

**UAS Geography, Environmental, and Outdoor Studies Bachelor of Arts  
Program Assessment Report  
Academic Year 2018-2019**

March 1st, 2020  
Dr. Richard Simpson, Program Coordinator  
GEOS Bachelor of Arts

## **1. Program Overview**

### *Faculty List*

Richard Simpson, Assistant Professor of Humanities  
Dan Monteith, Associate Professor of Anthropology  
Glenn Wright, Associate Professor of Social Science  
Forest Wagner, Assistant Professor and Program Director of Outdoor Studies  
Kevin Maier, Associate Professor of English  
Lora Vess, Assistant Professor of Sociology  
X'unei Twitchell, Associate Professor of Alaska Native Languages  
Eran Hood, Professor of Environmental Science  
Sanjay Pyare, Associate Professor of Environmental Science  
Sonia Nagorski, Assistant Professor of Geology  
Jon Radizloski, Assistant Professor of History

The Geography, Environmental, and Outdoor Studies program at UAS is the only program to integrate an interdisciplinary design integrating multiple disciplines in pursuit of an understanding of world systems. We a unique interdisciplinary place-based approach to education, not only to emphasize enculturation and human development with the well-being of community, but also to provide our students with the irreplaceable experiences and collaborative skill sets required to compete in today's job market. Linked by a common interest in landscape and the environment in all its forms, the classes composing this degree specifically engage the theoretical, historical, and cultural dimensions of society in fields as diverse as political science, economics, law, media studies, hydrology, geology, indigenous studies, and literature. The program prepares students for careers in management, policy, education, field-based operations and research, and urban planning.

## **2. Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

At the conclusion of the BA in Geography and Environmental Studies, students will be able to:

- 1) Use qualitative and quantitative research techniques to gather and analyze data on social, cultural, and ecological problems.
- 2) Use clear written and oral communication skills to communicate the results of research.
- 3) Demonstrate connections between everyday life at the local scale and the larger economic, social, and/or environmental forces that network them into a global community.
- 4) Evaluate cultural, social, and environmental processes with a particular focus on space and place, critical theory, practical application, analysis and/or social justice.

### 3. Overview of the Data Collected on the Program SLOs during AY 2018-2019

At the end of the Spring 2019 semester, Geography faculty met to review student work on assignments across core courses in our program. These selected student assignments and projects demonstrate our students’ mastery (and limits) of the above stated Program Student Learning Outcomes as a guiding rubric. Prior to our convocation meeting, faculty members completed assessment reports addressing student performances (success and limits) on chosen assignments as a means to assess how their course assignments specifically addresses our Program SLOs. The data from Individual faculty assessment reports on select assignments are available with the Geography BA Coordinator.

At our meeting, faculty shared the individual results of their assignment and assessments of how they achieved program SLOs. They then participated in a comprehensive discussion regarding the results, including trends, observations, evaluation of student work with the intention of assessing whether or not students are meeting our outcomes. The cross-department discussion provided a window into the depth of skill sets and diverse tasks undertaken by students within our interdisciplinary program. Given the result of these findings faculty discussed ways to improve student success toward achieving our Program SLOs, address adjustments to our courses, our evaluating assignments, and/or our overall program itself.

This was our second year using our new Program SLOs and we were able to compare the results of this data to the previous years’ data, however in our second iteration of assessment we incorporated two new features: 1) a standardized assessment form and 2) a quantified scoring system in addition to the qualitative assessment to the Program SLOs (Instructor ranking 1-6). This permitted another level of analysis that will enable a means to improve our comparison of historical trends in SLO achievement in our program.

### 4. Evaluation of the data collected on the Program SLOs and Future Plans to Improve Student Learning

Quantified Overview of Program SLOs

LD (1) or UD (2)	SLOs	Ratings				n (#students)				Weighted values							
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
1	Forest	4.5	5	5	3	9	9	9	9	40.5	45	45	27				
2	Kevin K	3	5	5	5	13	13	13	13	39	65	65	65				
1	Richard	5.3	5	5.3	5.1	21	21	21	21	111.3	105	111.3	107.1				
2	Kevin M	4.1	3.8	4.2	4.9	21	21	21	21	86.1	79.8	88.2	102.9				
1	Eran	4.2	4.7	3.9	4.8	26	26	26	26	109.2	122.2	101.4	124.8				
2	Dan	5	3.5	4	4	8	8	8	8	40	28	32	32				
1	Sonia	4.25	4.75	3.89	4.25	8	8	8	8								
						106	106	106	106	426.1	445	442.9	458.8	Sums			
		4.3	4.5	4.5	4.4	Unweighted Averages for SLOs 1-4				4.0	4.2	4.2	4.3	Weighted average for SLOs 1-4			

Assignments used in this assessment ranged across the curriculum from 100 to 400 level courses. At our meeting we each first shared details about our individual assignments and what our students are doing in our classes and then discussed performance outcomes on each of our SLOs. Our discussion resulted in four significant findings.

**Finding #1: Revision of Program SLO #1**

SLO#1 initiated the most discussion as some faculty felt that the term “problems” restricted the meaning of the SLO and instead proposed the term be switched to the broader term “issues.” Other faculty expressed uncertainty regarding what work fell under qualitative or creative research. As a result of this discussion, faculty moved to propose a revision of SLO #1 to read as follows: “Use qualitative, quantitative, and/or creative research techniques to engage in informed discourse on social, cultural, and ecological networks and complexities in an interdisciplinary environment.”

Faculty also recognized that this was our current *lowest scoring* SLO this academic year. Faculty considered that the confusion regarding the meaning of the SLO as it was written may have been a significant contributor to the low score on this SLO. Our assessment prompted a valuable discussion on the meaning of qualitative research and permitted greater understanding of the different kinds of geographical approaches at work among faculty and students in the GEOS BA.

**Finding #2: Incorporating Interdisciplinary Methodology into the SLOs**

For the second year in a row, faculty expressed the need to incorporate an SLO regarding student competence in **interdisciplinary methodology** as this is a unique quality of the GEOS program. The proposed revision to SLO#1 described above also incorporates an outcome highlighting and addressing interdisciplinary environmental thematics of the degree.

**Finding #3: Improvement on SLO #4/Annual Assessment is improving student success**

It was significant to discover that, according to our weighted average scores, we scored highest on SLO #4. In the results of our Annual Assessment from AY 2017-2018 we targeted low student success on SLO #4 and committed to targeting this outcome for success. In last year’s report, we collectively agreed and stated that, “faculty will be placing an emphasis on improving assignments to specifically address student achievement in scaling capacity as well as evaluating processes with a particular focus on space and place, critical theory, practical application, analysis and/or social justice. This will be done through a range of practices including emphasis in class discussions, the incorporation of new reading materials, and the adjustment of syllabi to address these outcomes.” The improvement on the findings regarding SLO#4 may serve as evidence that our assessment procedure is improving student success in the GEOS BA by enabling collaborative discussions that have concrete results.

**Finding #4: Representing Alaskan Indigenous Knowledges in the SLOs**

Faculty expressed the necessity to make coloniality, decolonialism, and indigeneity a visible (rather than subtle) component of the Student Learning Outcomes of studying environment and place in Southeast Alaska and beyond. A proposal was given to add a new SLO#5: *Articulate the complexities of colonial histories, Indigenous peoples and histories, stewardship and awareness of future generations utilizing Alaska Native and Indigenous scholars as secondary and primary sources.* Faculty believe that adding this SLO to the GEOS program would provide a means of strengthening our commitment to diversity and the interdisciplinary goals of our program.

**5. Geography Capstone Student Assessment Evaluations**

As part of our annual assessment procedure, the instructor of GEOG 490 Geography Seminar distributes a form to students in this course as a means to acquire student perception and feedback about the Geography BA program. Dr. Daniel Monteith led the capstone senior seminar (GEOG 490) in Spring 2019. He distributed the revised self-assessment survey to the GEOG majors in the course to ascertain Geography B.A. and B.S. seniors’ assessment of themselves in the categories designated in the then-current Program Learning Outcomes. Eight students were enrolled in the seminar and two graduated in Spring 2018 (one with a B.A. and one with B.S. in the GEOG Program).

Scale

- 1 = very well
- 6 = very poor

This table reflects scores of the B.A. and B.S. students in the Spring 2018 GEOG 490 capstone course

Student skill	Student Self-Assessment	Instructor Assessment
Effective oral and written comm.	2.25	2.5
Assignments Produced	1.8	2.5
Critical thinking	2.3	2.5
Information/computer literacy	2.5	2.5
Interdisciplinary approaches	2.5	2.5
Professional behavior	2.4	2.0
Quantitative skills	2.25	2.25
Overall Assessment	2.25	2.0

**Positive Aspects of the Program**

“Great,” “knowledgeable” faculty  
 Interdisciplinary approach, “opened eyes to different disciplines”  
 Application of knowledge

**Limitations of the Program**

Lack of classes being offered every semester limited access to some classes  
 Add more GEOG courses

**Summary of Capstone Course**

This cohort was particularly strong in terms of scientific understandings but most had less of a background in the social sciences. Many of the students in this year’s cohort are not from Juneau. The cohort had higher learning curves with regards to local connections and learned a great deal. I think the local students learned a lot about national and global issues from our transfer and exchange students. Students made linkages with how climate change and economic development is

impacting our local environment. This cohort was particularly strong and confident with qualitative methods and GIS. The most growth occurred in how to use qualitative and historical methods and sources. Students' written and oral skills varied significantly because I had both juniors and seniors taking the class. Overall I saw a much higher level of skill and confidence in seniors and graduating students. Students demonstrated higher oral communication skill competency and confidence than written skill competency. Students again report frustration with the limited availability of Geography courses. These responses from students affirm the imperative to revise the curriculum so as to increase the number of GEOG courses at UAS to provide students with more options. Finally, in this course students collaborated to build an online project and public resource on the spatial history of Auke Bay, entitled *Auke Bay Then and Now*.

## 6. Program Assessment Conclusions and Additional Information

GEOS BA faculty representatives from Humanities, Social Science, Natural Science, and Alaska Native Studies met throughout the academic year to discuss and develop the program. We collaborated on writing a new standardized assignment assessment sheet for our annual SLO assessment procedure, developed new program sheets for exit-reports for students in our capstone course, and implemented new quantitative assessment procedures into our annual meetings. These additions to our annual assessment will improve accuracy as well as enable comparisons moving forward.

Our program assessment led to important findings and we continue to grow as an interdisciplinary program in significant ways. This year faculty collaborated to revise and specify SLO #1; incorporate interdisciplinary methodology as a unique program strength into our SLOs; include Alaskan Indigenous Knowledges as a visible component of our SLOs; and finally, identify ways in which our assessment procedure is showing positive improvements in student success through our targeted incorporation of reading materials and adjustment of syllabi to increase results of student learning outcome number four.

To improve marketing the GEOS BA, the Program Coordinator Richard Simpson worked with the UAS database coordinator to design new Program Sheets for recruiters to use to attract students. Professor Simpson worked with UAS Creative Manger and Website Coordinator to update and improve the Geography, Environmental, and Outdoor Studies website. Finally, Professor Simpson worked with the Information Literacy Librarian to create a Cultural Geography Research Guide to be placed on the Egan Library website. This Research Guide provides an invaluable tool for students by gathering onto one website academic journals, undergraduate student groups, and a list of resources for students working on cultural and humanist approaches to geography and spatial issues. The GEOS BA also expanded our offerings of humanist approaches to geography with the addition of Forest Wagner's new course, GEOG 360 *Alaska: A Contested Geography*. This course will improve students' capacity to implement interdisciplinary methods to environmental issues with particular emphasis on the landscape and cultures of Alaska.