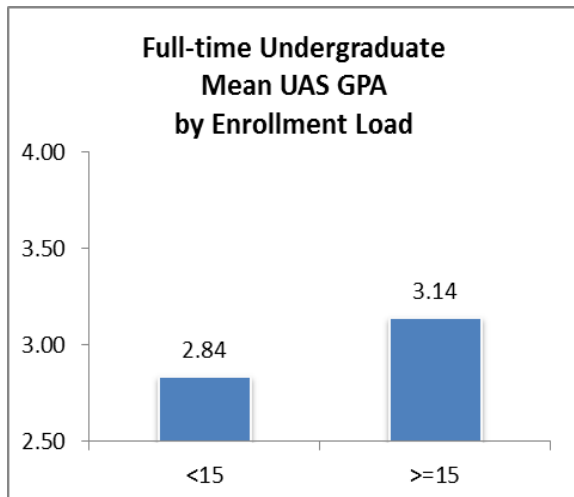


The mean successful course completion rates were significantly greater for fully enrolled undergraduates (M=80.7%, SD =0.32) than for minimally full-time undergraduates (M=73.0%, SD=0.36); $t(2,052)=-4.83, p < 0.0001$.

By student group, the mean successful course completion rates of fully enrolled undergraduates were significantly greater for tuition waiver recipients (M=85.4%, SD =0.28) than for non-recipients (M=77.2%, SD=0.35); $t(802)=-3.55, p < 0.001$.



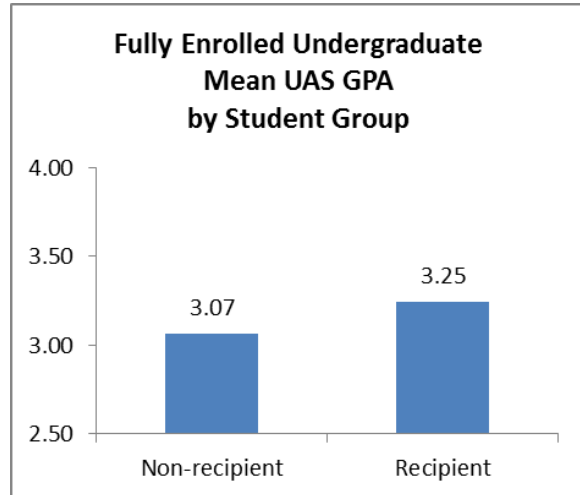
Grade Point Average



The mean UAS and UA semester⁷ GPAs were both significantly greater for fully enrolled undergraduates (UAS: M= 3.14, SD = 0.86; UA: M=3.15, SD =0.89) than for minimally full-time undergraduates (UAS: M =2.84, SD = 1.01; UA: M=2.83, SD=1.01); UAS $t(1,585) = -6.18, p < 0.0001$; UA: $t(1,589)=-6.33, p < 0.0001$.

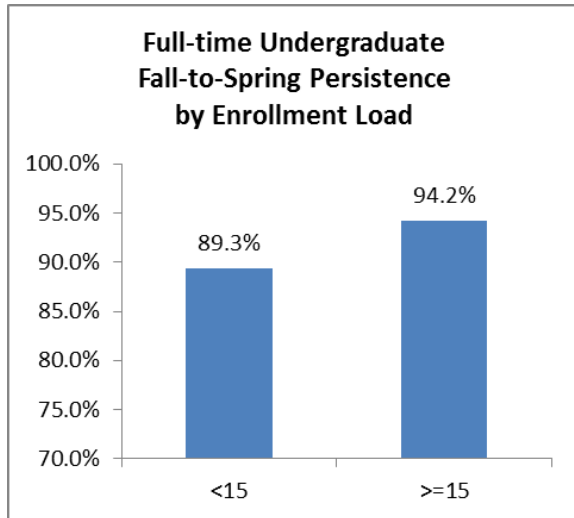
⁷ Cumulative GPAs measured before and after the enrollment term were not suitable performance metrics for this analysis for two reasons. First-time freshmen and transfer students would have to be excluded since they have no prior institutional GPA, so the control and treatment groups would not align with those used in the other performance metrics. Because the data is term-based, the prior cumulative GPA of spring recipients would reflect their “after” cumulative GPAs for those students who were also fall recipients.

The mean UAS and UA semester GPAs for fully enrolled undergraduates were both significantly greater for tuition waiver recipients (M= 3.25, SD = 0.74) than for non-recipients (M =3.07, SD = 0.93); $t(610) = -6.18, p < 0.01$.



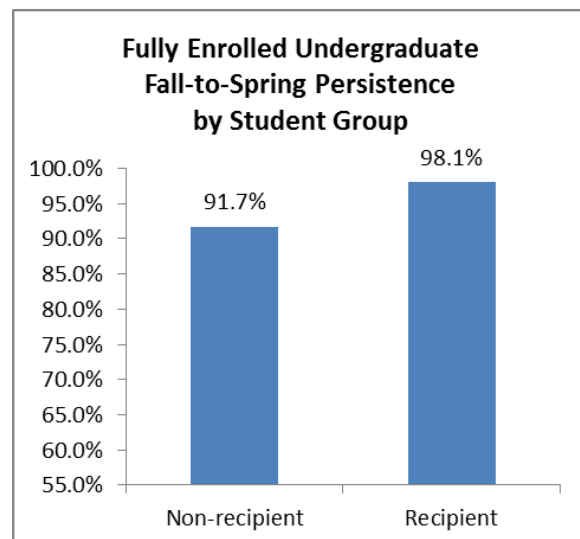
Persistence

Persistence refers to the percentage of students enrolled for Fall 2013 who re-enrolled Spring 2013 in the UA system.



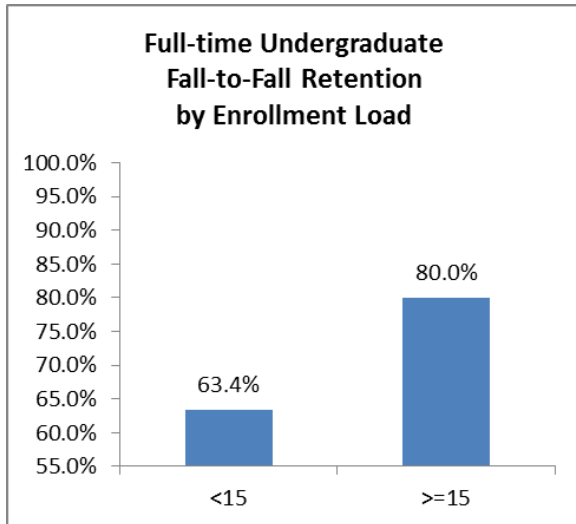
The fall-to-spring persistence rate for fully enrolled undergraduates (94.2%) is significantly greater than the persistence rate of minimally full-time students (89.3%) $\chi^2(1)=5.04, p < 0.05$, Fisher's exact test $p < 0.05$.

The fall-to-spring persistence rate of fully enrolled undergraduates is significantly greater for tuition waiver recipients (98.1%) than for non-recipients (91.7%) $\chi^2(1)=4.60, p < 0.05$, Fisher's exact test $p < 0.05$.



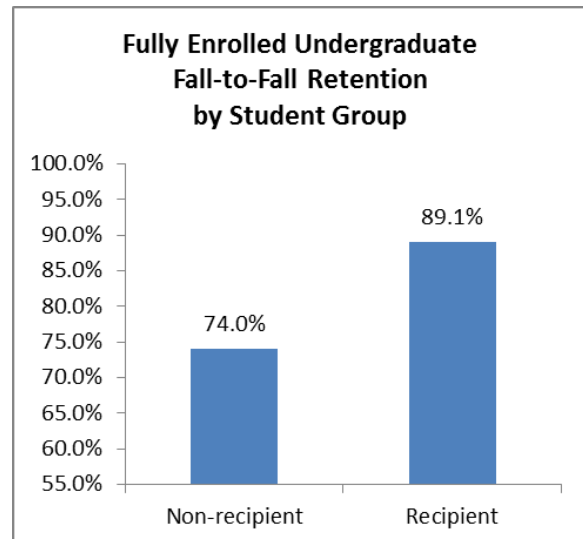
Retention

Retention is the rate at which students enrolled for Fall 2012 re-enrolled in the UA system in Spring 2013.

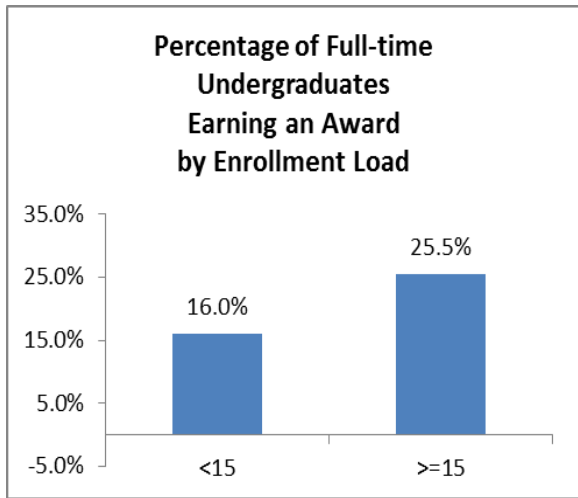


The fall-to-fall retention rate for fully enrolled undergraduates (80.0%) is significantly greater than the retention rate of minimally full-time students (63.4%) $\chi^2(1)=21.78$, $p < 0.0001$, Fisher's exact test $p < 0.00001$.

The fall-to-fall retention rate of fully enrolled undergraduates is significantly greater for tuition waiver recipients (89.1%) than for non-recipients (74.0%) $\chi^2(1)=8.67$, $p < 0.01$, Fisher's exact test $p < 0.01$.

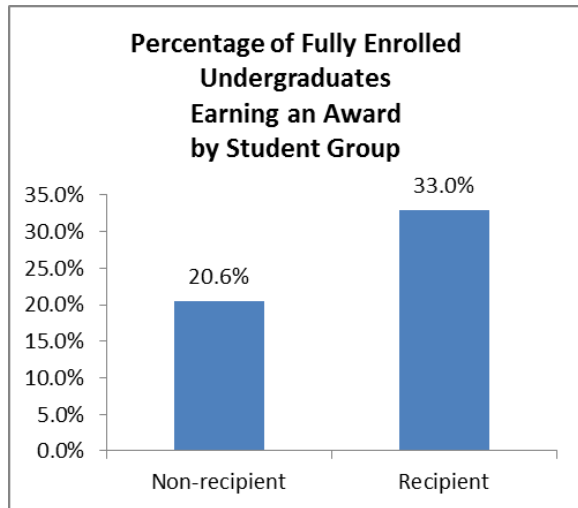


Endorsements, Certificates, and Degrees Awarded



Students were significantly more likely to earn an endorsement, certificate or degree by the end of FY13 if they were fully enrolled (25.5%) than if they were minimally full-time (16.0%), $\chi^2(1)=18.28$, $p < 0.0001$, Fisher's exact test $p < 0.0001$.

Of the fully enrolled students, tuition waiver recipients were significantly more likely to earn an endorsement, certificate or degree by the end of FY13 (33.0%) than non-recipients (20.6%), $\chi^2(1)=10.52$, $p < 0.01$, Fisher's exact test $p < 0.001$.



Appendix

Class Standing by Enrollment Load

Enrollment Load	Values	
	Students	Pct of Student Group
<input type="checkbox"/> <15	1004	61.6%
Freshmen	374	37.3%
Sophomores	240	23.9%
Juniors	190	18.9%
Seniors	200	19.9%
<input type="checkbox"/> >=15	626	38.4%
Freshmen	201	32.1%
Sophomores	137	21.9%
Juniors	125	20.0%
Seniors	163	26.0%
Grand Total	1630	100.0%

Class Standing by Student Groups

Student Groups	Values	
	Students	Pct of Student Group
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-recipient	1374	84.3%
Freshmen	570	41.5%
Sophomores	279	20.3%
Juniors	252	18.3%
Seniors	273	19.9%
<input type="checkbox"/> Recipient	256	15.7%
Freshmen	5	2.0%
Sophomores	98	38.3%
Juniors	63	24.6%
Seniors	90	35.2%
Grand Total	1630	100.0%

Degree Level by Enrollment Load

Enrollment Load	Values	
	Students	Pct of Students
<input type="checkbox"/> <15	1004	61.6%
AA/CT	362	36.1%
Bacc	642	63.9%
<input type="checkbox"/> >=15	626	38.4%
AA/CT	172	27.5%
Bacc	454	72.5%
Grand Total	1630	100.0%

Degree Level by Student Groups

Student Groups	Values	
	Students	Pct of Students
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-recipient	1374	84.3%
AA/CT	494	36.0%
Bacc	880	64.0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Recipient	256	15.7%
AA/CT	40	15.6%
Bacc	216	84.4%
Grand Total	1630	100.0%

On-Campus Housing Status by Enrollment Load

Enrollment Load	Housing		Pct of Enrollment	
	No	Yes	Category	Category
<15	688	316	68.5%	31.5%
>=15	396	230	63.3%	36.7%

On-Campus Housing Status by Student Groups

Student Groups	Housing		Pct of Student Group	
	No	Yes	Students	Category
Non-recipient	930	444	67.7%	32.3%
Recipient	154	102	60.2%	39.8%

Student Credit Hours Generated by Course Level and Enrollment Load

Enrollment Load	Course Level			Percent
	Developmental SCH	Lower Division SCH	Upper Division SCH	Upper Division SCH
<input type="checkbox"/> <15	1420	7408.5	2368	21.1%
Freshmen	1197	3018	55	1.3%
Sophomores	150	2294	273	10.0%
Juniors	41	1275	765	36.8%
Seniors	32	821.5	1275	59.9%
<input type="checkbox"/> >=15	536	5484.5	2328	27.9%
Freshmen	396	2166	35	1.3%
Sophomores	110	1495.5	239	13.0%
Juniors	11	991	709	41.4%
Seniors	19	832	1345	61.2%
Grand Total	1956	12893	4696	24.0%

Student Credit Hours Generated by Course Level and Student Groups

Student Groups	Course Level			Percent
	Developmental SCH	Lower Division SCH	Upper Division SCH	Upper Division SCH
Non-recipient	1858	10744.5	3502	21.7%
Freshmen	1577	5131	87	1.3%
Sophomores	181	2687	369	11.4%
Juniors	49	1751	1140	38.8%
Seniors	51	1175.5	1906	60.8%
Recipient	98	2148.5	1194	34.7%
Freshmen	16	53	3	4.2%
Sophomores	79	1102.5	143	10.8%
Juniors	3	515	334	39.2%
Seniors	0	478	714	59.9%
Grand Total	1956	12893	4696	24.0%