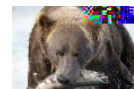


## Recommended Stories



Bears take over the planetarium



UAA student Kevin Arias-In the contest, students posted a "selfie," or self-portrait, to UA's Facebook site indicating with their fingers how many years it would take to earn their degrees. The contest is part of University of Alaska's annual Stay on TRACK campaign, now in its third year, which encourages students to graduate quicker and with less debt.

The contest ran during October and November. The top prize was two round-trip tickets on Alaska Airlines. Arias-Monge, who is Hawaii-bound with his winning tickets, had this advice to share with fellow students: "Focus on your studies and limit yourself to anything recreational until the work is done. School first, play later."

UA's efforts to encourage full-time students to take additional credits have made a difference. Students who attempted 15 or more credit hours had a higher credit hour completion rate than those who attempted less than 15 credit hours. In the long term, students who attempt and earn at least 15 credit hours a semester perform significantly better than full-time students who take less than 15 credit hours a semester. First-year retention to the second year of college is 23 percentage points greater for students taking 15 credits per semester compared to students taking lighter course loads. And graduation rates among full-time students with heavier loads are an impressive 39 percentage points higher (over a 10-year period).

Alumnus Kil McNamara won \$250 toward the department of his choice. McNamara shared that timely graduation is important because "the cost of the tuition is much different when you graduate on-time and save the extra years." He donated his cash prize toward the Civil Engineering Department at UAA to help future engineers.

Derek Ward won the \$250 staff/faculty award and is donating it to the OIT Data Center Operations to recognize this department's valuable work. As an employee and alumnus, Ward said he's "proud to be a part of the university for the fact there are so many opportunities available for students, faculty and staff."

Ward said, "When it comes to getting your education, outside distractions seem to be the biggest road blocks. Stay focused on your end goal at all times."

For more information about UA's Stay on TRACK campaign, visit [www.alaska.edu/stayontrack](http://www.alaska.edu/stayontrack).

