

## **UAS Associate of Arts Degree Annual Assessment Report – 2022-2023**

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### **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, they should consult the requirements for the advanced degree as some special general education and lower division courses are required in bachelor degrees.”

The degree requires students to complete 60 credits, which must include all UAS general education requirements, and 20 credits at the 200-level or higher.

### **Assessment Plan**

There is tremendous flexibility in how students complete the AA degree, so the best mechanism for assessing learning in the AA lies in assessing GERs, which all AA students must complete. The AA 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 noted that because the AA degree is “essentially indistinct from the GERs with carefully chosen electives,” assessing the AA amounts to assessing the GERs. They also note that, since 2016, robust and thorough assessment of GERS has been completed by the Provost’s Assessment Committee of General Education Learning Outcomes (PAC GELO), making separate assessment reports here duplicative in many ways. For this reason, there has been uneven assessment of the AA program over the last few years.

### **Assessment:**

We reviewed the PAC GELO annual assessment documents, and concur with previous assessments of the AA: the PAC GELO committee has developed a robust process, and effectively assesses the following student 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 PAC GELO's detailed annual reports evaluating the degree to which our students achieve these outcomes are available here:

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

As you will see in these reports, the PAC GELO committee has developed detailed rubrics and processes, continuously improving the methodology and workshop approach. It is truly impressive work.

## **Recommendations**

Beyond highlighting the work of the PAC GELO committee, previous annual assessment reports of the AA have made several recommendations and ask important questions about improving the AA degree. These have included the tracking of AA students through UAS IE, improving marketing, focusing on dual enrollment, and forming a committee to improve the structure of the AA Degree.

We believe that data and tracking should be a central component of the 5 year program review scheduled for 2025. We concur with the 2022 assessment that marketing may be helpful, but it comes at a cost. Likewise, we agree that dual-enrollment represents a key area of focus and development for the degree, and note that the AS Coordinator and AA Coordinator Dr. Sanjay Pyare and Dr. Kevin Maier are developing a series of grant-funded dual enrollment courses aimed at improving college pathways (see the 2023 assessment report on the AS degree). We also recognize that a more robust AA-degree committee or working group may be a good idea, but because it requires committing substantive institutional resources beyond those already

committed to the PAC GELO committee which very effectively assesses GERs, this move may be unnecessary.

As our primary recommendation, we suggest that more data would be helpful to assess the AA's efficacy. While we agree that student headcount, student credit hour, and degree completion numbers from IT will be useful for tracking long-term trends in the degree, we also believe some more qualitative survey data may be necessary to learn about student perceptions and interest amongst the AA cohort.

In a series of meetings over several months this academic year, we conferred with key stakeholders (academic advisors, arts and sciences administration, faculty teaching GERs, etc), we developed the questionnaire below. We recommend implementing the questionnaire as a Google form and sending it to all students enrolled in the AA Degree, using the information to shape curricular discussions beyond those addressed by the assessment of student learning outcomes done the PAC GELO committee.

## Survey Questions

NOTE: If-statements in brackets [ ] below indicate that a question or comment will appear (or not) based on previous answers.

Did you know that you are enrolled in the Associate of Arts (AA) degree program?

- Yes
- No

[If no: end survey with a thank you statement]

Why did you enroll in the AA degree program?

- I was directly admitted into the program.
- I chose to enroll because I wanted an AA degree.

[If directly admitted: end survey with a thank you statement]

Why did you choose to get an AA degree? (pick one, if more than one apply, pick "other" and explain)

- It was required by my employer, or by a potential employer.
- I wanted to transfer my credits to another university.
- For personal enrichment, to learn and know more about our world.
- I originally intended to get a four-year degree, but decided to take an AA degree instead.
- Other

[If you completed this degree for employment] How would you describe the usefulness of this degree in terms of your job responsibilities?

- Relevant and useful
- Probably helpful in some way
- Not all that useful
- Mostly a waste of time and busy work

[If you completed this degree for employment] What would make this degree more useful to you in terms of your employment?

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[If you completed this degree for personal enrichment] How would you describe the value of the AA degree to you?

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[If you completed this degree for personal enrichment] How would you describe your experience with taking classes for the degree?

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[If you originally intended to get a four-year degree, but decided to get an AA degree instead] What factors led to your decision?

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[If you originally intended to get a four-year degree, but decided to get an AA degree instead] Why did you choose this option over simply leaving the university without a degree?

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[If you originally intended to get a four-year degree] How useful do you think your AA degree will be for you? And in what way?

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How did you hear about the AA degree?

- It was recommended by my advisor or an instructor.
- The UAS catalog.
- UAS website
- Other (please describe):

How important was it to you that the AA degree can be completed entirely online?

- Very important
- Helpful
- Not relevant to me

[If the online nature of the AA degree was very important]

Did you encounter any difficulties completing the degree online? If so please explain:

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How would you describe the quality of education in your courses overall for your AA degree.

- High quality
- Good
- Met expectations
- Below average
- Poor

Would you recommend this degree program to someone else? Why or why not? And in what circumstances?

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What are you most proud of in your coursework for your AA degree?

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Do you intend to continue on to a Bachelor's degree?

- Yes
- No

[If yes] Do you intend to remain at UAS or transfer to another institution?

- Remain at UAS
- Transfer

[If transferring] What are your reasons for transferring?

- UAS does not offer a degree in the subject I want to study (please name): \_\_\_\_\_
- Another reason (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[End with thank you statement]