Bridging the Gap: Deferrals, Leaves, and Skipped Cohorts

Mary Jo Finney, Ph.D., Dean, Graduate School
UAA
1000 faculty
14,000+ undergraduates
600+ graduate students
~36% identify as non-white
~8% Alaska Native
Primarily commuters
Military Friendly School
ANCHORAGE
Largest city in Alaska
Home to 40% of all Alaskans
Highly diverse population
Location of state’s largest university-UAA
UAA
GRADUATE
SCHOOL

22 master’s programs
10 master’s certificates
2 doctoral programs
4 collaborative degrees
75% part-time students
The Context: ALASKA

663,000,000 sq. miles
Pop. 733,391
Three major cities
More than 200 remote villages
High wage jobs requiring minimal formal education
Trends in Leaves of Absence
AY 2017-2021


- Family
- Work
- Health
- Academic
How is UAA Accommodating Leaves of Absence?

- Reassuring faculty/administrators that enrollment disruptions are temporary
- Offering workshops on teaching
- Hosting Graduate Education Learning Community addressing admission standards, scholarly projects, and advancing graduate education

- Exploring approaches to incentivize enrollment and support persistence including:
  - Incremental credentialing
  - Dual degrees offering greater scope of preparation
How Will Accommodations Shape Future Cohorts?

Increasing Leaves of Absence negatively impact semesters-to-degree metric

Students resuming their degree affect expected faculty workload

Conversations planned to appropriately revise success metric

Student workshops held addressing motivation, work-life balance, and skills needed for degree resumption
Would We Make the Same Decision Again?

Granting a Leave of Absence is essential to evoking student agency.

Eliminating Continuous Registration Fee may reduce Leaves of Absence.

Removing system for tracking student progress may lower persistence.
Thank You