

## **Bachelor of Liberal Arts Annual Assessment Report for AY 24**

School of Arts & Sciences, University of Alaska Southeast

Andrea Dewees, Ph.D. (Juneau BLA Coordinator)

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### **Brief Program Overview**

The Bachelor of Liberal Arts (BLA) is a flexible, multidisciplinary degree program in which students take classes in different areas (Humanities, Social Science, Alaska Native Studies and Languages, Natural Science, Business, etc.). It is appealing to students looking to complete a college degree, to design their own course of study, and to engage critically with a variety of academic fields. We assess the BLA through an exit survey and interview of graduating students, and through student portfolios. Average student achievement of the learning outcomes for the degree achieves expectations for all categories.

### **BLA Committee & AY 25 activities**

Faculty actively involved in the BLA are the AY24 program coordinators Andrea Dewees (Juneau) and James Ryan (Ketchikan). Two faculty members new to the BLA—Taylor Rose and Judith Daxootsú Ramos—joined us in spring semester for portfolio evaluation. This maintains Social Sciences disciplinary participation in the degree and adds Alaska Native Studies and Art.

In addition to our annual review of the assessment plan and portfolio, correspondence with the registrar and advisors, and advising of BLA students:

--Drs. Ryan and Dewees attended the summer Student Focused Learning and Assessment cohort and, as a result, we revised our assessment plan and submitted it to the Provost's office. Dr. Ryan also began surveying Hum 210 portfolio students as part of that course, which gives us new student perspectives.

--Drs. Ryan and Dewees examined student responses to the HUM 210 survey. Questions were open-ended short answer prompts, and no consistent themes emerged. However, two of eleven students mentioned their frustrations with the 6-year plan not being updated or followed and a third expressed difficulty in planning their next two years of courses (which may be related). Two others mentioned a desire for greater community involvement in the degree, either in the form of guest presenters or participation in student art projects.

--Dr. Dewees handled language waivers and course substitutions for students.

--the BLA coordinators agreed to some minor curricular changes to the degree, and although these were proposed through Courseleaf in September 2024 they were not signed by the Dean's office until after the priority deadline. These may need to be re-proposed in Fall 2025.

--The BLA coordinators revisited the Alaska Native Languages and Studies BLA primary emphasis, and Alaska Native Studies decided that we could proceed with a phaseout. This went to curriculum committee and should be completed this academic year.

--Andrea Dewees requested to present to advisors on the BLA and language waiver this spring.

--Dr. Dewees met with the Interim Dean to discuss the BLA and our assessment process.

--Dr. Dewees and Ryan coordinated to place HUM 210 students with faculty advisors, as well as with Staff Advisor Helen Akléi Dangel

--Dr. Dewees worked with part-time staff Su Reyes to tabulate BLA information in a spreadsheet that is used for tracking student outreach and advising. This is a work in progress, but has proven helpful in messaging.

--Dr. Dewees met briefly with the Director of Admissions, Brenna Heintz, about general recruiting. We expect to meet again with her at some point spring semester.

--Given that we have a number of students with Art primary or secondary concentrations, Andrea Dewees (as Hum 499 instructor) encourages students to reach out to their Art faculty for guidance on presenting their work. We were able to get more disciplinary insight on art presentation during this year's portfolio assessment meeting from Professor Ramos.

### **BLA Program Learning Outcomes**

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

1. Articulate ideas, content, and personal goals through purposeful written or artistic expression.
2. Demonstrate competency in chosen field(s).
3. Critically engage assumptions, presuppositions and gaps in thought, social discourse, and creative expression within their chosen field(s).
4. Engage with their environment and local cultures.

Dr. Dewees submitted a curriculum program change to update the learning outcomes in February 2024.

### **Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Process**

Interdisciplinary Studies, Independent Design, and Designated Emphasis Alaska Native Language and Studies BLA students assemble an academic portfolio in the HUM S499 Capstone course (or, if not enrolled in the Capstone, separately). Note that BLA Designated Emphasis ODS students are assessed separately and are not required to take HUM S499. The BLA portfolios are stored on Google Drive and a random selection is annually evaluated by the BLA faculty committee. Faculty assign scores to the following fields using the following 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 2023-2024**

Professors Ramos, Rose, and Ryan each evaluated two portfolios. Since we had both a new rubric and faculty new to the process we met for over an hour to 1) describe the process and 2) assess our assigned portfolios online at the same time. This way we were able to discuss our observations and scoring to ensure consistency. Faculty new to the BLA degree gained insight into Program Outcome 2, for example, with clarification about how many upper division credits are required for each concentration. Professor Dewees also assessed three of the portfolios (overlapping on one with each faculty member) and averaged the two scores. We intended to evaluate all six BLA portfolios however one student had removed their materials (see discussion in the next section).

	Mean	Min	Max	N
Articulate ideas, content, and personal goals through purposeful written expression	3.2	2	4	5
Demonstrate competency in chosen field(s)	3.2	2	4	5
Critically engage assumptions, presuppositions and gaps in thought, social discourse, and creative expression within their chosen field(s)	2.8	1	4	5
Engagement with their environment and local cultures	3.1	1	5	5

### **Evaluation**

AY 23-24 portfolios were evaluated using a different rubric than previous years, and the student make-up was also different with many more students having an Art primary or secondary concentration than in previous years. This evaluation demonstrates satisfactory achievement of learning outcomes, but there are some very low scores for learning outcomes 3 and 4. Dr. Dewees notes that the student who withdrew materials had higher quality materials in their portfolio and their absence leads to a lower mean score.

Some portfolios show strengths such as:

- Engagement with critical concepts and methods
- Clear connections between coursework and professional growth
- Solid writing and organizational skills

The narrative comments suggest that some portfolios might be improved with:

- More information about their degree (primary and secondary concentrations) and a brief statement situating their sample within the larger field of study
- For students with an Art primary or secondary concentration, a clearer integration and reflection on art competencies (skills, techniques, art criticism, project management, etc.)
- For students with an Art primary or secondary concentration, a personal statement that explains the student's purpose or vision (and/or tells the story of art in your life and/or art in your community and what you want your art to do in the world)
- Better interdisciplinary connections between concentrations
- More critical engagement through self-reflection and/or disciplinary reflection
- More attention to writing overall.

AY 24 survey and interview results show students expressing overall satisfaction with the BLA degree, curriculum, faculty, etc. (students chose 4 or 5 (extremely satisfied) for these questions).

One student chose 3 for the question "I am able to express breadth and depth of knowledge in my content areas."

The flexibility of the degree, including online offerings, was viewed as a strength in the exit survey. Students indicated an equal preference between synchronous and asynchronous online courses. All of the students worked at a job 12 or more hours per week, and half worked full-time. Last year, fewer students mentioned the legislative internship and other capstone options as important career-building opportunities than the previous and this year only one student had completed a practicum.

Students expressed some frustration about the scheduling (and cancellation) and frequency of upper division classes. They noted that this can make it hard to plan and complete the degree.

### **Conclusions and goals for AY26\***

*\*Please note: Many of the goals from prior years are carried over here, and in the 5-year report. Planned and unplanned faculty retention issues and competing workload demands have reduced the collective faculty's ability to strengthen our programs.*

- We emphasize the urgent need to co-develop a marketing strategy for the BLA with recruitment staff. We would also love to strategize how we can better highlight our students' work—there have been some phenomenal projects, capstones, internships, and practica in our students' degrees. These are especially important goals given UAS' general enrollment challenges. Dr. Dewees met briefly with the Director of Admission in January, and hopes to meet with them again in the course of spring semester. Faculty need workload space to develop and conduct this work in partnership with staff and we are hopeful there will be an opportunity for this in AY 26.

- Dr. Dewees continues to incorporate career resources and Handshake into Hum 499, with the goal of providing better career guidance for BLA students. This is an important aspect of workforce development and UAS is lucky to have Aimée Richards in this role.
- Our discussion during portfolio assessment highlighted the need for students to better contextualize their materials. This can be incorporated into Hum 499 instructions and assignments. Faculty assessing portfolios will need orientation with respect to learning outcome 2, “Demonstrate competency in chosen field.” The secondary concentration requires only two upper division courses and is therefore similar to a minor in terms of competency achieved.
- The proposed NWCA designator change will need coordination with the BLA curriculum prior to the October 1<sup>st</sup> curriculum committee deadline. This is relevant for both the primary and secondary emphases in Art in the BLA interdisciplinary studies degree. It is unclear which Art faculty will be taking the lead on this.
- The BLA is one of the only places where students can apply art credits to their major, and since we don’t have any studio art faculty on the BLA committee I’m not sure where to pass along information we are garnering from the portfolios.
- BLA students are satisfied with their BLA faculty advisors, although in this past year we are again experiencing challenges related to turnover. Dr. Dewees has requested a meeting with UAS advisors, and with Social Sciences, and will work with the new A&S once they are hired.
- The BLA faculty, particularly those who teach Hum 499, will continue to encourage students to copyedit portfolio materials. Andrea Dewees will continue to improve portfolio instructions and support for students with Art concentrations in AY 26.
- We will continue to update the Google Worksheet tracking BLA students to assist with timely Hum S210 and Hum S499 enrollments. We will also utilize this to identify students who have not yet declared a secondary concentration (INDS degree).
- We use a Google form for the exit survey. Hum 499 faculty and BLA program coordinators need to continue to ensure that students fill those out in cohorts, so that we can easily tabulate the responses.
- We are ecstatic to have new faculty on the BLA committee!

