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Program Assessment Plan

University of Alaska Southeast – Outdoor Studies Programs

Program Description

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 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.

The Outdoor Skills and Leadership Certificate is an intensive 34 credit, ten-month program designed for upper-division students. Many students complete the program while on academic exchange and others come to the program after completing bachelor's level degrees. The program is designed for students interested in becoming outdoor professionals, achieving more general goals related to personal development and leadership, or to achieve a better understanding of themselves and the natural world. It is particularly suited for students who wish to complete the certificate in combination with an independent degree program.

The Outdoor and Adventure Studies Designated Emphasis in the BLA is designed for students interested in a multidisciplinary course of academic study that is grounded in the humanities and specializes in outdoor skills and adventure leisure studies.

The ODS Environmental Studies Emphasis is designed for students interested in pursuing and environmental studies with specialization in outdoor skills and recreation/leisure studies. The Environmental Studies BA is part (along with the Environmental Resources BS and the Environmental Science BS) of the Program on the Environment.

Program Learning Outcomes

The ODS program level learning outcomes are derived from the program mission and core values. The mission describes the overarching goal of the program. Each core value has a learning outcome associated with it.

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 their 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:

- **Informed Understanding of Outdoor Activities:** All ODS 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.
- **Proficiency 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.
- **Excellence in Critical Inquiry:** The ODS program seeks to develop students into inquisitive critical thinkers with the ability to do interdisciplinary academic work in a variety of fields.

Student Learning Outcomes:

By the time that they have finished their degree program, all students in the Program in the Environment will be able to:

1. Describe various outdoor activities in terms of their historical development, environmental implications, and related social issues.
2. Lead groups in at least two activity areas (such as climbing, hiking, backcountry skiing or kayaking) as an entry-level professional in the outdoor industry.
3. Critically evaluate practices relating to outdoor activities, nature-oriented tourism, and nature sports, in an informed way, using methodologies and techniques of the humanities, natural, or social sciences.

While the three ODS degree tracks share these student learning outcomes, the programs differ in what is emphasized. Students in the certificate program spend proportionately more time in the field than students in the BA and BLA programs. The BLA in outdoor and adventure studies emphasizes humanities-based approaches to studying outdoor activities. And, the Environmental Studies BA includes more courses from the natural sciences. In assessing the effectiveness of non-ODS, discipline-specific, coursework, we rely on the expertise of faculty in specific areas. That said, we are also concerned with assessing how well ODS programming fits into, complements, and is complemented by, the non-ODS-specific curriculum in the BLA and Environmental Studies BA. We assess this primarily in our exit interviews with students.

Assessment Methodology

Method 1 – Direct Assessment of Students

The ODS program graduates a manageable number of students each year, and faculty in the outdoor studies program spend a significant amount of time interacting directly with students in

the classroom and in the field. During our yearly assessment meeting, program instructors provide a final assessment of graduating students for each SLO:

SLO 1: Student transcripts are evaluated and faculty, as a group, discuss student projects, coursework, and any other relevant data. Each student is rated on a 1-5 scale (5 indicating excellence, 3 meets expectations, and 1 unacceptable).

SLO 2: ODS faculty give students a rating in 3 areas pertaining to outdoor leadership: Professional Behavior (preparedness, leadership, confidence, and composure), Hard Skills (technical proficiency in a variety of discipline-specific activities), and Soft Skills (decision making, communication, judgment, and ability to work with others). In each area, each student is rated on a 1-5 scale (5 indicating excellence, 3 meets expectations, and 1 unacceptable).

SLO 3: Faculty, as a group, discuss student projects, coursework, and any other relevant data. Each student is rated on a 1-5 scale (5 indicating excellence, 3 meets expectations, and 1 unacceptable).

Data is compiled in order to spot opportunities to program improvement.

Method 2 – Exit Interviews

Exit Interviews

During or just after the ODS capstone expedition, students complete exit interviews. The interviews contain the following questions:

1. What were your goals and expectations coming into the ODS program?
2. Did the program meet, fail to meet, or exceed your expectations?
3. What was the best, or most valuable, part of the program for you?
4. What was the worst, or least valuable, part of the program for you?
5. Do you have any recommendations for improvements or changes in the program?
6. What are your immediate plans for the future?
7. Where do you see yourself in 1 year, 5 years, and 10 years?

Exit interview answers are compiled in order to spot opportunities to program improvement. Exit interview data is discussed at the assessment meeting and possible changes and improvements are considered.