

# Idaho State UNIVERSITY

Division of Health Sciences

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8060 165th Avenue NE, Suite 100  
Redmond, WA 89052-3981

Good Morning:

Please consider this letter to be a report on the Monday, October 21, 2013 On-site Ad Hoc Peer Evaluation visit to the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). The purpose of our visit was to review the university's candidacy status to offer educational programs at the doctoral level. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) granted candidacy at the doctoral level to UAA in April 2012 which allowed them to grant the Ph.D. in Clinical-Community Psychology with a rural indigenous emphasis, a joint program with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Our visit reviewed the information contained in the September 2013 *Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report: Candidacy at the Doctoral Level* submitted to the NWCCU.

Since 2006, the UAA has been offering a joint doctoral level (Ph.D.) program, in Clinical-Community Psychology, in cooperation with UAF with the approval of the NWCCU. UAF has been, and remains, the primary doctoral-granting state-funded institution in Alaska. The first cohort of students began the program in the Fall of 2006. Half of the students were located on the UAA campus and the other half were on the UAF campus. Faculties on both campuses teach both student cohorts on-site and via distance learning technology. While both students and faculty were housed on both campuses, only UAF had the authority to award the doctoral degree. As of this date, the program has graduated 11 Ph.D.s in Clinical-Community Psychology.

In November 2011, the UAA submitted a request to the NWCCU for a substantive change in their accreditation status to include the authority to award doctoral degrees. In April 2012, the NWCCU, in accordance with Policy A-2, approved the University of Alaska Anchorage's request for a substantive change. Once UAA achieved candidacy status to offer doctoral level education, students could graduate from UAA. UAA granted Ph.D.'s to three doctoral students in Clinical-Community Psychology in May 2013. It was a historic day on the UAA campus!

The UAA's candidacy review and advancement from candidacy status to full authority as a doctoral granting institution was planned to be part of the university's On-site Year Three review for the NWCCU. Because the UAA On-site Year Three review was postponed, this Ad Hoc review of the substantive change was conducted as a separate and focused site visit. If allowed to grant doctoral level degrees, the UAA strategic plan includes future development of the Doctorate of Nursing Practice and Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) degrees.

Our review included meetings with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School, the Program Directors for the joint doctoral program in Clinical-Community Psychology at both Fairbanks and Anchorage, the College of Arts and Sciences Business Manager, faculty at both campuses, students at both campuses, graduates of the program, clinical site preceptors and cultural advisors to the program, including members of the Alaskan Council of Elders. We also toured the UAA physical facilities, including the in-house psychology clinic. We also observed a doctoral level statistics class that was in session at both campuses, via distance learning technology. In addition to our personal visits and campus tour, we reviewed the resumes of the core faculty at UAA in the Clinical-Community Program, and we reviewed a sampling of the dissertations produced to date in the program.

Based upon information that we received from all of the sources, in addition to our observation of the technology and physical plant utilized by the program, we were able to draw the following conclusions:

- We found the jointly developed and delivered program to be clearly aligned with the missions of the UAF and the UAA as the designated health sciences institution in Alaska. Specifically, a portion of the UAF mission is: *To inspire learning and advance and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research and public service, emphasizing the North and its diverse peoples.* The portion of UAA mission is: *To discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression.* The mission of the doctoral degree in Clinical-Community Psychology is: *To produce psychologists who are knowledgeable and able to work with rural indigenous people.* The joint program clearly capitalized on the strengths of both institutions with respect to faculty expertise and provided UAA with time to develop doctoral level infrastructure.
- Our review of the curriculum of the joint psychology program indicated that the orientation of new students includes a Cultural Retreat in which Native Cultural Advisors play an integral part. This early experience is followed up with Brown Bag lunches with Cultural Advisors for students during the course of their program. These events support the program's design as one that focuses on skill development for clinicians who plan to work with the indigenous people of Alaska.
- UAA has developed an administrative support system to support graduate education, including doctoral level offerings. In 2008 UAA developed a Graduate School which is staffed by an Associate Dean under the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies. This development allows for time and attention to be paid to graduate level admissions and advancement issues, including graduation requirements.
- The joint program was initially administered by the Provost's office on the UAA campus. Recently it has moved under the Dean, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). The CAS Dean expressed commitment to the program with respect to financial support. He supports the program with the allocation of graduate assistantships and compensation for budgetary shortfalls which

occurred during the last fiscal year. Two founding faculty on the UAA retired. Both of these positions were filled with qualified faculty. Psychology faculty grant funding expectations were recently adjusted to more realistic levels. It is likely that this adjustment will assist in retaining qualified faculty at UAA.

- We found that the program was highly responsive to the state's needs for doctorally prepared clinicians in the mental health arena and to students' interests in doctoral-level education in psychology. We base these conclusions on information obtained during our interviews with the program graduates, the majority of whom have settled in Alaska, and our review of application data which suggests that there is a robust pool of student applicants for the program. Of note was a graduate student who said to us that she enjoyed working "where she felt she was needed." The admission process is jointly run by both campuses.
- Our discussions with on-site clinical preceptors, some of whom have hired program graduates, confirmed that the level of expertise of the Ph.D. students was above that of former M.S. graduates, especially with respect to knowledge of the research literature in the field. The employers endorsed the graduates as well-prepared to address the mental health clinical and community programming needs of the under-served in Alaska. Our review of the comprehensive *Student Handbook for the PhD Program in Clinical-Community Psychology with Rural Indigenous Emphasis* indicated that the policies related to students' progression in the program are well articulated.

We found that the program at UAA was staffed by a sufficient number of qualified faculty and staff and that the program is adequately equipped. UAA is a unionized campus. Two types of faculty staff the Psychology Department: Tripartite faculty with research components to their workloads (all of whom are tenure eligible) and Bipartite faculty with no research components to their workloads (some of whom are tenured and some of whom are non-tenure eligible because they are temporary employees). Four Tripartite faculty positions are assigned to the doctoral program. Tenure track faculty have research and grant work expectations that result in lower teaching workload requirements in the UA system.

- Since the program's inception, the physical plant in Anchorage has been remodeled and the technology associated with the distance learning modality appeared to be state-of-the-art. The staffing of the program includes a Program Coordinator, which has been maintained during an era in which positions of this nature have been eliminated in other parts of the institution.
- We found the research, a critical element of Ph.D. education, to be ongoing in the program, through independent faculty scholarship as well as student projects. A review of resumes of the core doctoral faculty indicated that they appeared to be productive and fully engaged in grant-eligible research projects and topics associated with rural and indigenous people. Graduates indicate that they have published in professional refereed journals together with their faculty mentors prior to their graduation from the program.

- We found the UAA's information resources and technology services to be appropriate and appeared to foster the goal of collaboration across the two sites. Our interviews with students indicated that in a very short time they felt unity with their colleagues at the other site because of the quality of the technology and the setting in which the classes were offered. They noted that there was some variability among faculty and the ease with which they used the distance learning technology.
- We found the program's graduates are contributing to the state's need for services to diverse populations, at a doctoral level, which includes eligibility for licensure in the state. The graduates with whom we met were working for institutions and agencies that served the state of Alaska, including indigenous peoples. They noted that the use of technology in their programs facilitated the ease with which they have now incorporated technology in the delivery of the psychological services to remote areas.

As for the areas that the UAA appears to continue to work on, we noted the following:

- The policy on graduate faculty eligibility has yet to be completed. Once completed, it will need to be disseminated. It was our understanding that the Graduate Council is currently working on this policy.
- We also encourage the University of Alaska Anchorage faculty to assist the University of Alaska Fairbanks in filling vacant positions so that a full complement of students can be accepted next year. This year, no students were accepted to the Fairbanks cohort due to two vacancies in faculty. We commend the University joint program for adjusting the number of students accepted based upon faculty availability.
- Finally, we encourage the universities to provide adequate professional development that produces highly skilled use of technology by all faculty who teach via distance learning.

In summary, the University of Alaska Anchorage is producing qualified doctoral graduates who are eligible for psychology licensure in Alaska. UAA has developed systems and allocated resources such that the graduates of their joint program with UAF are assuming doctoral positions in institutions and agencies who serve the indigenous peoples of Alaska. This product appears to be in line with the goals of the program and supports UAA's request for a substantive change in their institutional status.

It was truly a pleasure to work on behalf of the Commission on this Ad Hoc visit to the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Sincerely,

  
 Linda Hatzenbuehler

  
 Corinne Mantle-Bromley