

**BA Program in Political Science - AY20 Expedited Program Review**

**Submission date: Tuesday, February 11, 2020**

**Program/s in this review:** Political Science - BA

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

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

**Members of the program review committee:**

- **Dr. Forrest Nabors, Associate Professor & Chair, Anchorage campus**
- **Dr. James Muller, Professor, Anchorage campus**
- **Kimberly Pace, Term Assistant Professor, Anchorage campus**

**1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role**

UAA’s political science (PS) major prepares undergraduates for good citizenship, connecting them to careers and graduate study in professions and academic disciplines, aligning with UAA 2020’s mission to serve “the higher education needs of the state, its communities, and its diverse peoples.”

PS is the preeminent program of liberal arts study in a democracy. Liberal arts develop students’ abilities to think critically, preparing them to use their liberty well. Education in PS helps them reflect on justice and prudence, improving their choices for themselves and their communities.

Our program’s cornerstones are texts that informed the establishment of American constitutional government. PS majors study comparative politics, international relations, political philosophy, and American government.

With government more involved in students’ civic and economic lives than ever before, PS is more relevant to future careers. Government employs one-quarter of Alaska’s workforce. Many public and private positions require knowledge of government and politics.

Political education is a timely antidote to problems undermining our ability to govern ourselves well. Partisanship and distrust in our institutions are rising. Public life, like campus life, must be “open to all ideas and schools of thought” (UAA 2020). Our program, built on inclusion and diversity in America’s founding documents, promotes student success by civil debate and productive exchange of ideas, encouraging good policy and civic concord.

Courses survey differing political ideas and approaches, engendering mutual respect in discussion and debate. Students learn to deliberate on both sides of questions, speak and write clearly in advancing arguments, listen and consider opposing or unfamiliar viewpoints, and respect political opponents.

Non-majors generate most PS credits. We teach courses cross-listed with five College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) programs—Alaska Native Studies (AKNS), History, International Studies (INTL), Sociology (SOC), and Women’s Studies (WS)—and one College of Health (COH) program—Justice. Twenty-three PS courses satisfy requirements in nine programs in CAS and two other colleges:

Programs	# of PS Courses
BA, INTL—CAS	10
BA, Journalism and Public Communications—CAS	2
BA, Legal Studies—COH	1
BA, SOC—CAS	1
BSc, Health Sciences—COH	3

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Associate of Applied Science, Paralegal Studies—COH	1
minor, AKNS—CAS	2
minor, International Business—College of Business and Public Policy (CBPP)	2
minor, WS—CAS	1

Nine PS courses meet tier II or III general education requirements; our integrated capstone seminar serves students in many majors. PS courses are required for CBPP's MPA and fulfill the Alaska Studies requirement for teacher certification. We teach courses for Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), CBPP, Middle College, and University Honors; OLE's lifelong learners; and Pacific Northwest students studying abroad through Global Education Oregon.

Our faculty assist students "defining, revising, and meeting their academic and personal goals," advancing UAA's core value of student success. Through co-curricular activities, we get to know students, suggest opportunities, and help them find careers. In their first year after graduation, 84% of majors are employed.

Anchorage's Municipality and Assembly, our Congressional delegation, and Alaska legislators offer internships. Other partners include Alaska World Affairs Council, American Political Science Association, Commonwealth North, First Alaskans Institute, International Churchill Society, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Northern Forum, and UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Every fall, our Political Science Association and Pi Rho (ΠΡ) chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha (ΠΣΑ), the national PS honor society, organize the Madison Cup competition. Every spring, faculty and students conduct the Model UN, bringing together hundreds of high school students and teachers with dozens of UAA students. This largest on-campus gathering of prospective students persuades many to enroll at UAA. Every year, Chartwell and Seward lectures feature speakers on humanities and liberal arts. Audiences of 60 to 100 include many departments' students and faculty, prospective students and their teachers, alumni, and community members.

Outside funding helps students learn and succeed, promoting UAA's core values, affordability and access. We connect students to externally funded opportunities to develop talents and interests: Henry Clay Center's Student Congress, seminars at the Claremont Colleges, and Washington internships.

ACLU Alaska, Alaska Association of Scholars, Churchill Society of Alaska, Jack Miller Center, Murdock Charitable Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Union League of Anchorage, U.S. Department of Education, and the Washington Program have given \$60,000 to support activities benefiting UAA students.

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

During the review period, the program in political science was embattled, but its core was strong. Thanks to its emphasis on student success and recruitment, and despite losses in the faculty and attendant drops in program enrollments, the program has rebounded, is successfully growing program enrollments, has maintained graduation rates, and is improving its financial performance.

The trends:

- The number of awards of a baccalaureate degree in political science has remained steady, compared with the record of CAS, which shows more volatility and steep declines.
- Credits, semesters, and years per degree in political science have gradually increased. At one point, political science was outperforming CAS. Now our averages are in line with CAS averages.
- The number of program enrollments annually declined from 2013 to 2017 but rebounded and increased in 2018 and 2019, while the number of program enrollments in CAS has steadily declined every year. For 2018 to 2019 program enrollments increased 21% for political science but decreased by 10% for CAS.

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- Course pass rates have improved every year, from underperforming CAS (79.1% vs. 74.9% in 2013) to outperforming CAS (82% vs. 85.6% in 2019).
- The program in political science serves other programs to a greater extent than the overall average for CAS. For both upper- and lower-division courses offered, political science outpaces CAS in out-of-major enrollments. A majority of all enrollments in political science come from students not majoring in political science, which confirms the extent to which we serve other programs.
- Credit production in political science dropped precipitously. In 2018 our credit production was half our level of credit production in 2013.
- Average credit hours, class enrollments, and program enrollments per full-time member of the faculty, as well as average class size, dropped in 2014 and mostly remained steady, below CAS averages.
- Instructional cost and tuition revenue per credit hour was consistently higher than CAS.
- External demand: On average, the program graduated 12.7 students per year. For five of the seven years of the review period for which data are available, an average of 4.2 of our graduates earned postgraduate degrees per year, about one-third of the average number of graduates.

### Analysis:

The most significant factor influencing the negative trends is that political science has had to cope with reduced faculty. At the beginning of the period under review, our instructors consisted of four permanent members of the faculty with tenure lines and a pool of adjunct and term instructors. We have not been able to replace two tenured members of the faculty who recently resigned, and our former pool of adjunct and term instructors has been reduced to a single term faculty member.

Moreover, for most of the years under review, the two faculty members who recently resigned were away on leave, on fellowships, or, when they were present, received course releases and sometimes taught electives rather than courses required by our major. A third faculty member went on a long-postponed sabbatical for a year. Under financial pressure, we have been obliged to abstain from hiring term and adjunct instructors when we have needed them.

Decreased availability of instructors has decreased the number of course sections available to students, overall credit production, and program enrollments. The decrease in course sections has extended the number of semesters and years our students must take to complete the degree. We are not offering enough course sections.

The decrease in average credit hours, class enrollments, and program enrollments per full-time member of the faculty, as well as relatively lower average class size, is best explained by personnel management practice. Every year from 2013 to 2014 through 2018 to 2019 (and the present year, 2019–2020, which is outside the review period), members of the tenured faculty requested to take leave and vacate scheduled courses that are required by the major program. These requests were made and granted with little advance warning. As a result, every year, on the verge of opening the new academic year or spring semester, the department has had to change teaching assignments, cancel courses, or, when permitted, find emergency replacements, with little time to identify and recruit superior candidates to fill the vacancies.

The Department of Political Science was already small when these requests were granted. Those faculty were hired for their expertise in the courses required by our major. Thus, these chronic emergency leaves dealt heavy blows to the program every year and probably dissuaded additional students from enrolling in the program or encouraged others to disenroll from courses and the major.

Two other significant factors contributing to these negative trends were suspension of the Forty-Ninth State Fellows Program in the University Honors College in 2013 and the subsequent abolition of CAS college requirements. Both were sources of significant enrollments in political science courses.

Despite these handicaps, the program has adjusted and is bucking the negative trend in program enrollment across CAS. Our program enrollments are up, and more students successfully pass our courses. These positive trends are the result of focusing efforts of remaining program faculty on student success and recruitment.

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Also, a much larger share of undergraduate credits earned in political science than credits earned in CAS are upper-division credits, 53% in political science versus 24% in CAS, which demonstrates that we are retaining our majors. Those upper-division credits are priced 21% higher for Alaska residents. Consequently, although our average credit production per faculty member over the review period is 11% below the average for CAS, our higher-priced credits close some of the resulting revenue gap per faculty member.

The financial performance of the program has improved since 2016. IR data show that in 2015 (the first year the data were available) and 2016, profitability of the program (using instructional costs and 80% of tuition revenue as the basis), was -30% and -35%, respectively. In 2017, profitability improved to -22%, and in 2018 the program was profitable, +0.49%. In 2019, profitability declined to -12% when we regained the faculty member who had been on sabbatical leave at reduced salary, but we expect this figure to rise in the foreseeable future. Average class size is markedly rising (see class enrollments in 2019–2020), and new program enrollments continue, despite our having fewer faculty.

When the program is able to hire new tenure-track professors in our two lines now vacant, we intend to apply the hard lessons learned over the review period. We will build on our small but strong remaining core of faculty. We will carefully screen prospective assistant professors for their commitment to the program and student success, and their ability to recruit new students. As less expensive faculty, these hires will help us improve our key financial metrics.

A high proportion of our graduates matriculate to law school. We cannot find exactly what proportion, because IR data do not clearly distinguish law schools from other graduate programs. We can see, however, that at least half are law school graduates.

Political science is the leader in preparing students for a career in the law. According to the Law School Admission Council, political science produces the most law school applicants by a very wide margin and ranks among the top five majors for law school admissions and LSAT scores. Therefore, political science is essential for UAA students who are planning to join the legal profession.

Our graduates are best prepared to be flexible in the job market, and are more able than graduates of workforce development programs to adjust themselves to new jobs in a variety of careers, and to types of jobs that do not yet exist. That is because political science is a liberal arts program of study, not a workforce development program. Rather than learning how to perform a specific job function, our students learn how to learn anything.

Here is why: a demanding liberal arts program like ours rests on the premise that students who have studied the arguments of Kant, the nuances of international diplomacy, or the institutional complexity of American government, for example, can learn, and can even teach themselves, job skills, finance, IT, and management more easily after graduation than students who successfully complete workforce development programs.

As a result, our alumni have been successful in a wide range of diverse careers, ranging from politics, law, diplomacy, and public administration to business, higher education, journalism, and nonprofit organizations.

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

Our faculty have successfully carried out the mission of UAA 2020, disseminating “knowledge through teaching, research, engagement, and creative expression.” Our efforts reflect the core value of excellence in UAA 2020 and demonstrate that we have contributed to UAA 2020’s goal to become a “national benchmark institution in our teaching, research, and service missions and services.”

Faculty research and engagement are widely recognized by the academic community, governmental institutions, and the public. Although our tenure-line faculty were only four during the review period, they have won preeminent national and international awards. The World Economic Forum recognized one of us as a Young Global Leader. In 2019, the YWCA of Alaska recognized two members of our department as among the ten Women of Achievement award winners. The American Political Science Association recognized another as author of the best book in American political thought in

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2017. Faculty have consulted, held leadership positions, or held fellowships with the United Nations, the Alaskan government, the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission, the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts, the Carnegie Foundation, Churchill College at Cambridge University, the Estoril Political Forum, the International Churchill Society, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, Stanford University's Center for African Studies, and the White House. Our degrees are from Harvard University, the University of Chicago, the Fletcher School at Tufts University, and the University of Montreal. We are often invited to deliver lectures, including endowed lectures, to national and international audiences at premier academic and public institutions. We speak to a wide range of Alaskan audiences and are frequently called upon to provide political commentary through the news media. We have served on more than a dozen undergraduate honors thesis committees.

In keeping with the UAA 2020 core value of excellence, to ensure "a diverse faculty...that reflect Alaska's and the world's unique cultures," we are diverse in identity and in intellectual endeavors. A majority of our faculty during the review period are from underrepresented minorities. We are scholars of Winston Churchill, Indigenous peoples and the Arctic, democratization in Africa, civil rights and social justice, and nineteenth-century American government. One of our faculty serves as the lead for UAA's campus affiliate of the National Coalition Building Institute and has led or co-led more than fifty social inclusion and equity training sessions, serving hundreds of students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

The curriculum of the Department of Political Science recently underwent a major revision. While wanting to make sure our students receive the highest-quality education in the field, the faculty realized that the number of courses required for the baccalaureate degree might deter students from following through with our major. Subsequently, the number of required courses was reduced. The curriculum was simplified. The number of credits required to graduate with a degree in Political Science was reduced from 39 to 33. We were able to achieve these changes without harming the integrity of our program. This major revision to our curriculum removed barriers to student success and improved the affordability of our program, in keeping with two core UAA 2020 values, access—"reducing barriers and providing multiple pathways to instruction"—and affordability—"UAA ensures an affordable college experience."

Our innovative program design has made Political Science one of only a handful of majors in the College of Arts and Sciences that strongly encourage students to take advantage of a myriad of internship opportunities, both curricular and extracurricular. These not only enhance our students' educational experience, but also offer real-world experience which can be, and has often been, parlayed into employment opportunities. From the Alaska Legislature to the Anchorage Assembly, from the Municipality of Anchorage to the U.S. Senate staff, from the United Nations to the First Alaskans Institute, among dozens of other internship opportunities, our students are gaining an understanding of the political world and how they can make a difference.

Upon regaining the Ted Stevens Legislative Internship Program at UAA in 2014, our department revitalized it. We send about six students each spring to serve legislators in Juneau. Drawn from all UA system universities, interns mostly come from UAA. Always in high demand among legislators in Juneau, they become full working staff members during the legislative session. Our credit hour production falls off in spring, when many students are away at the state capital, taking one UAS political science seminar but no UAA credits, yet they would not have it otherwise. This internship has become a rite of passage for more than a third of majors, and many parlay their experience into promising entry-level career positions afterward.

Specialized accreditation in the field of political science is rare, and like most undergraduate programs in America, we have not sought specialized accreditation. To maintain the integrity of our major program, the Department of Political Science at UAA annually assesses it against seven program outcomes. These measure writing ability, knowledge of American government, knowledge of the relationship between America and the world, critical assessment of political science arguments, interpretation of key texts, research acumen, and knowledge of four major fields in political science. Despite shrinking resources and reduced faculty, the program's performance has remained steady between A and B across all outcomes. Small dips in performance between years were usually remedied the next year, and some small gains were recognized.

Our department offers courses via distance education, both at the lower-division and upper-division levels. Faculty recognize that almost all UAA students work part-time or full-time, many have families, many serve in the military, some

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of them living (and often being deployed by the military) outside Anchorage. It may not be realistic for them to drive to campus, particularly in winter. All these factors and more make it our responsibility to meet students where and how it works for them, without compromising the quality of education that they expect from us and that it is our obligation to deliver.

To that end, two of our faculty have been accepted into the competitive Tech Fellows program offered by Academic Innovations and e-Learning (AI&e-L) at UAA. The focus was on making online courses accessible. They gained increased awareness of the importance of accessibility of online course offerings and syllabi, which were and continue to be accessible to all students. One undertook more online teaching from AI&e-L, focused on how to infuse Alaska Native Ways of Learning into online courses. In recognition for those efforts, that faculty member, one of only a dozen at UAA, received a Certificate in e-Learning and has been invited to be faculty associate for summer 2020's Tech Fellows, focusing on handling difficult dialogues in the online classroom. Our faculty member is working throughout academic year 2020–2021 with instructional designers at AI&e-L to provide a dynamic and useful education for incoming Tech Fellows.

The program does not currently have a formal advisory board, although our informal advisors and friends in business, government, and nonprofit organizations are many. Many current friends and informal advisors to the program are accomplished former students.

The accomplishments of our graduates are impressive and diverse, as these ten examples illustrate:

- National award-winning journalist, founder of Alaska's only online weekly newspaper, the *Alaska Commons*, and freelance political journalist
- A student in a master's degree program at the London School of Economics and Political Science
- CEO, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
- Truman Scholar (2018) and 2nd Lieutenant, US Army
- Press Director for the Alaska Senate Majority
- The first and only student in the UA system to win a Rhodes Scholarship (2017), now a graduate student in political theory at Oxford University and an Alaska Native
- Director of the Economic and Community Development Department for the Municipality of Anchorage
- Truman Scholar (2017) and program associate, Alaska Venture Fund
- Co-founder and CEO, PT Capital; former mayor of Bethel, Alaska
- An award-winning member of the nationally ranked Seawolf Debate team, served as Deputy Press Secretary for Governor Bill Walker after graduation, and is now an independent political consultant

As for academic advising, while our faculty rely on our CAS advisors to take care of our students' primary advising, all of us provide a secondary advising role. We help to guide students through our program, steer them to internship possibilities, share advice on law school admissions and other graduate programs, encourage them to apply to national scholarships, offer advice upon and after graduation from UAA, and write countless letters of recommendation.

When students graduate from UAA, it does not mean that they are no longer part of our political science family. Former students often join us for programs such as the Model United Nations and the James Madison Cup competition, act as mentors for current students, or come back as guest lecturers. Many are on our notification list and attend our Seward and Chartwell lecture series. Our ability and willingness to keep ties with our graduates strengthens bonds with our community as a whole.

#### 4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness

Our program serves Alaska's population center, home of almost all PS students. Many graduated from Kenai, Mat-Su, and Anchorage schools. During the review period, more than twenty Southcentral high school participants in Model UN later majored in PS here. Others enrolled in other UAA majors after experiencing Model UN. Others take our courses after enjoying our lectures in high school, at the suggestion of teachers we taught at UAA.

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Many non-traditional students have families here. Many are veterans or active duty military on bases here. Many work half- or full-time, as UAA's class schedule allows. Our open admissions lets many earn a PS degree who could not otherwise do so in Alaska.

Our major is efficient and productive. If discontinued or consolidated at another UA university, Alaska and the UA system would save little and lose much. The first Rhodes Scholar from a UA university was a UAA PS major, as were two recent Truman Scholars and most Alaska legislative interns.

We defend so-called "duplication" because UA's universities, like communities they serve, are so far apart. Should Washington State University drop PS because University of Washington has it? Those universities are much closer to each other than ours are.

Each program's continuation should depend on demand and support from its community. We offer online courses, but liberal arts programs should also offer face-to-face classes. Core faculty should reside in one location to preserve curricular integrity.\*

A 2019 survey of non-matriculating students admitted to UAA showed most did not attend college, or attended college outside Alaska, rather than another UA university. If our students could not major in PS at UAA, most would probably follow that pattern, rather than moving elsewhere in Alaska to pursue the same degree.

\*If called upon to defend our position, we can easily do so.

### **5. Summary Analysis**

Since UAA's Department of Political Science began more than forty years ago, our commitment to student success has never wavered. In prosperous and lean times we always have supported our students, for UAA, and for the community. Through engaging classes, diverse internships, distinguished research, Seward and Chartwell lectures, and the Model UN, we play a crucial role in the lives of students, the University of Alaska Anchorage, the Anchorage community, and the state of Alaska.

We draw strength from many sources: above all, from our students, who constantly drive us to meet their needs while maintaining the significance and relevance of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, along with the wisdom of the American Founders, as they navigate the political landscape of the twenty-first century. We are proud to watch them win Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, and Fulbright Scholarships.

UAA supports our thriving lecture series and our spirited Madison Cup competition. We draw strength from the wider Anchorage community, including

- high school students, who take our classes for ANSEP's program, attend lectures, and participate in Model UN;
- the Anchorage Municipality and Assembly, which support interns learning hands-on how local government works and realizing their significance as they play a vital role in it; and
- public, private, and non-governmental organizations, who put interns on their teams, where they learn about public/private partnerships, government relations, and how to affect political change.

The Alaska State Legislature welcomes Ted Stevens Interns—political science majors and others—who work with legislators on crucial issues for our state and university. Real-world skills students gain writing legislation, negotiating, and compromising serve them well, whatever their future has in store. After graduation, many work for the Legislature or the state.

And finally, our faculty, who contribute knowledge in classes and spend hours making sure the department remains strong. As we maintain our programs and relationships, we seek to expand them—including high-quality online courses to meet students' needs, wherever the students may be.

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Although political science faculties at peer universities often rival those in English and mathematics in size, our department's faculty is no larger than it was before 1983, when it gained a third tenure line. Despite their talents and accomplishments, UAA can boast few political science faculty. During this review period, our tenured faculty shrank from four to two, and our adjunct and term faculty to a single, indispensable professor. Yet our students still achieve exceptional success. Having reversed our decline in majors, we remain the largest undergraduate political science program in Alaska, with growing enrollments. All we need to build on our successes—to offer an even better education for growing numbers—is the go-ahead to fill two vacant tenure-track positions.

The future of political science therefore looks strong and healthy to us. It was Aristotle, after all, who wrote, "Man is by nature a political animal." Our students, like all Alaskans, face the full range of urgent and difficult political questions as citizens, and in this turbulent landscape we need political science now more than ever.