

# **Bachelor of Liberal Arts Annual Assessment Report: AY 2020-2021**

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## **Overview**

The Bachelor of Liberal Arts (BLA) is a multidisciplinary degree program in which students take classes in multiple departments (Humanities, Social Science, Math, Alaska Native Studies and Languages, Natural Science, etc.). BLA enrollments rank in the top five of all Arts and Sciences bachelor's degree programs, according to the UAS Office of Institutional Effectiveness (Spring 2022). Average student achievement of the learning outcomes for the degree exceeds expectations for all categories.

This report provides continuing assessment of student learning outcomes for the academic year 2020-2021. It also discusses program strengths, opportunities for improvement, challenges, and goals.

## **BLA Committee & AY 21 activities**

Faculty actively involved in the BLA are the AY21 program coordinators Andrea Dewees, Juneau, and Stephen Florian, Ketchikan, as well as committee members Bill Urquhart, Ketchikan, and Juneau campus members Jeremy Kane, Forest Wagner, and X'unei Twitchell.

The BLA committee met in Fall and Spring semesters. In addition to our annual review of the assessment plan and portfolio assessment and advising of BLA students:

- Urquhart and Dewees handled language waivers and course substitutions for students,
- the BLA committee updated the program description for the website,
- The BLA committee noted an uptick in the number of students pursuing the new business studies secondary concentration and Dr. Dewees has been in touch with the Business department chair and advisor to explore further collaboration in support of those students,
- Dewees and Florian met with the new Dean of A&S to brainstorm some recruitment ideas for the BLA, as well as MOUs with several community colleges,
- Dewees worked through UAS' undergraduate curriculum committee to update the BLA curriculum,
- Urquhart and Dewees have worked closely with the A&S Academic Advisor Denise Carl to prepare for the advising transition when she leaves UAS in spring of 2022.

## **BLA Student Learning Outcomes**

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

1. Articulate ideas, content, and personal goals through purposeful written or artistic expression.
2. Demonstrate interdisciplinary competency in their chosen field(s).
3. Create original work or research in their chosen field(s).
4. Critically engage assumptions, presuppositions and gaps in thought, social discourse, and

creative expression within their chosen field(s).  
 5. Engage with the cultures and environment of Southeast Alaska.

### Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

BLA students assemble an academic portfolio in the Humanities 499 Capstone course. The portfolios are stored on Google Drive and a random selection are annually evaluated by the BLA faculty committee. Faculty assign scores to the following fields using a 5- point scale:

Outcome 1: BLA Outcomes Essay
Outcomes 1, 4 and 5: Language Competency and Diversity Statement
Outcome 1: Professional C.V. or Résumé
Outcome 1: Professional Portfolio Overall
Outcome 2: Competency in Designated Emphasis, Independent Design, or primary field (if interdisciplinary)
Outcome 2: Competency in secondary field (if interdisciplinary)
Outcome 2: Overall quality of writing in samples
Outcome 3: Example of Research or Creative Work
Outcome 3: Overall quality of the upper division sample
Outcome 4: Evidence of thoughtful examination of issues from multiple perspectives and reflection on assumptions, etc.
Outcome 5: Statement of Community Involvement

**5-point 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 2020-2021

Urquhart, Florian, Wagner, Kane, and Dewees evaluated 10 selected portfolios from AY 20-21 (there were 18 portfolios total; 6 for fall and 12 for spring).

	Mean	Min	Max	n
BLA Outcomes Essay	3.9	3	5	10
Language Competency and Diversity Statement	3.88	3	5	9*
Professional C.V. or résumé	4	3	5	9*
Professional Portfolio Overall	4.1	3	5	10
Competency in Primary Field	4.1	3	5	10
Competency in Secondary Field	4	3	5	10
Overall quality of writing in samples	3.9	3	5	10

Example of Research or Creative Work	3.8	3	5	10
Overall quality of the upper-division example	3.9	3	5	10
Evidence of thoughtful examination of...	3.9	3	5	10
Statement of Community Involvement	3.8	3	5	10

\*indicates one portfolio was missing this element

AY 20-21 portfolios met or exceeded expectations, on average, although the means are slightly lower than last year for most categories. Portfolios exhibited a wide variety of topics in research, creative work, and critical thinking. Some writing samples needed more careful editing, as there were frequent errors. We continue to advocate for increased attention to writing and revision as part of HUM 499, and across the UAS curriculum.

Other faculty comments noted a need for more scholarly sources in some of the writing sample bibliographies, incorporation of Alaska Native scholarship in research projects, unevenness in terms of items submitted, and some interesting creative and educational projects.

All students are asked to complete an exit survey. Due to COVID, faculty workloads, and the number of students graduating our last exit interview was conducted on Dec. 10, 2020. AY 20 survey and interview responses were similar, with students expressing overall satisfaction with the BLA program and their degree. These major themes emerged as strong points of the program: flexibility of the BLA degree, online courses (especially asynchronous classes), small class sizes, and access to staff and faculty.

The three exit surveys that were submitted in Spring of 2021 acknowledged the difficulties experienced by students, faculty, and UAS generally during the pandemic but praised UAS' perseverance and success in meeting students' needs. Strengths of the BLA included the "ability to create a major that is applicable to my career goals," and "knowledgeable, culturally aware instructors." One student noted that they would like "more options to transfer credits."

### **Challenges and goals\***

*\*Please note: Many of the goals from prior years are carried over here, as was the case in AY20. Planned and unplanned faculty retention issues, non-renewal of full-time tenure track positions, sabbaticals, and competing workload demands have greatly reduced the collective faculty's ability to strengthen our programs.*

- The departure of A&S Juneau-based advisor Denise Carl will have an impact on the BLA. Ms. Carl is a champion for students, and is instrumental in providing student program data that is difficult to capture on the IE website. Fortunately, Ms. Carl has been active ensuring that students have new faculty advisors and that those faculty advisors have the necessary training.
- The Indigenous Studies B.A. was approved by the faculty and will go before the Board of Regents in 2022. When final, the BLA committee will consider and discuss potential impacts, particularly to HUM 499 and other aspects of BLA enrollments.
- We should continue to encourage students to copyedit portfolio materials.
- We continue to consider ways to streamline portfolio requirements for those not enrolled in HUM 499, and review the portfolio elements and rubric so that there is a place to assess and place any capstone projects (generally align rubric with items in the portfolio folder). For example, Dr. Dewees, in consultation with Alaska Languages faculty, is developing a Language Competency and Diversity assignment for language classes.

- While we have a Google form for the exit survey, Hum 499 faculty and BLA program coordinators need to ensure that students fill those out. This will be a discussion item for our next meeting, as we prepare for our 5-year program review.
- We continue to communicate with faculty, advisors, and students about the language requirement waiver process, as well as the process of waiving the HUM 200 requirement.
- While this has been unfeasible in terms of faculty workloads, we would like to co-develop a marketing strategy for the BLA with recruitment staff. We would also love to strategize how we can better highlight some of our students' work—there are some phenomenal projects, capstones, internships, and practicums in our students' degrees. These are especially important goals given UAS' general enrollment challenges.
- We continue to advocate for a recommendation made in the AY 2011-2012 Annual Report: "Complete the process of building a cadre of core, tenure-track faculty dedicated to the BLA degree program." In recent years, Humanities has lost two Juneau-based tenure-track Communication faculty, two Juneau-based Art faculty, a Ph.D. faculty member in Alaska Native Languages and Studies, and two faculty in English (one who also taught in Alaska Native Studies). The result has been overburdened faculty members who are responsible to other degrees and programs, a reduction in the pool of faculty available to serve as advisors for the program, and diminished curricular diversity within the BLA committee.