

Program Assessment Report

Outdoor Studies: 2021-2022

Overview

Outdoor Studies at the University of Alaska Southeast combines outdoor skills and academic coursework in order to provide a liberal arts approach to studying human recreation and interaction with the natural world.

Outdoor Studies at UAS offers three different degree programs: the Outdoor Skills and Leadership Certificate, the Outdoor and Adventure Studies Designated Emphasis in the BLA Degree, and the Outdoor Studies Emphasis area in the Environmental Studies BA. All programs include outdoor risk management, leadership, specific outdoor skills, environmental philosophy and literature, and academic electives.

ODS Program Mission

The University of Alaska Southeast's Outdoor Studies Program offers outdoor skills courses within an academic liberal arts framework. Through the combination of traditional academic and experiential courses, we help students develop a deeper understanding of themselves, their relationship to the natural environment, and the outdoor activities they pursue. UAS Outdoor Studies Programs seek to develop thoughtful, well-rounded, critical thinkers with specific skills needed to lead in outdoor and adventure settings and general skills needed to be successful in all chosen pursuits.

Core Values

The three ODS degree programs share two core values:

Informed Understanding of Outdoor Activities: Students should develop an understanding of, and continually reflect upon, the history of, cultural influences on, and environmental factors relating to, outdoor recreation and activities.

Excellence in Outdoor Skills: Outdoor skills and decision making in various environments should be performed at a highly developed level, utilizing good judgment, with the confidence and ability to be responsible for themselves and others.

Program Enrollments

There were 14 students enrolled in ODS Program in 2021-22.

8 students were enrolled in the Outdoor Skills and Leadership Certificate program. 4 students were enrolled in the ODS track of the BA in Geography, Environmental, and Outdoor Studies. 2 students were enrolled in the BLA, Outdoor and Adventure Studies.

In addition to serving ODS students, nearly all ODS courses are stacked with PE courses in order to serve a wider group of students and community members.

While course enrollments remain strong (most ODS Courses are at, or very close to, capacity), the number of enrolled program students was down significantly from the previous year in which 23 students were enrolled. We see this reduction as a combination of the fact that 7

program students graduated in 2021 and we had lower numbers of incoming students during the pandemic. And we see indications of a strong recovery. In the fall of 2022, we have 6 students enrolled in the BLA Outdoor and Adventure Studies, 8 in the certificate, and 5 in the BA Environmental Studies. We have also seen an increase in ODS applications for the fall 2023. It currently looking like we will our fall 2023 enrollments will be our strongest in the history of the program.

Assessment Tools

Exit Interviews

During or just after our final capstone field expedition we conduct exit interviews with graduating students. Students are asked to reflect on their goals and expectations coming into the program. They are asked whether the program met, failed to meet, or exceeded expectations. They are asked what they felt the best and worst parts of the program were for them, and what changes they recommend for the program.

Summary of Exit Interviews

Given that we only graduated 3 students in 2021-22, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the exit interviews. Still we will included relevant information.

Expectations – 1 students said the program met their expectations and 2 students said that it exceeded their expectations.

Best Part of the Program – 1 said risk assessment, 1 said backcountry skiing, 1 said community of people.

Worst Part/Recommendations –1 said learning to deal with various skill levels, 1 said capstone planning, one said that some of the curriculum is repetative.

Instructor Evaluations from Capstone Course:

Instructors in the outdoor studies program spend a significant amount of time interacting directly with students and working with them in the classroom and in the field. During our capstone field expeditions program instructors provide a final assessment of graduating students in four areas that correspond to our core values: professional behavior, hard skills, soft skills, and informed understanding of outdoor activities. In the area of professional behavior we evaluate students' preparedness, leadership, confidence, and composure in field environments. In the area of hard skills we evaluate students' technical proficiency in a variety of discipline-specific activities. In the area of soft skills, we evaluate students' critical thinking, decision making, communication, and judgment. Informed understanding of outdoor activities concerns students' ability to apply academic concepts to capstone activities. In each category, students are rated on a 1-5 scale (5 indicating excellence, 3 meets expectations, and 1 unacceptable).

Average of Instructors' Evaluations of Students

Professional Behavior: 4.3

Hard Skills: 4.8

Soft Skills: 4

Informed Understanding of Outdoor Activities: 4.5

Faculty Meetings

ODS faculty and directors meet regularly during the academic year.

Conclusions

We continue to be encouraged by student feedback concerning the value of the program in their lives. Based on student responses to exit interviews and instructors' evaluations of students we feel confident that that we are offering an effective program in which students acquire the skills and knowledge needed to successfully advance in a variety of professions relating to outdoor activities or to continue their education.

That said, based on our assessment we continue to implement changes that we feel will improve our program. In response to student comments, we have revised our curriculum in the following ways. Last year, we eliminated the Capstone Planning course and streamlined the material, incorporating it into our ODS 245 ODS Field Expedition course. We will continue to refine our fall Ocean Studies-spring Mountain Studies curriculum and that we want it to serve as the backbone of our ODS certificate program.