

Program Assessment Report

Outdoor Studies: 2022-2023

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 four different degree programs: the Outdoor Skills and Leadership Certificate, the Outdoor and Adventure Studies Designated Emphasis in the BLA Degree, the Outdoor Studies Emphasis area in the Environmental Studies BA, and the Outdoor Studies Minor. 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 four 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 19 students enrolled in ODS Program in 2022-23.

4 students were enrolled in the Outdoor Skills and Leadership Certificate program. 6 students were enrolled in the ODS track of the BA in Geography, Environmental, and Outdoor Studies. 9 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.

In addition to strong course enrollments (most ODS Courses are at, or very close to, capacity), the number of enrolled program students has gone up significantly from the previous year in which 14

students were enrolled. This increase slightly under reports our actual degree seekers, at least of three of whom have not completed their ODS entrance application.

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 5 students in 2022-23, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the exit interviews. Still, we will include relevant information.

Expectations – 1 student said the program met their expectations and 4 students said that it exceeded their expectations.

Best Part of the Program – 2 said risk assessment, 1 said backcountry skiing, 2 said community of people.

Worst Part/Recommendations –2 said learning to deal with various skill levels, 2 said capstone planning, 1 said that some of the curriculum is repetitive.

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: 4.0

Hard Skills: 4.2

Soft Skills: 3.8

Informed Understanding of Outdoor Activities: 4.2

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.

As Dean Silkaitis requested in their response to our 21/21 Program Assessment, looking back and looking forward the ODS program is positioned to expand, but will need one additional full-time faculty. Major requirement full semester courses (ODS 243 Outdoor Studies and Leadership, ENVI 120 Cultures & Environments, ODS 372 Mountain Studies, ODS 493 Tourism Studies) are at or significantly over capacity. With Professor Krein on sabbatical in AY22/23, and Professor Wagner on sabbatical in AY23/24, delivering core curriculum with the occasional hire of adjuncts will remain the short-term central focus. If program growth continues, conversations for an additional faculty ODS hire should begin in AY24/25.