BIENNIAL PROGRAM STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REPORT FORM – ASSESSMENT COMPLETED IN AY2023-2024 (Due to the dean on November 15)

Submission date: 11/15/2024

Assessment Plan covered in this report: Paralegal Studies AAS/PBCT & Legal Studies BA

College: College of Health

Campuses where the program(s) is delivered: ☒Anchorage ☐KOD ☐KPC ☐MSC ☐PWSC

Submitted by: H. Ryan Fortson, Professor of Justice

After responding to the questions below, the program should email this report form to the dean, with a copy to the appropriate community campus director(s) if the program is delivered on a community campus.

1. **Please list and number the Program Student Learning Outcomes your program assessed in the past academic year. For each outcome, indicate one of the following: Exceeded faculty expectations, Met faculty expectations, or Did not meet faculty expectations.**

   For Example: 1. "Communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and formats" – Exceeded faculty expectations; 2. "Adopt critical perspectives for understanding the forces of globalization and diversity" – Met faculty expectations.

   The Legal Studies program evaluated three measures within the same PSLO. This PLSO applies to all three degree programs.

   D.1. Develop and execute legal research plans using law library resources and commonly used legal research databases: Identification of potentially relevant authorities -- Met faculty expectations.

   D.2. Develop and execute legal research plans using law library resources and commonly used legal research databases: Development of Research Plan -- Met faculty expectations.

   D.3. Develop and execute legal research plans using law library resources and commonly used legal research databases: Plan Execution and Retrieval of Authorities Needed -- Met faculty expectations.

2. **Describe what your assessment process was last year for these Program Student Learning Outcomes, including the collection of data, analysis of data, and faculty (and other, e.g., advisory board) conversations around the findings.** *(1000 words or less)*

   Pursuant to our Assessment Plan, PSLOs are evaluated in Spring using student work that incorporates the PSLOs selected by the faculty in the Fall for evaluation. Legal Studies has 9

PSLOs (with 26 total measures). All student work is taken from the same course (though potentially from different semesters), with the names removed for evaluation purposes. The program cycles through PSLOs and related measures from year to year. Assessment of some PSLOs is split between multiple years because of the number of measures within each respective PSLO, though attempts are made to assess any given PSLO entirely within one year. All measures being assessed are scored as either "exceeds expectations" (2 points), "meets expectations" (1 point), or "does not meet expectations" (0 points).

Typically, work from later in the standard course sequence is chosen to be better reflective of student capabilities upon graduation. The samples are then evaluated on the same scale (0-2) by both faculty and members of the Legal Studies Program Advisory Committee (LSPAC), an external advisory board composed of attorneys, paralegals, and court administrators from the local legal community. A rubric is provided for each PSLO measure with criteria for exceeds expectations, meets expectations, and does not meet expectations. Each sample is scored by each of the four Legal Studies faculty and by four LSPAC members. This provides comparisons between faculty standards and those of the local legal community. Results are shared and discussed with both the faculty and the LSPAC in the Fall semester meeting.

3. **What are the findings and what do they tell the faculty about student learning in your program?** *(1000 words or less)*

A total of 9 student artifacts from the LEGL A377 (Evidence, Investigation and Discovery) were evaluated over two semesters. The number of artifacts chosen was based on the number of assignments turned in and the available LSPAC members to evaluate them. The artifacts evaluated were chosen at random from the pool of total student artifacts. The assignment involved the creation of a research plan based on a legal scenario provided by the professor. Different scenarios were used in each respective scenario. Students were asked to research a novel question of law and locate a variety of different types of legal resources (federal and Alaska cases, federal and Alaksa statutes, secondary sources) relevant to answering the question posed. Students were then required to write a short summary of each resource and explain its relevance.

Scores between faculty and LSPAC were comparable for all three measures. Outcome D.1 received a faculty score of 1.03 and an LSPAC score of 1.06. Outcome D.2 received a faculty score of 1.14 and an LSPAC score also of 1.14. Outcome D.3 received a faculty score of 1.03 and an LSPAC score of 1.13. A score of 1.0 = Meets Expectations. This demonstrates consistent standards of evaluation between faculty and the local legal community. It also shows that our students as a whole are slightly above legal community expectations for an entry-level paralegal. The program has consistently been near or moderately above a 1.0 for all PSLO measures over the past several years.

The PSLOs measured in this past academic year addressed research plans, which are a central component of paralegal job responsibilities. The results of the assessment indicate that students as a whole are performing up to the expectations of both the professors and the legal community. This reflects successful teaching in this area.

4. **Based on the findings, did the faculty make any recommendations for changes to improve student achievement of the Program Student Learning Outcomes?** Yes

   i. **Please describe the recommended action(s), what improvements in student learning the program hopes to see, the proposed timeline, and how the program will know if the change(s) has worked. If no recommendations for changes were made, please explain that decision.** *(1000 words or less)*

      The ability to conduct computerized legal research is one of the most important skills our program graduates obtain, especially those who go directly into the legal job market as paralegals or legal assistants. The Legal Studies program teaches legal research in several of its courses, but it is the central focus of the Legal Research, Analysis, and Writing course. While the results of the assessment demonstrate that students are meeting expectations, both of the faculty and the community advisory committee, the scores are close to this median level. The faculty strive for students to conduct legal research that exceeds expectations and is closer to a 1.5 or above. One possible explanation for the scores being lower than desired is that the assignment chosen, while the closest to Program Student Learning Outcome D that could be found, did not clearly match the measures in the PSLO rubric. The PSLOs are being streamlined (see below), which should reduce this disconnect in the future. Efforts can also be made to emphasize with students the need to make sure sources are the most current and relevant possible and not to stop researching when a source that meets the requirements of the assignment is found. This point of emphasis can be reinforced with all faculty and adjunct faculty who teach legal research.

5. **In the past academic year, how did your program use the results of previous assessment cycles to make changes intended to improve student achievement of the Program Student Learning Outcomes? Please check all that apply.**

   ☐ Course curriculum changes
   ☐ Course prerequisite changes
   ☐ Changes in teaching methods
   ☐ Changes in advising
   ☐ Degree requirement changes
   ☐ Degree course sequencing
   ☐ Course enrollment changes (e.g., course capacity, grading structure [pass/fail, A-F])
   ☐ Changes in program policies/procedures
   ☒ Changes to Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)
   ☐ College-wide initiatives (e.g., High-Impact Practices)
   ☐ Faculty, staff, student development
   ☐ Other

☐No changes were implemented last year. *(If no options above were selected)*

If you checked "Other" above, please describe. *(100 words or less)*

6. **Do you have any information about how well these or other past improvements are working? Are they achieving their intended goals? Please include any data or assessment results that help you demonstrate this. *(1000 words or less)***

The Legal Studies program currently has nine Program Student Learning Outcomes (six apply to all three degree programs, two just for the BA and one just for the AAS and PBCT), with 26 total measures. This is simply too many to assess effectively and with any frequency. Consequently, the program has drafted and submitted through the curriculum process revisions to the PSLOs. The revised PSLOs condense the learning outcomes down to four. Each learning outcome applies to all three degree programs; there are no program-specific learning outcomes. Each learning outcome has three measures. Moreover, there are suggested assignments to evaluate each of the learning outcomes respectively.

The revised PSLOs will substantially streamline the Legal Studies assessment process. The new outcomes and measures, while drawing from the prior PSLOs, are more reflective of how the pedagogy of the program has evolved over the last few years. Outcomes and measures have been refined and clarified to avoid, along with the suggestion of specific assignments to evaluate, the disconnect that muddled this year's assessment. Redundancy in outcomes and measures has been eliminated. This results in PSLOs that are simpler, easier to understand, and easier to assess.

The condensed PSLOs additionally meet the newly implemented seven-year assessment cycle. It was previously impossible to assess each program student learning outcome in seven years without doubling up on assessments, which would be overly burdensome on both the faculty and the advisory committee. The revised PSLOs allow for continuation of the practice of assessing a single learning outcome each year while also ensuring that all learning outcomes are assessed at least once during the seven-year cycle. It also allows for revisions and re-assessment for most PSLOs to be made during any given cycle.

DEAN SECTION (Due to the program on January 15)

After completing the Dean Section and signing it, the dean should email this report form to the program, and copy uaa_oaa@alaska.edu for posting. If the program is delivered on one or more community campus, the dean should consult with the appropriate community campus director(s) on the response and copy the appropriate community campus director(s) when emailing the response to the program.

1. **Based on the program's responses above, what guidance and support do you have for the program moving forward?** *(200 words or less)*

   The program assessed students' ability to develop and execute legal research plans using law library resources and commonly used legal research databases. Data were collected from nine student artifacts from LEGL A377 (Evidence, Investigation and Discovery) and were analyzed by both faculty and members of the Legal Studies Program Advisory Committee.

   Overall, it is clear that students are performing up to the expectations of both the faculty and the legal community. Students are meeting expectations in identifying potentially relevant authorities, developing a research plan, executing the plan, and retrieving needed authorities. I support the program's goal to emphasize with students the need to make sure sources are the most current and relevant possible and not to stop researching when a source that meets the requirements of the assignment is found.

   I also support the program's goal to revise and streamline its student learning outcomes.

2. **Discuss what the program is doing particularly well in terms of its processes for the assessment and improvement of student learning, for example, the use of a common rubric or prompt, a signature assignment, etc.** *(200 words or less)*

   The program regularly assesses student learning and uses multiple measures to collect data. Data are then used to recommend improvements. Overall, the program is demonstrating a strong commitment to program assessment and continuous improvement.

   I recommend that future program assessments use the additional measures that are collected for the program's ABA approval (these measures are also included in the assessment plan). The program already collects valuable data from internship evaluations, exit exams, student surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys. Providing additional data (and hopefully increasing sample size) will provide a broader and more reliable assessment of program student learning outcomes. The Dean's office can provide support for integrating these additional assessment measures in the biennial assessment of program student learning outcomes.

   I thank the program for its commitment to program assessment and continuous improvement.

Dean's signature: *Debbie Craig*   **Date:** 1/14/2025