

UAS Associate of Arts Degree Annual Assessment Report – 2021-2022

Overview and Background

The UAS Academic Catalog describes the Associate of Arts as follows:

“The Associate of Arts degree provides students with a broad general education. It is also designed to be a transfer degree to bachelor degree programs. If a student intends to transfer to a bachelor degree program, he/she should consult the requirements for the advanced degree as some special general education and lower division courses are required in bachelor degrees.”

The purpose of this assessment report is to review the prior recommendations and whether they have been implemented and to recommend a path forward in developing the degree. Attention is given to the main track of the AA degree, with the assumption that the Northwest Coast Indigenous Arts Emphasis is assessed as part of the Alaska Native Studies program (if this is not the case, it is recommended that a change be made since Alaska Native Studies faculty are in the best position to assess that degree track).

Assessment Plan

The AA program received its first formal assessment in 2014. At that time, it was recommended that an assessment plan with specific learning outcomes be developed.

In 2018, a committee of natural science faculty completed the first assessment plan for the degree. That committee recommended that the Associate of Arts program be assessed in conjunction with the Associate of Science degree.

The 2018 committee also notes that because the AA degree is “essentially indistinct from the GERs with carefully chosen electives,” assessing the AA amounts to assessing the GERs. At that time, ongoing work on GER assessment was being completed by the Provost’s Assessment Committee of General Education Learning Outcomes.

The Provost’s Assessment Committee for General Education Learning Outcomes (PAC GELO) developed the following student learning outcomes, which the 2018 Assessment Plan identifies as the AA learning outcomes.

- **Effective Communication:** *Communicate thoughts and ideas effectively, orally and in writing.*
- **Critical Thinking:** *Demonstrate comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.*
- **Creative Thinking:** *Present creative works of expression, innovative approaches to tasks, or solutions to problems.*
- **Empirical Reasoning:** *Articulate the scientific method and pose well-reasoned questions in the search for answers through data.*
- **Synthesis and Analysis:** *Use and extend theoretical concepts to qualitative and quantitative applications and problem solving.*

- **Environmental and Community Engagement:** *Use and extend Indigenous and global cultural perspectives with respect for diversity of people, the sustainable use of resources, and awareness of the environment.*

The plan states further that, “rubrics for assessing the level to which UAS undergraduate students acquire these values (and satisfy the corresponding GELOs) were prepared by the PAC GELO to provide information about the level (*Beginning, Proficient, and Mastery*) of student learning... A schedule for the annual assessments of GER student learning outcomes by the PAC GELO has been established. Data from these assessments along with appropriate (and available) UAS OIE data on successful AA and AS graduate transfers to baccalaureate programs will be included in annual reports on student learning for the AA and AS degree programs.”

The work of the PAC GELO committee has continued along with annual reports:

<https://uas.alaska.edu/provost/academic-affairs/assessment/general-education-learning-outcomes.html>

The specific 2021 report is here:

https://uas.alaska.edu/provost/docs/assessments/gelo/GELO_Assessment_Report_May_2021.pdf

Change to 2018 Assessment Practice

In the 2019-20 Assessment Report, the approach recommended in the 2018 assessment plan seems to have been abandoned. The AA and AS degrees were assessed separately. No explanation for this change is included in the 2019-20 AA Assessment Report, however, several references are made to a 5-year program review and IRC report, so it is likely that the committee (consisting of Richard Simpson, John Radzilowski, and Aimée Richards) was formed *ad hoc* following the completion of the 5-year review. No assessment report for 2020-21 is on file.

Recommendations in the 2019-20 Assessment Report

The committee that completed the 2019-20 report included four recommendations:

- 1) Increasing specialized tracking of AA students, specifically:
 - a. Regarding students who *did not* complete the degree, what percentage of them transfer into a UAS/F/A bachelor program? What percentage ended up transferring to an institution outside of UA?
 - b. Regarding students who complete the AA, what percentage continued on into a BA?
 - c. How does our completion rate compare to UAA and UAF?
 - d. When and why were major changes made to the program (these include the addition of an additional math GER (math 151, 113), including the requirement of 18 credits of electives from Arts & Sciences, and the requirement that students complete 20 credits at the 200 level)?
 - e. General tracking of student reasons for beginning or leaving the program. The committee proposed 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) Committee recommendations regarding courses and curriculum:
 - a. The committee proposed the creation of a list of current 200 level courses across UAS that are currently active and would satisfy the requirement of completing 20 credits at the 200 level. This list should identify which of these 200 level courses have prerequisites.
 - b. Advisors indicated that students are discouraged by the requirement of completing Math 151/113. The committee recommends acquiring data on whether the addition of Math 151/113 coincides with a reduction of completion rates of the AA. They also point out that UA requires only Math 104 (technical mathematics) for the completion of their AA.
 - c. The committee recommended removing the requirement that 18 of the elective credits must be from Arts & Sciences and notes that this would be consistent with UAF and UAA's requirements.
- 3) The committee recommended increased marketing that emphasizes the uniqueness of the program and is directed to specific types of students who have an interest in completing an AA degree.
- 4) The committee recommended that an AA Review Committee be formed. They recommended further that it should be comprised of faculty representatives from at least two different UAS campuses and at least one academic advisor.

Action Taken in Response to 2019-20 Assessment Report

- 1) Increased Specialized Tracking
The data provided by UAS IE for this report includes the percentage of AA students who went on to complete a bachelors. If any other tracking has been completed, it is unclear where that information is located.
- 2) Recommendations Regarding Courses and Curriculum:
No action has been taken in response to this recommendation.
- 3) Increased Specialized Marketing
There has not been an increased effort to market the General AA degree. However, significant effort has gone into marketing the AA with a Northwest Coast Indigenous Arts Emphasis (this action was not taken in response to the recommendation in the 2019-20 Assessment Report).
- 4) Formation of an AA Review Committee
No action has been taken in response to this recommendation.

Revisiting the 2019-20 Recommendations

Very little action has been taken in response to the former committee's recommendations. It is worth considering whether, at this point, action *should* be taken.

- 1) Increased tracking – Simply compiling data is not useful unless that data is put to use and leads to action, in this case guiding program development or change. Without a committee, or at least a program coordinator, it makes little sense to attempt to gather the data requested by the previous committee (see recommendation 2 below).
- 2) Course and Curriculum Changes – It is true that UAA offers Math 104 (which has Math 055 as a prerequisite rather than Math 105). As a result, both BA and AA students at UAA are only required to complete one math course (Math 104), while UAS students will have to complete Math 105 *and* Math 113 (since the former is a prerequisite for the latter). UAS should consider following UAA on this and offering a Math GER that does not require MATH 105 as a prerequisite (see recommendation 2 below).
- 3) Increased Marketing – Marketing at UAS is centered around campaigns for the recruiting cycle of the entire university and representative programs identified by the Hanover report. The Associate of Arts degree (with the exception of the Sealaska Heritage-funded NWC AA Emphasis) has not been identified as a priority program. *If it were to be identified as a priority, it should be understood that resources currently devoted to marketing other programs would have to be reallocated and marketing support for those currently prioritized programs would be reduced. As well, if UAS wants to be regarded by prospective students as a 4-year institution, we should be cautious about how we market our AA degrees.*
- 4) Formation of AA Review Committee – This is a question of resources and priorities. If it is determined that the degree can be improved significantly and that this is important enough that we should reallocate resources from other areas, then a committee or work group should be formed (see recommendation 2 below).

Recommendations

The recommendations below build on the work completed in the previous assessment plans and reports with an emphasis on specific, achievable goals that will benefit the AA program and UAS as a whole.

1) Does the Degree Need Significant Restructuring?

Given that many universities accept the completion of an AA degree equivalent to completing GER requirements, it makes sense that completing an AA at UAS must include completing all GER requirements. As well, given that the goal of the AA is to provide a broad general education, it makes sense that the learning outcomes of the GERs serve as the learning outcomes for the AA. In addition to the 34 required GER credits, as it stands, the degree includes an additional 26 credits of electives. As it stands, there is a lot of flexibility in which courses students choose as their electives. Any significant restructuring would likely mean that students' choices would be more limited. This is unlikely to help students acquire a broad general education. *It seems unlikely that the degree needs a major overhaul.*

2) Review Committee

Although a major overhaul is not necessary, there is work to be completed. In particular:

- a. An assessment plan that outlines what is to be included in the yearly assessment report should be developed (this may amount to simply deferring to the yearly GER Assessment Reports).

- b. It needs to be determined whether changes should be made to the curriculum (for example, whether an additional math class similar to UAA's Math 104 should be added to UAS GERs).
- c. The catalog language describing the degree and the program learning outcomes needs to be revised and updated.
- d. Work needs to be completed regarding recommendation 3 (below).

If the UAS administration thinks that it is important to continue to develop and improve this degree, and is willing to allocate resources, a one-year work group should be formed to accomplish the above tasks. *It is important the work group also be charged with submitting any necessary curriculum changes and putting in place any systems required to complete ongoing yearly assessment reports.* This work should begin in the fall of 2023.

3) Pursue AA degree as Recruitment Strategy for Dual Enrollment Students

UAS is currently developing a plan and has allocated staff resources to dual enrollment. One way to attract such students might be to have them immediately begin working on an AA degree. With proper coordination and advising, students could make meaningful progress toward an AA while they are in high school. This could provide a motivation for them to attend UAS after high school graduation in order to finish the degree and perhaps continue their education. This should be a significant part of our dual enrollment plan. It is also the kind of opportunity that could be efficiently and economically marketed to high school students in Southeast Alaska as they are a specific group that can be easily identified and approached with a targeted message.