

**UAS Associate of Arts Degree Program  
Program Review Committee**

Richard Simpson, John Radzilowski, and Aimée Richards

To: Paula Martin, Interim Dean Arts and Sciences

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**Review Committee Recommendations and Comments**

The committee members have reviewed the five-year report and IRC Report on the Associate of Arts degree as well as feedback provided by Dean Tom Thornton. In preparation for this document we also solicited feedback from current student advisors. This document identifies several action items toward improving the student completion rate of the AA degree at UAS.

The Associate of Arts degree provides students with a broad general education and, as stated in the academic catalog, “is designed to be a transfer degree to bachelor programs.” While the purpose of transferring into a bachelor degree remains vital, students desire to obtain an AA degree for additional reasons. Thus before addressing the suggestions for improving student graduation rates in the AA, it is helpful to know the various types of students who are now actively pursuing an AA degree at UAS. Students enrolled in the Associate of Arts - General program do not fit one profile but fall into one (or more) of the following categories:

- a. Students who applied into a bachelor's program but did not meet the admission requirements and are therefore automatically placed into the Associate of Arts - General program. Once these students successfully complete 30 college credits they can apply into their chosen major.
  
- b. Students who apply directly into the Associate of Arts program as an intentional stepping-stone to transfer to a UAS or non-UAS degree (either at UAA/UAF or outside the UA system). These students, often local, generally want to extend their time in SE Alaska as long as possible before transferring into their intended program, such as a Bachelors of Social Work, Engineering, Computer Science, Nursing, etc. Some students are APS/UA scholarship recipients and would like to use as much of their UA scholarship before transferring out-of-state. Others would like to complete an AA degree prior to leaving SE. We also have a significant number of students living in SE who would like to complete their AA-general as a career stepping-stone before they complete their Bachelor of Social Work online from UAF.
  
- c. Students who are undecided and use the Associate of Arts - General program to explore different subject areas within the electives section.

d. Students who intend to complete the Associate of Arts as a stand alone program and do not intend on completing any additional programs.

Identifying how this degree does or does not serve the needs of different students provides an opportunity, not only to improve the degree as it now stands, but also to make the degree more broadly accessible to a wide range of students that now arrive at our door, thereby increasing the rate of completion for all students interested in obtaining an AA degree at UAS.

The committee identifies four necessary courses of action to improve understanding of this degree which has not had consistent faculty attention or consistent oversight for several years. This information is now necessary in order to best assess how this degree can serve students, provide an accessible and available two-year or less curriculum, and ultimately improve the matriculation rate of the AA degree: 1) Increasing specialized tracking; 2) Establishing, maintaining, and streamlining clarity on the accessibility and availability of courses, course prerequisites, and credit requirements within the AA program across the three UAS campuses; 3) Expansion of the purpose of the degree (beyond “a transfer degree into an AA”) to retain and attract students into the AA degree; 4) Creating an annual review committee to oversee, collect, and assess collection data collected about this degree, its students, and its courses in addition to addressing the specific needs of the AA degree program. We address each of these in detail below.

### 1. Increase Tracking of Students in the Program

Student enrollment in the AA since 2016:\*

Year	Students Enrolled	Degrees Awarded
2016	154	37
2017	137	50
2018	136	45
2019	118	41
2020	66	40

\*Pulled from Institutional Effectiveness dashboard on 2/25/2021

Other than the number of students enrolled and degrees awarded there has been almost no tracking of students within this degree. In the above table, we note the decline in students enrolled in the AA, however a relatively steady number of AA graduates through a time of budget cuts and the pandemic when most programs saw a sharp decline. This chart provides information for the past five years which helps to understand the consistency of degrees awarded from 2016-2020, however, more information is necessary to draw conclusions. In order to fully understand which students are

best served by the program and how to make the program most effective, a number of data sets are necessary:

1. Over the past five years, of those students who *did not* complete the degree, what percentage of them transfer into a UAS/F/A bachelor program after completing the necessary 30 credits? (Specified by each institution.) What percentage ended up transferring to an institution outside of UA?
2. Over the past five years, what percentage of bachelor students who acquire the AA degree on the way to the BA?
3. Over the past five years, what percentage of BA students acquire the AA degree on the way to the BA?
4. For comparison purposes, what percentage of students graduate with an AA degree at UAA and UAF?
5. When and why were major program changes made to the AA program?
  - a. Addition of an additional math ger (math 151, 113)
  - b. 18 credits of electives from Arts & Sciences
  - c. 20 credits at the 200 level

Additionally, in order to meet the needs of students in the degree moving forward, the AA degree requires specific tracking of students' experience within this degree. The committee proposes tracking students into the following categories as a means to fully understand how this program is serving students:

- 1) Students interested in acquiring an AA degree either for itself, or as a milestone toward the BA.
- 2) Students who acquire 30 credits and then transfer into a BA or BS program or other associate programs, such as the Associate of Applied Science in Nursing
- 3) Students who do not complete the AA and do not continue on to another degree.

To assist with this information, the committee proposes including a prompt for students to identify their reasoning for choosing the AA degree in Banner or perhaps as they are registering for classes.

## 2. Coursework in the AA degree

The Committee recognizes several critical issues related to the current curriculum structure and courses related to the degree.

Issue 1: Since the degree is only two years, many students are unable to take 200 level courses in one year since they require a prerequisite. There are many questions about the availability of 200 level courses.

Suggestion: The committee proposes the creation of a list of current 200 level courses across UAS that are currently active and would satisfy this requirement. This list should identify which of these 200 level courses have prerequisites. Coordinating these courses for frequency and delivery would improve graduation rates in the AA. Coordination is essential to keep the six-year course sequence up to date each year and make sure it is implemented. Without this coordination, it will be hard to ensure consistent offerings that will allow students to finish in a reasonable time, which is our goal. Gathering information about the 200 level courses will assist the committee in determining the correct amount of required credits at the 200 level. This information will also provide concrete data on which kinds of classes (based on disciplines, diversity, prerequisites, etc) are available or not to AA students.

Issue 2: Advisors see many students struggling to pass Math 105 and expressing discouragement in being required to complete the additional required level of Math 151/113.

Suggestion: The committee recommends acquiring data on whether the addition of Math151/113 coincides with a reduction of completion rates of the AA. With the data pulled from the request in section 1, question 1, the committee requests an evaluation of why the additional level of Math151/113 was added to the degree (UAA currently offers a Math104, Technical Mathematics, which satisfies the math requirement for their AA).

Issue 3: The requirement that 18 of the elective credits must be from Arts & Sciences classes has been problematic for many students who are completing the AA prior to entering another program that is not housed in Arts & Sciences. For example, we have many students who are completing the AA while also working towards UAF's Social Work program or UAA's Nursing, Computer Science or Engineering programs. Students intending to transfer to such programs after they complete their AA, run into the problem that their UAA/UAF coursework is not accepted as UAS electives in their AA, because so 18 of those credits need to be from programs in Arts & Sciences. As a result, many students abandon their AA degree since many of the electives they would want to pursue would not be counted in their AA electives. We recently had two UAS students petition to have their elective credit from outside of Arts & Sciences be accepted in the AA elective requirement.

Suggestion: remove the requirement that 18 of the elective credits must be from Arts & Sciences (this would be consistent with UAF and UAA's requirements).

### 3. Marketing the Associate of Arts Degree

The committee believes it is vital to identify the uniqueness and value of the AA degree beyond simply serving as a stepping-stone to the BA. This degree serves multiple purposes beyond the acquisition of the BA. Indeed, for some students the AA degree could be marketed as a degree on its own. While many utilize the AA for entry into college, the degree also serves non-traditional students, vocation-seeking students, and returning students, and so we identify numerous opportunities for expanding marketing of the AA:

1. Marketing to students seeking a low-cost starting point for a college degree who want to reduce expenses and future debt by obtaining an AA at UAS before transferring to a more expensive university. The AA serves those students as a portable, high-quality program that won't break the bank. This is particularly the case with students interested in entering programs such as nursing or engineering which UAS does not offer.
2. The surge in online teaching this past year has made college accessible to new demographics of students. High school students are electing to obtain their diploma through completing the GED test, rather than attend online classes for the year. If marketed to this new group of GED graduates, the AA degree can serve as an immediate accessible and affordable "next step." UAS' current partnership with SERRC--an adult education resource institution that provides testing in Juneau and throughout the entire state of Alaska--provides an important opportunity to market the AA as an option for this increase in numbers of college-ready students.
3. Many students, including the ones listed above, only want to acquire an AA degree. These students are undecided on a major and a career but they still desire to obtain a college degree. Some of them have broad goals that do not match any program, such as working for the State of Alaska, but the student does not yet know in which specific occupation. They seek to obtain an AA degree recognizing that doing so will open up more job opportunities for them.
4. The recent addition of coursework in Northwest Coastal Art programs and Alaskan Native Pathways curriculum will bring increased available coursework and interest in the general AA degree. Including coursework that emphasizes diversity will attract more students into the AA degree and therefore provides another opportunity for marketing outreach.

#### 4. An Annual Review Committee for the UAS Associate of Arts Degree

This committee agrees with the findings from both the Five-Year Review and IRC Report Committee that the AA degree is in desperate need of leadership in the form of a cross-campus annual Review Committee.

The Five-Year Review committee found that,

“Advising for the program is decentralized on the three campuses, and individual advisors have neither the workload capacity nor the institutional authoring to tackle these issues.”

The IRC Report concluded that,

“The AA program needs complete reorganization, starting with assigning someone to administer and coordinate program course offerings. Someone needs to be responsible for ensuring this program meets student needs at all three UAS campuses. Determine whether those students who enter the program with the intent to complete the AA, as opposed to those seeking only to take a few courses, actually receive their degrees. Figure out whether it is possible to

This committee now recommends that an annual review committee be established for AY 2021-2022 and moving forward into the near future as a vital component of student academic success at UAS. We believe this committee should be made up of the following cohort: 1) Faculty representatives from at least two different UAS campuses in order to productively coordinate with all three UAS campuses. 2) At least one academic advisor; 3) This committee should have annual access to the information acquired from tracking students in the degree as noted in Section 1 above.

While the PAC-GELO Committee works to assess and improve the GERS, this is clearly not the only need of the AA degree--nor even a substantial need--toward the improvement of student completion of the AA degree as noted in the suggestions for improvement listed above. It may, however, be valuable for the AA Committee and PAC-GELO committee to meet annually each year to address any issues concerning the GERS. Another idea is to have one faculty member on both of these committees in order to streamline effective communication regarding the successful scheduling, development, and implementation of the AA degree.

Finally, in discussing this degree, this committee recognizes the significance of the AA degree as a curriculum that unifies all three UAS campuses in a unique way, and if maintained as an effective and attainable program for incoming students, this degree can also function as a critical foundation for UAS degrees and programming in general. The formation of an AA Review Committee is therefore a direct contribution not only to recruitment and retainment of our students, but also a direct means to increase cross-campus communication on programming for faculty, staff, and administration as well. The AA degree is in a position to serve as a critical bridge for the UAS moving forward.