

# **Program Assessment Report Outdoor Studies: 2020-2021**

## **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 23 students enrolled in ODS Program in 2020-21.

13 students were enrolled in the the Outdoor Skills and Leadership Certificate program. 8 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. We also had 2 students enrolled in the ODS Minor.

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. Almost all ODS Courses are at, or very close to, enrollment capacity.

## **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**

We conducted 10 exit interviews in 2021

**Expectations** – 5 students said the program met their expectations and 5 students said that it exceeded their expectations.

**Best Part of the Program** – 5 of the 10 students said that it was the social/community aspect of the program that was the best part for them. 2 said that the combination of academic and skills classes was the best part.

**Worst Part/Recommendations** – 3 students recommended a different schedule for our wilderness medicine course, 3 students recommended better communication with students and TA's about scheduling changes.

### **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: 3.9

Soft Skills: 4

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.

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. We eliminated the Capstone Planning course and are streamlining the material from that course and incorporating it into our ODS 245 ODS Field Expedition course. We changed the scheduling of our Wilderness Medicine class per student requests. In response to our own evaluation of student skills, we want to work more on refining students' hard skills in the field. We determined in faculty meetings that 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. Finally, we are working with faculty in natural sciences and social sciences to implement the new Program on the Environment.