

Bachelor of Liberal Arts Annual Assessment Report: AY 2019-2020

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Overview

The Bachelor of Liberal Arts (BLA) is a multidisciplinary degree program in which students take classes in multiple departments (Humanities, Social Science, Math, Alaska Native Studies and Languages, Natural Science, etc.). BLA enrollments rank in the top five of all Arts and Sciences programs, according to the UAS Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Average student achievement of the learning outcomes for the degree exceeds expectations for all categories.

This report provides continuing assessment of student learning outcomes for the academic year 2019-2020. It also discusses program strengths and opportunities for improvement.

BLA Committee

Faculty actively involved in the BLA are Fall 2020 program coordinators Bill Urquhart, Ketchikan, and Andrea Dewees, Juneau, as well as committee members Stephen Florian, Ketchikan, and Juneau campus members Rosemarie Alexander-Isett, Jeremy Kane, and Forest Wagner. Alexander and Florian took over BLA coordination in Spring 2021.

Due to pandemic constraints, the BLA committee did not meet synchronously in Fall 2020. All necessary coordination occurred by telephone between Urquhart and Dewees, and via email with committee members. Following committee approval of revisions to the Exit Survey, the Program Assessment plan was finalized and submitted to the Provost on Oct. 30, 2020. BLA curriculum proposals were discussed by the committee and approved in Fall 2020 Humanities Department meetings. Urquhart and Dewees handled language waivers and course substitutions for students, and Urquhart and Florian coordinated an exit interview in December with graduating students. Alexander and Dewees attended the exit interview as additional program faculty. The committee will conduct a virtual meeting in Spring 2021.

BLA Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the BLA degree, students should be able to:

1. Articulate ideas, content, and personal goals through purposeful written or artistic expression.
2. Demonstrate interdisciplinary competency in their chosen field(s).
3. Create original work or research in their chosen field(s).
4. Critically engage assumptions, presuppositions and gaps in thought, social discourse, and creative expression within their chosen field(s).
5. Engage with the cultures and environment of Southeast Alaska.

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

BLA students assemble an academic portfolio in the Humanities 499 Capstone course. The portfolios are stored on Google Drive and a random selection are annually evaluated by the BLA faculty committee. Faculty assign scores to the following fields using a 5- point scale:

Outcome 1: BLA Outcomes Essay
Outcomes 1, 4 and 5: Language Competency and Diversity Statement
Outcome 1: Professional C.V. or Résumé
Outcome 1: Professional Portfolio Overall
Outcome 2: Competency in Designated Emphasis, Independent Design, or primary field (if interdisciplinary)
Outcome 2: Competency in secondary field (if interdisciplinary)
Outcome 2: Overall quality of writing in samples
Outcome 3: Example of Research or Creative Work
Outcome 3: Overall quality of the upper division sample
Outcome 4: Evidence of thoughtful examination of issues from multiple perspectives and reflection on assumptions, etc.
Outcome 5: Statement of Community Involvement

5-point scale:

- 0 = Nothing (no or incorrect materials)
- 1 = Minimal Evidence (inadequate)
- 2 = Some Evidence (underdeveloped)
- 3 = Meets Expectations (satisfactory)
- 4 = Exceeds Expectations (above average)
- 5 = Superior (high-level presentation, analysis, critical thinking and/or synthesis)

Assessment of Academic Year 2019-20

Four committee members evaluated 6 of 11 (55 percent) of randomly selected portfolios from AY 2019-2020. Four portfolios were submitted in Fall 2019 and four in Spring 2020. Three portfolios were submitted in Summer 2020. Each portfolio in the sample was rated by two different faculty members; *n* is the number of portfolios that addressed each competency.

	Mean	Min	Max	n
BLA Outcomes Essay	4.08	3	5	6
Language Competency and Diversity Statement	3.83	3	5	6
Professional C.V. or résumé	4.08	3	5	6
Professional Portfolio Overall	4.17	3	5	4
Competency in Primary Field	4.38	3	5	4
Competency in Secondary Field	4.19	3	5	4
Overall quality of writing in samples	4.25	3	5	6
Example of Research or Creative Work	4.00	3	5	6
Overall quality of the upper-division example	4.21	3	5	6
Evidence of thoughtful examination of...	4.08	3	5	6
Statement of Community Involvement	3.88	3	5	6

Faculty evaluators indicated that AY 19-20 portfolios met or exceeded expectations. Portfolios exhibited a wide variety of topics in research, creative work, and critical thinking. Some included multiple presentation styles (e.g., a video presentation along with a written paper), which created nicely balanced submissions. However, most writing samples also needed careful editing, as there were frequent typos and capitalization, punctuation, even grammatical errors. We continue to advocate for increased copyediting as part of the process. Not all BLA students take HUM 499, therefore completing their portfolio outside of class. Throughout the process, all students must be reminded of the need to carefully edit their work.

All students are asked to complete an exit survey and Hum 499 Capstone professors also conduct an exit interview each semester (saved to Google Drive). Exit interviews were conducted on Dec. 10, 2020. Survey and interview responses were similar, with students expressing overall satisfaction with the BLA program and their degree. These major themes emerged as strong points of the program: Flexibility of the BLA degree, online courses (especially asynchronous classes), small class sizes, and access to staff and faculty.

BLA Exit Interview Comments (Dec. 10, 2020)

Many BLA students are non-traditional, juggling jobs, family, and college. Some take years to complete their degree. These BLA program strengths worked to their advantage:

“I prefer asynchronous classes ... because I have three different jobs, so it's really hard to balance a lot of things.”

“Sometimes I was part time and sometimes I was full time, just depending on, like financially how things were going. I've been financially independent since I was 17, so, you know, it took me almost 10 years to end up with the bachelor's degree. (It) was always really helpful to have the asynchronous courses.”

“It just felt more geared to students of all ages and not just like the very young students who really don't have an established career and don't have an established life in the same way that I do.”

Program flexibility is also a draw for many students:

“I really like the idea of being able to kind of tailor my degree to what I wanted to do.”

“(The) flexible degree program was appealing...it seemed like this was a good opportunity to kind of like touch a whole lot of bases. That just sounded really good to me.”

Whether on campus or online, the small class sizes at UAS were very appealing to recent BLA graduates:

“... you basically know everybody on campus, it's really tiny. And you can get a lot of one on one time very easily with the staff, with the faculty, the teachers, the advisors.”

“I've had classes with Math Trafton for four out of the five semesters that I've been taking classes through UAS. And it's been really, really neat...just being able to have that rapport with professors instead of having to reintroduce yourself all over again every single time.”

Commented [AD1]: I'm not sure if we did one in Spring 20. The one we did in Fall 20 may have been to substitute for that. Stephen took notes. We need to check w Bill

Semester after semester, students note these BLA program strengths:

- Independent design flexibility and space for a year-long study away
- Transfer student flexibility, directed study options
- Opportunity for internships in a variety of areas, most recent examples include exhibit design at the Alaska State Museum, and public communications for the Alaska Red Cross
- Intercultural competence

Student concerns

- Students coming to UAS with an associate's degree are required to take GERs
- Reduced course offerings
- Canceled classes because of low enrollment
- Course scheduling conflicts
- Twelve-credit limit on independent studies
- Only two professors teaching Alaska Native Studies classes
- Portfolio is burdensome

Curricular and other changes

- In an effort to increase flexibility for BLA students, HUM 200 has been removed and alternatives are available to HUM 499
- In AY 20-21, a Cultural Geography primary and secondary option became available within the Interdisciplinary Studies degree
- Portfolio instructions, and the portfolio assessment rubric and process were updated in Fall 2019
- Exit survey questions were rewritten to better reflect revised learning outcomes and to provide better data

Summary of proposed curriculum revisions (AY 21-22)

- Changes to BLA core:
 - Remove Alaska Native Studies requirement from the core now that ANKGR is in place for all degree programs
 - Remove WRTG designator as an option for upper division courses
- Changes to BLA Designated Emphasis:
 - Replace AKL S470 with AKL S290
- Changes to BLA Interdisciplinary Studies:
 - Remove Theater as a primary and secondary option
- "Modern Languages" changed to "other languages" for the Humanities primary option

Future improvements*

**Please note: Many of the Fall 2019 goals are carried over here. This is the result of an unexpected retirement of a Humanities faculty member in Spring 2019 and two Humanities faculty sabbaticals in Fall 2019. Due to these factors and the Juneau BLA coordinator's Fall workload, some Fall 2019 goals were impossible to complete without an overload, which was fiscally undesirable.*

- Require that students visit the UAS Writing Center to assist with copyediting portfolio materials.
- Consider ways to streamline portfolio requirements for those not enrolled in HUM 499.
- Continue to communicate with faculty, advisors, and students about the language requirement waiver process
- Co-develop a marketing strategy for the BLA with recruitment staff
- Continue to support a recommendation made in the AY 2011-2012 Annual Report: "Complete the process of building a cadre of core, tenure-track faculty dedicated to the BLA degree program." In recent years, Humanities has lost two Juneau-based tenure-track Communication faculty, two Juneau-based Art faculty, a Ph.D. faculty member in Alaska Native Languages and Studies, and two faculty in English (one who also taught in Alaska Native Studies). The result has been overburdened faculty members who are responsible to other degrees and programs, a reduction in the pool of faculty available to serve as advisors for the program, and diminished curricular diversity within the BLA committee.

Commented [AD2]: I did finalize these in F20.

Commented [AD3]: yeah...we didn't do this