

Submission date: February 10, 2020

Program/s in this review: Dental Assisting Undergraduate Certificate (UC) and Associate of Applied Science (AAS)

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) _____

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage _____

Members of the program review committee:

- Stephanie Olson, Program Director, Professor of Dental Assisting (chair), Anchorage
- Jessica Ross, Term Instructor of Dental Hygiene, Anchorage

1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)

Relevancy

The mission of the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression.

UAA's School of Allied Health's mission is "to educate and develop allied health professionals to serve all Alaskans," while the College of Health's mission is "Advancing the health and well-being of people and communities."

The mission of the UAA Dental Assisting Program is to provide a high quality academic program that encourages the maximum involvement and achievement from Dental Assisting students.

Dental Assistants are important members of the dental team who provide critical support in every type of dental practice. The UAA Dental Assisting (DA) program promotes the health of Alaskans by playing a significant role in educating dental assistants. The program is one of two Alaskan programs that are nationally accredited through the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) and is the only accredited program within the UA system. The other accredited program is at the Southcentral Foundation. Their focus is on the education of Alaska Native shareholders and gives preferential admission to Alaska Native and American Indian applicants. UAA DA graduates are leaders within dental practices, promote safe workplace and patient care practices in the areas of Dental Infection Control and Radiation Safety. Well-educated dental assistants are essential to support dental care and wellness in Alaska. As dentistry progresses in technology and as the safety of the patient and dental employees becomes more of a focus, demand for formally educated dental assistants will increase.

Currently the State of Alaska does not require certification for dental assistants. Training can be conducted on-the-job by local dentists, but may be inconsistent as it occurs at varying levels of knowledge and skills. As the only CODA-accredited dental assisting program in Alaska (without Alaska Native preference), the relevancy of this program is exhibited in the market need, the community's need for safety and health, as well as the role of the program as an accelerated pathway for students to work in the dental field. This relevancy is an indication that this program should be valued and warrants ongoing investment.

Role in supporting other academic programs

The DA program supports UAA's Dental Hygiene program. The following dental assisting courses are required for the Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene degree: DA A160, DA A110 and DA A110L.

Partnerships

The DA program partnerships include: Alaska Dental Action Coalition, Alaska Dental Assistants Association, Anchorage Dental Society, Alaska Dental Society, Cook Inlet Dental Hygienists' Association and Alaska State Dental Hygienists' Association.

The DA program has an active Dental Advisory Committee (DAC) consisting of 12 members. As an advisory body, the DAC serves an important role as liaison between the UAA Dental Programs, local dental and allied dental professionals, and the community. The committee provides input on program curriculum, goals, and objectives, as well as industry standards. The DAC promotes and advocates for the Dental Programs within the Alaska community.

Workforce development and employment opportunities

Research on job search sites showed a \$4.00/hour pay differential between formally-educated and on-the-job trained dental assistants. National research from the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) also indicates increased salaries for those holding Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) certification.

The DA program also delivers a course that meets the Alaska Board of Dental Examiners legal requirements for specialty certification in Coronal Polishing. This three-day continuing education course is offered once or twice a year depending on demand and is self-supporting.

Extramural Funding

First National Bank Alaska has been a source of continued extramural funding for the DA Program. Funds from this account are used to offset student costs, enable the program to offer continuing education courses, and acquire equipment as needed.

High Demand Job Designation

Dental assisting is among the most high-demand, high growth health care occupations in Alaska. The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development classifies the profession as one of the “top 20 hot healthcare jobs” in the state (<https://www.dentalcareersedu.org/alaska/alaska-salary/>). Dental Assistants are in high demand in the state. The employment outlook for dental assistants is “growth robust, openings very high” (<http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/occ/hcoccs.cfm>), with an expected 24% increase in Dental Assistant positions by 2026.

2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)

Reflection and correction on the IR-Reports for the UC and AAS in Dental Assisting

The seven-year degree data trend provided by UAA institutional research (UAA IR) shows 2 UCs or AAS degrees awarded in 2017 and 5 in 2014. The probable reason for this is that these students completed all of the required DA courses and proceeded with the general education portion of the AAS degree and graduated in a subsequent year, or delayed applying for graduation for another reason. An example of this occurred in 2016, when UAA IR data show that 28 UCs or AAS degrees were awarded, when only 14 students completed the program that year. This program is delivered in a cohort model, so once a student begins the program as a full major, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) *completion rates* described below are accurate for that cohort for the undergraduate certificate, regardless of UAA-tracked certificate or awards numbers.

Each year, programs accredited by CODA are required to submit an annual Survey of Dental Assisting Education Programs. In this survey, programs must report on the number of students who start each cohort year and the number of completers. This is the data from submitted surveys, and is the most accurate portrayal of program completers. In AY13, 17 students were originally enrolled and 15 completed (88%). In AY14, 18 students were originally enrolled and 17 completed (94%). In AY15, 16 students were originally enrolled and 12 completed (75%). In AY16, 18 students were originally enrolled and 12 completed (67%). In AY17, 17 students were originally enrolled and 14 completed (82%). In AY18, 17 students were originally enrolled and 12 completed (71%). In AY19, 11 students were originally enrolled and 10 completed (91%).

Average Completion Percentage (7 year trend) = 81%. This is a strong completion trend. The average national completion rate for accredited DA programs from 2010-2017 (most recent data available) is 75.9%.

Credits Per Degree data provided by UAA IR show that students took an average of 1.8 years to complete the DA UC degree and an average of 4.0 to complete the AAS degree. These numbers are accurate, but are not a reflection of the students' ability to complete the DA UC or AAS in 1 year or 2 years respectively. There is a low margin of error for advising students pursuing the UC degree. The UC degree requires no pre-requisite courses, but students starting college may get poor advising from sources outside of Allied Health or self-advise and take courses that are not needed.

As with many programs in the School of Allied Health and at UAA, many DA students are considered non-traditional students and enter the program after a change in careers, being discharged from the military, or having raised their children. These students usually start their education endeavor by pursuing a different degree and subsequently select the DA AAS program as a change of major or secondary degree. This change adds credits and time to the 31-credit UC in dental assisting, as well as the 60-credit AAS in dental assisting. With the recent change in advising within the College of Health, advising should provide more accurate information to students and decrease the amount of time for degree completion.

7-year major/program enrollment: In recent years the program has not filled to capacity. Industry feedback and data from the State of Alaska indicate strong demand for dental assistants and frustration in the lack of dental assistants to fill open positions. The disconnect between program enrollment and employment demand appears to be a lack of knowledge about opportunities in the profession and available career training through the program. The COH is actively addressing this through intentional, directed marketing efforts.

Include the extent to which tuition, fees, extramural funding, and other external sources to cover the cost of the faculty.

The current UAA cost per DA student graduate is consistent with other Allied Health programs (even with current lower than desired student enrollment). Student tuition alone does not cover the cost of Allied Health courses. There is currently no external funding or external resources to cover the cost of faculty, but with a recent change in the DA Clinic (DA A195A), increased patient fees and streamlined services cover many costs associated with that course/clinic.

When analyzing costs, it is important to one Allied Health program to other Allied Health programs. These programs graduate students who are prepared to enter the healthcare workforce in Alaska. Although dental assisting is not an inexpensive program, the cost is comparable to other similar programs. The cost per graduate for dental assisting is \$13,435. If enrollment increases to the CODA-approved cohort size of 24 students, that cost decreases to \$4,500. By comparison, a similar Allied Health Program (Program A) costs \$21,619/graduate and another (Program B) costs \$10,606. Program B's cost is expected to increase by ~\$1,000 if DA support courses for that program are eliminated. [Costs were calculated by Lynn Murphy, Business Manager, School of Allied Health at the request of Stephanie Olson.]

This information demonstrates that even with low enrollments, DA is comparable in cost to other Allied Health Programs. The DA program becomes much more cost effective when 24 students are accepted. Fall 2019 was the first year that the DA program had the ability to enroll 24 students. CODA did not approve the increase in enrollments from 18 students to 24 students until mid-spring semester 2019. Unfortunately, lack of time and advertising hindered this process and the 24-student enrollment was not achieved. The School of Allied Health is undertaking an intensive marketing effort this year, and has dedicated financial and human resources to the goal of increasing applicants and enrollments for Fall 2020.

3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

Specialized Accreditation

The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) is the accrediting agency for dental assisting programs. The Accreditation Standards for Dental Assisting Education Programs have been developed for the following reasons: (1) to protect the public, (2) to serve as a guide for dental assisting program development, (3) to serve as a stimulus for the improvement of established programs, (4) to provide criteria for the evaluation of new and established programs, and (5) to protect enrolled students. These standards are national in scope and consist of six categories with 52 sub-standards that must be met or exceeded by programs to be eligible for CODA accreditation. UAA's program was originally accredited in 1978 and its current status is approved without reporting requirements. This status is granted to programs that demonstrate full compliance with rigorous accreditation standards. The next accreditation site visit will occur in 2021. In 2019, the program was granted CODA approval to increase cohort size to 24.

Dental Assisting program director Stephanie Olson was appointed as a site visitor with the Commission on Dental Accreditation in 2015. She was promoted from Curriculum Coordinator to Chair in 2018. This distinguished level of knowledge and service helps ensure the quality of the educational program delivered to UAA DA students, as well as strict compliance with accreditation requirements.

Dental assisting requirements, job titles, and patient care vary from state to state, ranging from on-the-job training to certification by national exam and/or graduation from a CODA-accredited program. The Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) estimates that 24 of 50 states require or accept graduation from CODA-accredited educational programs as a minimum requirement for state licensure, registration, or other credentialing. As previously stated, the CODA-accredited DA program offered by the Southcentral Foundation preferentially admits students who are Alaska Native or Native Americans, thus making UAA's program the only open-access program in the state.

In 2005, the DANB and the American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA) called for the mandatory education and credentialing of dental assistants in each state to ensure patient protection and demonstrated competence. They also called for all educational programs to be accredited by CODA to establish a common core knowledge nationally.

It is essential that Alaska has an accredited dental assisting program that is available to all students.

Currency of the curriculum

The curriculum is current. A major curriculum revision with course updates and sequencing was submitted to and approved by the Commission on Dental Accreditation in February 2019 and updated through UAA's curriculum process.

Innovative curriculum design

The curriculum is innovative and designed to ensure that students progress and build upon their skill and learning as the program progresses. Some examples of innovative curriculum design include the following:

1. Alaska Cares: Dental Days at UAA: This free dental event that is hosted at UAA's Dental Assisting and Dental Hygiene Clinic is a UAA and Dental Community Partnership. This high-impact, educational experiential event has become a pivotal component in the education of DA students while benefiting the community.
2. Feedback and Review: Students receive many opportunities for one-on-one learning with faculty and supervised additional "open" lab opportunities. Each student is required to pass DA essential skills at minimum competency levels that must be demonstrated through competency skills assessment. Faculty use innovative rubrics to evaluate each skill.

3. **Encouraging Collaboration:** Students complete projects within various courses that are designed to encourage collaboration. The team-based approach is a significant theme in the pre-clinical and clinical courses.
4. **A Holistic View of the Student Experience:** The DA program educates students to be workforce ready. A holistic view of student education and advancing skills and knowledge, as well as teamwork, professionalism, ethical behavior, are also a focus.

Availability and Indications of Quality Distance Offerings

Two dental assisting courses are currently available via distance delivery (DA A127, DA A150). Distance delivery of the entire didactic portion of dental assisting program is being considered as a means to address statewide workforce demand.

Program Student Learning Outcome Assessment

The program is highly vested in student success, constantly evaluates the success of coursework and sequencing and has a proven record of making changes that affect a positive outcome.

Formal program assessment shows that DA is exceeding its learning outcome benchmarks. The data and findings of formal assessment supports students success.

The program continually makes changes to improve the assessment process. One recent change includes a change to backward curriculum design, The students reported that they valued the homework as they could see how it correlated with tests and primary learning objectives. Homework was well received, turned in on time by students and referenced during lectures.

Externship performance evaluations were also changed, putting the responsibility on students to ensure their evaluations were completed by externship supervisors. This was a positive change in many ways. The amount of data for student externship performance increased significantly by increasing the number of evaluations available. It also provided timely information to alert faculty of potential problems, and facilitated students being made aware of their performance.

The outcomes for the DA Program are:

- **Demonstrate skills and knowledge necessary to be competent in the dental assisting field.**
- **Demonstrate professional standards according to OSHA, ADA, OSAP, ADAA and radiation health and safety standards.**
- **Demonstrate ethical behavior in a dental office setting.**

Extensive data are collected for each cohort of dental assisting students. The data are thoroughly analyzed and program/course changes are implemented to improve program quality. The following outcome data were collected for the 18/19 school year.

Demonstrate skills and knowledge necessary to be competent in the dental assisting field.

The following data was obtained and analyzed for this outcome: Summer Externship Performance Reviews, Rubber Dam Placement Competencies, Vital Signs Competencies and Tofflemire competencies.

- Summer Externship Performance Reviews- the skills related to competence in the dental field - Of the 182 reviews that were collected, the individual skills were evaluated at an 82%, the overall performance of the students were evaluated at 89%.
- The average of the 22 Rubber Dam Placement Competencies was 99%. (one each in the fall and spring semester with an expectation of improved performance)

- The average of the 22 Tofflemire Placement Competencies was 94% (one each in the fall and spring semester with an expectation of improved performance).
- The average of the 22 Vital signs competencies was 90%.

Demonstrate professional standards according to OSHA, ADA, OSAP, ADAA and radiation health and safety standards.

The following data was collected and analyzed for this outcome: Summer Externship Performance Reviews, Infection Control Skills Competencies, Radiography Final Skills Assessment

- Summer Externship Performance Reviews- Of the 162 reviews that were collected, the students were evaluated at a 96%
- The average of the Radiography final skills assessment for 11 students was 86%.
- The average of the Infection Control Skills Competency was 92%.

Demonstrate ethical behavior in a dental office setting.

For this outcome, the Summer Externship Performance Review data were used.

- Summer Externship Performance Reviews- Of the 162 reviews that were collected, the students were evaluated at a 96%.

Student Support

In the Fall of 2019, the College of Health created academic advisors through their Student Success Center. Ralyssa Harris is the advisor assigned to Dental Assisting. Stephanie Olson also actively advises pre-majors and major students. With the addition of the College of Health Student Success Center and UAA's First Year Advisors, there is an increased level of understanding that health degrees at UAA are diverse and require careful and unique advising.

Student Accomplishments

The 2019-2020 student cohort will be the first group of DA students to take the Dental Assisting National Board as part of their educational experience. There are three components to the exam (General Chairside Assisting, Radiation Health and Safety, and Infection Control). The students from this cohort have completed the Infection Control component with a pass rate of 100% (81% is the national pass rate).

The end goal of many dental assisting students is to work as a dental assistant in the dental field. However, students may have other end goals, including: to become a dental hygienist, to become a dentist, or to pursue more education in another field.

Dental Assisting graduates are prepared for work immediately following the completion of the program (either UC or AAS). They have solid job prospects and earning potential and enter jobs serving the healthcare needs of Alaskans.

Although this is not shown in institutional data, the DA program is 3 semesters in length. A ten year review of program data shows that if a student successfully completes the first semester, then they are 96% likely to complete the entire program. One data collection problem is that program completers can easily get dental assisting jobs without applying for graduation to obtain the certificate or degree. To have formal completion data more accurately reflect reality, the program is working closely with students to facilitate completion of paperwork needed to apply for graduation.

4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

This program is not duplicated anywhere else within the UA system. There is a non-accredited Dental Assisting program delivered at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Research shows that UAF's DA program has also experienced low enrollments. It would be ideal if UAA and UAF could collaborate to deliver one accredited program statewide.

5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)

The major factors influencing the future role and demand for dental assisting professionals are the rapid growth of large dental group practices, increasing numbers of dentists, new dental treatments and increasing delegation of duties to dental assistants. As the dental delivery system evolves over the next 25 years, the demand for dental assistants to have more advanced clinical skills will increase. The Journal of Dental Education anticipates that dental practices will increasingly seek to employ dental assistants who possess clinical skills that cannot be taught on-the-job. As large group practices come to dominate the dental delivery system in many states, the allied dental workforce will need to expand to provide patient care. Alaska cannot be left without the ability to formally educate dental assistants.

Dental Assistants are critical members of the current and future oral health care team. As protection of the public is important in the dental profession, the evolving dental assistant should be formally educated in all aspects of clinical practice and permitted to perform delegated patient care, as legally allowed by each state. The dental profession has an obligation to ensure public protection by hiring the most qualified dental personnel. Mandatory education and credentialing, a more standardized scope of practice, and delegation of patient care are critical components of future dental assisting practice. By maximizing the utilization of qualified dental assistants, the dental profession of the future will significantly contribute to optimum care and best practices in dentistry, while increasing efficiency in practice management. (Journal of Dental Education, Sept 2017)

The DA Program is a distinguished program with highly skilled faculty, a current curriculum, a sustainable record of excellence with their external accrediting body and the ability to expand and become more fiscally sound. This program has the potential to be an extremely affordable Allied Health program. UAA must allow a transitional time for applicants and enrollments to this program to be increased.

The DA UC and AAS Expedited Review Committee strongly recommends this CODA accredited DA program be **continued**. This program is vital to the health and welfare of Alaskans.