



Date: February 21, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: John Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Cc: Shannon Donovan, Associate Professor; Chair, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies  
Dorn van Dommelen, Professor  
Audrey Taylor, Associate Professor

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings

**Program/s in this review:** Environment and Society BS

**Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable):** None

**Campuses where the program is delivered:** Anchorage

**Members of the program review committee:**

Shannon Donovan, Associate Professor and Department Chair  
Dorn van Dommelen, Professor  
Audrey Taylor, Associate Professor

**Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role**

UAA's mission is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression. UAA is committed to serving the higher education needs of the state, its communities and its diverse peoples. It is also committed to instruction at multiple academic levels, success of all students regardless of their higher education goals, and service to the diverse peoples and communities of the state. UAA's core themes are (1) Teaching and Learning, (2) Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity, (3) Student Success, (4) UAA Community, and (5) Public Square. UAA values international and intercultural education, diversity of experiences and perspectives, and the diversity of our unique location in Southcentral Alaska that comes from the Alaska Native peoples of this area.

The College of Arts and Sciences contributes to UAA's mission with a suite of programs that provide, among other things,

1. general education courses for undergraduates in CAS and other Colleges,

2. opportunities for undergraduates to pursue majors in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts, and
3. opportunities for faculty and students to pursue research and creative activities in CAS's academic disciplines,
4. graduate programs for advanced studies.

Given decreased enrollments across UAA and significant budget cuts to CAS, the challenge is to serve UAA's and CAS's missions with only 75% of the funds it had in 2018-2019. CAS's shrinking budget is especially challenging for programs that rely on state financial appropriations through CAS because the programs have a gap between (a) the total costs of everything the program does and needs, and (b) the tuition CAS receives to cover those costs. This describes most programs in CAS: most rely on state appropriations and CAS has 30% less than it had two years ago.

CAS's Department of Environment & Society spans two academic prefixes (ENVI and GEOG). It contributes to CAS's and UAA's mission with two options for general education in the social sciences, provides students the opportunity to major in an applied environmental discipline and become professionals in environmental planning and mitigation, and for faculty and students to do research in that area. It contributes to the BA and BS degrees in other CAS programs, like International Studies and Natural Sciences (particularly the later program's Environmental Sciences Option).

### **Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity**

Program demand is modest: an average of only 6.5 incoming first-year students select this program as their major (below the CAS undergraduate program mean of 17 and median of 10). With nearly 1,600 student credit hours in 2019 across ENVI and GEOG, the courses draw fewer students than 17 of 18 majors. The challenge seems to be the tale of two worlds where GEOG classes have much higher enrollments (averaging 30 students per section in 2019) whereas ENVI classes have half the enrollment (averaging 15 per section) of GEOG and well below typical numbers in CAS in the 20's and 30's. Given the comparatively small classes in ENVI, the program efficiency is a challenge because the tuition CAS receives from students for ENVI and GEOL courses does not cover the instructional costs for those courses. Then, when considering the full salaries and benefits for everything these faculty do (namely, instruction, research, and service), the Department has a sizable deficit that required state appropriations to fill. That said, the program is quite productive. Whereas only 6.5 incoming students on average select this major (a number well below the CAS average), nearly twice that number (11.9) graduate with this degree every year, and the program. This is remarkable. A small but talented group of faculty start with 2-3 incoming freshmen each but end up 20-25 each along the way.

### **Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success**

Program faculty are innovative and flexible; the curriculum does not ossify and is responsive to contemporary topics in applied environmental studies. Where possible, classes are offered online, and faculty require students to build an electronic portfolio of their works.

### **Program Duplication / Distinctiveness**

UAA's Environment & Society BS overlaps to some extent with UAF's BS in Natural Resources & Environment, and UAS's BS in Environmental Sciences. Merging these programs is a possibility, sharing online courses where possible and retaining local supervision of field-based practices.

### **Commendations and Recommendations**

The faculty are commended for converting far more students into their program than initially come to UAA because of it. Faculty are also commended for the hard work on their program review report.

### **Decision**

**Deletion.**

This recommendation is particularly difficult because the faculty do so many things right. Exhibit A could be that 6-7 incoming students declare Environment & Society as their major but 11-12 graduate with degrees from this department. However, budget cuts are forcing CAS to offer fewer programs to students in the future. Despite all that this program does well, deleting the Environment & Society BS will likely have relatively modest impact on the number of students who come to UAA in the future. Unfortunately, fewer future students will discover this vibrant program and its strong faculty in the future, and fewer will switch their major to Environment & Society, and fewer will fill Alaska's jobs in applied environmental work. This move will also impact the Environmental Sciences option of the Natural Sciences BS. Program deletion requires approval by BOR and NWCCU.