

**Associate of Arts in General Studies
University College
Office of Academic Advising
March 2008**

Degree Program Assessment Progress Report for 2007

1. What are your student learning goals for this degree program? Include which core competencies are addressed by these goals where applicable.

The goal of the Associate of Arts in General Studies program is to provide students with the UALR Core Curriculum as a base for continuing in school for a bachelor's degree. Beginning in the Fall of 2003, the Associate of Arts in General Studies requires the completion of the UALR 44 hour core and a total of 64 credit hours. All ten core competencies are satisfied by students who complete the AAGS. This fulfills the purpose of the core curriculum, "to establish a foundation for the undergraduate academic experience and to ensure that students develop fundamentals skills and a lifelong commitment and ability to learn."

In 2006-2007 more than half of the students applying for the AAGS met the requirements for the new program. 59% (53) fall under the 2003 catalog, while less than half, 41% (37), fall under the catalog requirements prior to 2003. Students who complete the "new" (2003 and later catalogs) requirements are in a position to move into a bachelor's degree program, thus supporting retention and graduation.

2. Student learning outcomes addressed each year.

- a. To complete the UALR Core Curriculum and be prepared to continue studies for a bachelor's degree.
- b. To encourage students to consider this degree as progress toward a higher degree.
- c. To enable students to feel a sense of personal accomplishment upon receipt of the degree.
- d. To provide students with a means of professional advancement.

3. Where will the outcomes be addressed in your program?

All UALR courses are assessed in their respective departments.

The learning outcomes are assessed each year by a review of student responses on the Student Survey, Banner review of student status, and an analysis of worksheets and unofficial transcripts.

4. How do you assess each objective?

- a) **Methods:** Outcome 1 and part of Outcome 2 are assessed by reviewing information in Banner. The “Degree Summary” form is reviewed to find the number of students who complete the AA, and the “Registration Query” form is used to determine how many are still enrolled at UALR. The information that is missing is the number of students who go on to another school, such as UAMS, to pursue a higher degree. The Student Survey asks students to report their intent to continue for a higher degree. Outcomes 3 and 4 are assessed by counting the respective responses from the Student Survey, indicating if they feel a sense of accomplishment and/or if the AAGS is a means of professional advancement. The information obtained from Banner is reliable and valid. The information obtained from the Student Survey is self-reported and is considered reliable. The Assistant Director of Academic Advising obtains the information from Banner and the Student Surveys each year and writes the assessment reports. The reports are reviewed by others in the department and by the Division Chief of University College to assure that data is treated, analyzed, and interpreted consistently.
- b) **Design:** The AAGS applicant completes the Student Survey when signing the degree plan. A follow up survey, the ACT Alumni Survey, is sent out yearly from the Office of Counseling and Career Planning. This report is for the previous year graduates.
- c) **Assessment Cycle:** The review and assessment of each outcome is conducted annually for the AAGS.
- d) **Stakeholder involvement:** The annual Degree Program Assessment Plan and Progress Reports are posted to the Academic Advising, the Provost’s Assessment Central, and the Vice-Chancellor for Educational and Student Services websites each year.

5. What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

The first outcome is to provide students with the UALR Core Curriculum as a base for continuing in school for a bachelor’s degree. In 2005-2006, 9 out of 87 students (10%) were required to complete the entire 44 hour core. In 2006-2007,

59% (53) were required to satisfy the new program requirements, and less than half, 41% (37) were eligible to meet the old program requirements.

A second outcome is that students will consider this degree as progress toward a higher degree. Fifty-nine students (66%) are still actively enrolled students at UALR as of the spring semester of 2008. Three (3%) have already completed a bachelor's degree. Seventy-nine students (88%) indicated on the student survey that they plan to continue in school to get a bachelor's degree. Six of those students indicated they plan to transfer to UAMS to one of the health related professions degree programs. Of the remaining 11 students who indicated that they did not plan to continue for a bachelor's degree, one indicated "moving" and one indicated "unknown" as reasons.

The eighty-seven students seeking the AAGS in the 2007 report were reviewed this year, one year later, to determine: 1) if the student is still enrolled at UALR in spring 2008 and 2) if the student has completed a bachelor's degree at UALR. The status of each student was checked in BANNER. Of the 87 students, 37 are still enrolled in the spring of 2008, and 8 students have completed a bachelor's degree. These 45 students represent 52% of the 87 students.

Retention and graduation. Five years (2000-2004) were studied for the "Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation Strategies: A Poster Presentation." This study found that 288 students graduated with the AAGS, and 128 of them (44%) of the AAGS graduates were retained at UALR to graduate with a bachelor's degree.

The third outcome is to enable students to feel a sense of personal accomplishment upon receipt of the AAGS degree. On the student survey, students are asked to check reasons for applying for the degree. They may check any that apply. Following are the numbers from this year's survey.

Job opportunity/advancement	44
Personal satisfaction	64
Halfway to bachelor's degree*	15
Intend to transfer	4
Other (comments)	

*Removed from new version of survey because the AAGS is halfway to a bachelor's degree.

Comments from the survey:

"I need to graduate soon."

"Only needed a few electives to complete after core."

"I had enough credits."

"Just in case I have to move."

"I feel like I accomplish [sic] something in my success in order to move forward to the next, which is nursing at UAMS."

“Moving to California to work...”
 “Wanted a degree till I could finish BA.”
 “This is mainly for personal satisfaction.”

Personal satisfaction or accomplishment continues to be indicated as the most frequent reason for applying for the Associate of Arts.

The fourth goal is to provide students with a means of professional advancement.
 Forty-four students checked this option on the survey, reflecting that they expect this degree to help them with increased employment and/or advancement opportunities. Following are comments from students on the survey.

“It will help me get a better job as a students in college, while continuing for my bachelor’s.”
 “Possible.”
 “It will help me move into a better job.”
 “Yes, it will help me advance in my particular department to a more higher level prep position.”
 “Will have pay increase at current job.”
 “I don’t know.”
 “Computer skill helped keep a job at AGL.”
 “Not at my current job but perhaps at another place of employment.”
 “It is going to help get a better job that I have been offered but can’t get until I have at least a two year degree.”
 “Yes, I could use the degree to obtain certification to become a teacher.”
 “No. I wanted a certificate to reward myself for completion of some sort of degree program for my years of taking classes of interest to me.”
 “Not sure.”
 “Yes, without a degree it’s hard to get promotions.”
 “I have not been (sic) to find a job; I thought an AA degree would make my resume look better.”
 “I am currently unemployed and I need to take some more classes here at UALR to go on to UAMS for my RN degree.”
 “Maybe.”
 “With my A+ certification my associate degree will help me obtain a computer support specialist position.”
 “No, it is just a personal choice.”
 “No child left behind act. Keep a job.”
 “My job is dependent upon my BS degree, so I would like my AAGS to show that I’m getting closer to my BS.”
 “The AA degree is a personal accomplishment and will definitely help with my career in the future.”
 “Just wanted it.”

“The AA degree will assist me in receiving a promotion in my present employment position. Also the receipt of the AA degree will put me even closer to earning a BA degree in Early Childhood Education.”

“It possibly will promote me in the company but will help me in the future.”

“Keep a job.”

“Yes.”

“Unknown.”

“Yes, with the AA under my belt, it will accentuate the level of work experience that I have.”

“That’d be swell.”

“Not quite.”

“I think it has helped me to continue advances in my current job.”

“Will help justify why I was hired.”

“Better job. It’s a wonderful accomplishment before my bachelor degree.”

“Not sure, but would like to have it anyway.”

“The AA degree will help me move into a better job as I further my education to receive a BS.”

“Employers always prefer employees with a degree or solid education behind you.”

“Not a promotion but maybe a better job.”

“It will help me earn certificates and possibly move into a better job.”

“Yes, in the future.”

“I wanted to leave UALR with a degree that will always be useful if I do change my career goal.”

“Yes, I will receive a raise and will be able to apply for a better job with that qualification.”

“It will not help with my current position, but should definitely help my advancement.”

“Yes. As a research assistant at UAMS, this will assure advancement within my department.”

“I am a HR Director at Vestcom Int. and have been for many years. All my support staff have degrees.”

“Yes. I have the experience but not a degree of any type. Having a degree will greatly improve my chances for promotion.”

“I plan to get a better job with a higher pay rate.”

“Not necessarily, it will just improve my credentials.”

“Promotion to better job.”

“It would benefit me to hold any degree while keeping my current job.”

“I hope to move into a better job position. However, I’ve been in school (higher education) for 10 years and have to complete anything.” [sic]

Student characteristics are analyzed annually. Ninety (90) students filed degree plans in 2007-2008.

Year	Total # Students	% Change
2007-2008	90	+3%
2006-2007	87	+26%
2005-2006	69	-9%
2004-2005	76	-6%
2003-2004	81	8%
2002-2003	75	7%

Forty-eight (48) were native UALR students (53%), and forty-two (42) were transfer students (47%). Native UALR students are defined as those who began in college at UALR as a “first semester freshman” or “freshman transfer” students, even if they transferred credits, such as for summer school, back to UALR. The following table illustrates the number of native UALR students and the number of transfer students.

Year	UALR #	UALR %	Transfer #	Transfer %
2007-2008	48	53%	42	47%
2006-2007	53	61%	34	39%
2005-2006	32	46%	37	54%
2004-2005	37	49%	38	51%
2003-2004	44	54%	37	46%
2002-2003	36	48%	39	52%

The average age of students applying for the AAGS this year is 30 years of age, the same as last year. This is still somewhat higher than the average age for 2007 undergraduate students, 27. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the AAGS applicants are female, and twenty-four percent (24%) are male.

One characteristic related to “personal satisfaction” is the length of time it has taken some students to complete the Associate of Arts degree. The average number of years, for those who received the degree in 2007, to complete the associate degree is 6. However, the time span of years, from when the student first entered college until 2007, ranged from 2 to 37 years, with 10 years being the average number of years. Many of these students have either been in and out of school or enrolled part time over an extended period of time. They feel a sense of satisfaction to have reached a milestone such as the completion of the Associate of Arts in General Studies.

6. What conclusions were drawn and decisions made as a result?

Conclusions:

The number of students applying for the degree is up by 3% this year. For the first time, more than half the students applying for the degree fall under the new requirements of the 2003 or later catalog.

The characteristics of students applying for the Associate of Arts degree remain consistent with prior years. "Personal satisfaction" continues to be the most frequently checked response on the survey as a reason for applying for the degree. Students apply for the AAGS after having been in and out of school for several years, so that it represents a sense of accomplishment for many. Additionally, completing the associate degree can mean job advancement or job opportunity.

This is the first year (2007) that more than half (59%) fall under the new program requirements which were implemented in Fall 2003. Each year more students should be coming under the Fall 2003 or later catalog, which means that upon completion of the Associate of Arts, they are half way to a bachelor's degree with the UALR Core completed. This, in addition to the "personal satisfaction" factor, appears to support the retention of students. This is supported by the findings that 69% of the 2007 AAGS applicants are either still in school in Spring 2008 or have already graduated with a bachelor's degree.

The revised Student Survey appears to collect the information needed for feedback and assessment purposes.

Recommendations

One recommendation is to develop a one page handout to AAGS applicants as they come in to sign the degree plan and fill out the survey. The handout would give them written directions on: 1) how to declare the General Studies major and 2) how to apply for graduation online.

Assessment results are posted on the following websites: the Provost's Assessment Central, the Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Services, and Academic Advising.

Avenues for providing information regarding the AAGS were completed in 2006. The first, in the fall of 2006, a new informational bookmark about the Associate of Arts in General Studies was printed. It can be displayed for students to pick up and can be used as an insert in the new University College Academic Advising brochure. Second, there is a link at the Academic Advising website which

provides a brief description of the program and takes the reader to links to yearly assessment reports: www.ualr.edu/aa/GSTU.