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The university also benefits when students finish more quickly.

“It is less costly to move graduates through in a timely fashion,” Oba said.

A university has to provide fewer services per student, or degree, and has more room for incoming students.

Students also have better access to the classes needed for graduation when everyone is progressing more uniformly toward a degree, and can thus make better progress.

The university’s efforts to improve graduation rates and increase credit loads largely revolve around the messages it sends. The Shaping Alaska’s Future initiative includes a focus on student achievement and attainment, and improving graduation rates for higher education.

“The number one thing we can control is what we tell our students,” Oba said.

The university’s “Stay on TRACK” campaign is a part of that.

Stay on Track encourages a heavier load. The website component provides tips and resources for graduating on time.

Throughout the UA system, and much of the nation, full-time for an undergraduate is considered 12 credits, largely due to federal financial aid definitions. But it won’t lead to a degree in four years.

Taking 12 credits per semester for eight semesters only gets a student to 96 credits, Oba said.

The minimum requirement for a University of Alaska baccalaureate degree is 120 credits, although some programs require more than that.

At 15 credits per semester, a student can finish in four years.

Oba said the university is encouraging students to make steady degree progress by either taking 15 credits per semester, or 30 during the course of the year. The university has also encouraged students to meet with an academic advisor regularly and pay

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attention to the classes they're taking and their overall degree progress, Oba said.

The state has helped with that push by providing \$1.4 million in increased funding for academic advising in the last two years.

In a 2012 UA survey, students overwhelmingly said that more and better advising would help them graduate on time. Parnell's Alaska Performance Scholarship has also helped with the 15-credit push.

The scholarships require students to take a minimum of 15 credits per semester beginning in their sophomore year.

Last year, the first class of APS recipients was sophomores. This fall, three classes will be enrolled — and two will be subject to the credit requirements.

Each campus in the system has also found its own way to encourage the campaign.

At University of Alaska Southeast, students have an additional financial incentive to make progress, Oba said.

There, students who complete 15 credits in a semester receive a \$500 tuition waiver. That's inline with the 2012 survey, in which respondents said that free credits were the best incentive to graduate in four years.

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