

Date: February 28, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: Zeynep Kilic, Chair, Sociology Department

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

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review: Optional Program Response to Dean's Recommendation

Program/s in this review: BA/BS Sociology

Program response to dean's findings:

Dear Interim Provost Stalvey,

In response to Interim Dean Petraitis' recommendation, we would like to highlight five main points:

- 1) We serve students who are critical to UAA's core values and represent current demographic realities of our state.
- 2) Our curriculum and work in the community directly contribute to UAA's Mission, as well as Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan objectives.
- 3) The "lack" of 1st year major declarations stems from the fact that most sociology majors typically transfer.
- 4) The cost analysis performed by the Dean is incorrect.
- 5) Alaska would be the only state without a sociology degree in the country.

In the first section of his findings, Dean Petraitis refers to UAA's commitment to serving the higher education needs of Alaska's "diverse peoples." In fact, "diversity" is mentioned four times in this section, which is completely consistent with UAA's stated mission and the oft-repeated statements of UAA administrators. The sociology major has consistently attracted students from underrepresented groups, including 10% Alaska Native, and other students of color, first generation students and/or veterans.

Students of color earned 45% of the Sociology baccalaureate degrees over the review period, while UAA overall only awards 33% and CAS only 30% to students of color. UAA's Sociology program's success and commitment in this area, for which there is ample evidence, illustrates our important role at UAA and our mission-aligned successes. To put this in some perspective, the racial and ethnic composition of recent UAA graduates resembles that of Anchorage nearly two decades ago. UAA Sociology graduates look like Anchorage right now. Given this reality, one might expect the Dean to promote UAA Sociology as an exemplar of UAA's stated mission rather than recommending its deletion.

The UAA Diversity Action Council, which exists to, “to nurture an environment where the diverse cultures and beliefs of all people are acknowledged, diversity is respected, and all people are valued,” undertook a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan in 2017 in order to actualize these goals. Further, DAC passed a motion on Jan 13th, 2020 recommending that the EPR process reaffirms UAA’s commitment to valuing diversity against the cost cutting criteria. The Sociology program fulfills many of the objectives in the Diversity & Inclusion Action plan. We have international faculty among our ranks (Dr. Kilic), who received the Chancellor’s Excellence Award in Diversity and a Fulbright grant, whose position would be terminated as a result of this decision (against the ‘best practices in hiring’ goal from the plan). Almost all of our curriculum fit within the guidelines of diversity and inclusion criteria and our classes on race and ethnicity, globalization, social stratification, gender and Indigenous land rights are prime examples of teaching diversity and inclusion.

Sociology faculty also perform important research and service that furthers the aims of the Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. Dr. Farrell’s research changed the way that the Mountain View neighborhood is understood in our city and our state. Now, instead of thinking about poverty and crime, people think about diversity and strength when they hear Mountain View. This research has captured the attention of numerous national news outlets including CNN, MSNBC and NPR, shining positive light on our city and UAA, and although this research is relatively new, Dr. Farrell has been cited in the scholarly community over 1,600 times already (Google Scholar).

Dr. Edwards co-chairs the newly formed Working Group to Address Gender and Violence in Alaska in 2020, a problem that disproportionately affects Native Alaskan women. We are one of the handful of departments that hired a multicultural pre-professoriate postdoc (Dr. Shenkin) whose research on Indigenous land rights directly supports Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan goals. Dr. Kilic organized the international food conference for ASFS and AFHVS in 2019 which brought over a million dollars to the state, and the conference specifically worked with groups such as FRESH, AFPC, RAIS and ACLT to highlight and benefit small local businesses and refugee/immigrant entrepreneurs. All of the above points demonstrate that Sociology is diversity and inclusion in action on and off campus and is reflective of UAA’s mission.

The only pointed criticism that Dean Petraitis offers for our program is that very few first-time freshmen choose sociology as a major. The data for this particular metric were not originally provided to us so that we could respond to it in our report. The answer is that sociology is not offered at most of the local high schools (with the exception of South High School, for one semester, as an elective) so incoming freshmen, particularly UAA students who disproportionately come from less wealthy high schools, are unlikely to choose it as a major right off the bat simply because they do not know what it is. *Nearly 90% of our majors become majors after taking Sociology 101*, either declaring a major for the first time or changing majors. The specific number the Dean cites is less than a third of our graduates which also points to the pattern of transfers to our major.

The Dean also neglected to note that those first-time freshman sociology majors have much higher 6-year graduation rates than found elsewhere at UAA. *The 6-year graduation rate for UAA Sociology majors was 50% among the 2010-2014 cohorts of first-time, full-time, baccalaureate degree-seeking students. This is 18 percentage points higher than UAA CAS (32%), 22 points higher than UAA (28%), and 15 points higher than the UAA 2020 goal of 35%.* Additionally, other metrics point to the attractiveness of our program to students who are not first-time freshmen. The average credits to degree among our majors is 105 (compared to CAS at 120 and UAA at 121). Since 120 credits is required to earn a baccalaureate degree, it is clear that our program is more attractive to transfer students than is typical among most UAA programs. We view this as a strength, not a weakness.

For the last two years, we have been working on outreach to ASD and took part in all high school events. Although what happens in ASD curriculum is outside of our control, we have been intentionally working on improving familiarity with our discipline among high schoolers. We have recently worked with Advancement and secured funding which produced four videos that highlight our department's contribution to community-university relationships as part of our ongoing outreach efforts.

The Sociology Department is not an outlier compared across the campus regarding tuition to total faculty pay, even when GER courses are taken out of the consideration. Contrary to the Dean's assertion Sociology is close to the average of all CAS in terms of tuition-to-total-cost analysis. A further nuanced look would show a \$15,000 surplus when only the four tenured Sociology faculty are considered. Hence, we do not consider this to be a justifiable fiscal decision.

Lastly, without the UAA BA/BS in Sociology Alaska would be the only state in the United States without the opportunity for students to earn a bachelor's degree in sociology (UAF's Sociology program has already been deleted). Even students in Puerto Rico, Guam and the US Virgin Islands have an opportunity to earn a sociology degree. Sociology is a fundamental discipline and universities all over the world offer sociology degrees. As Alaska grows more diverse and globally connects, the demand for employees with sociological training will continue to increase. The Dean also mentioned that the least number of students would be affected by this decision, yet the outcry from current students, alumni, colleagues and the general public that the Interim Provost and the Chancellor have received since this decision was announced should be an indication of how ill-advised this decision is.

At the end, we do understand that the recommendation to delete the Sociology BA/BS is not about the quality of our program; the Dean makes that clear in his very uncritical review. Instead it is about meeting the cuts dictated by the budget compact. However, from the Provost and the Chancellor's eye view, we believe that there must be savings in other areas of the university and/or other big draws on the general fund that could be trimmed to preserve the only sociology degree program in the state, and one which meets the institutional goals of diversity and inclusion and disproportionately attracts and serves students from underrepresented groups.

We urge you to please reconsider the Dean's initial recommendation.

Sincerely,

Zeynep Kilic, Chair & Professor of Sociology