

**Associate of Arts in General Studies
University College
Office of Academic Advising
March 2009**

Degree Program Assessment Progress Report for 2008

- 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, 59% of AAGS degree seeking students were required to meet the new degree requirements, and 41% satisfied old degree requirements. By 2007-2008, only 21% were eligible to graduate under old program requirements, and 79% will be graduating under the new program requirements, which includes the UALR core.

- 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 by University College Academic Advising 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, only 10% were required to complete the entire 44 hour core. By 2007-2008, 79% of the AAGS applicants are satisfying the new program requirements and the UALR core. With the core complete, students are in a position to continue for a bachelor's degree. The completion of the UALR core, completion of the AAGS, and a sense of accomplishment support UALR graduation and retention efforts.

A second outcome is that students will consider this degree as progress toward a higher degree. Fifty-nine students (61%) are still actively enrolled at UALR in the spring semester of 2009. Forty-five (46%) completed the Associate of Arts in General Studies in 2008, and two have completed a bachelor's degree. Eighty-one students (84%) indicated on the student survey that they plan to continue in school to get a bachelor's degree.

A reminder email was sent to 16 students who have a signed degree plan and who need to apply for graduation in May 2009.

The ninety students seeking the AAGS in the 2008 report were reviewed one year later to determine: 1) if the student is still enrolled at UALR in spring 2009 and 2) if the student has completed a bachelor's degree at UALR. The status of each student was checked in BANNER. Of the 90 students, 43 are still enrolled in the spring of 2009, and 9 students have completed 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.

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|-------------------------------|----|
| • Job opportunity/advancement | 48 |
| • Personal satisfaction | 62 |
| • Intend to transfer | 14 |
| • Other (comments) | 4 |

Other comments:

“So I wouldn't have to transfer to another college...”

“Have no degree and feel should at least have AA and then continue towards BA.”

“Toward bachelor degree.”

“Moving to another state.”

“Marriage and baby.”

“My husband and I move a lot because of his job and I want to make sure I have at least an AA degree before we move again so I have a degree to take with me.”

Each year *personal satisfaction* is the most frequent reason checked for applying for the Associate of Arts, followed by *job opportunity/advancement*.

The fourth goal is to provide students with a means of professional advancement. Forty-eight students checked *job opportunity/advancement* on the survey, reflecting that they expect this degree to help them with increased employment and/or advancement opportunities.

Following are answers students gave to the question, “Will the receipt of the AA degree help you receive a promotion or move into a better job, or keep a job (degree now required by employer)?”

“It could only help in employment searches.”

“Presently not seeking another job; will contribute (AA Degree) to salary increase in future.”

“Yes, I’m currently working @ the L.R.S.C. as an substitute teacher and if I have that degree I will make more money and more opportunities will open.”

“Yes, this will allow me to work at one of the local schools and have same schedule as my children.”

“So many positions here have the requirement of degree.”

“The AA degree will move me into a better job. With the AA degree I am able to apply for more advance positions.”

“Yes, more money earned.”

“Yes, military.”

“With this new degree...I might go job shopping.”

“Not sure, but no to my current job. It will not advance me here.”

“Yes, job advancement.”

“Yes, it will help me get into UAMS nursing program.”

“Keep my job as a histology lab and maybe find another health science related job.”

“May help.”

“No, it will not. I just did it for myself. I have no particular reason.”

“Yes. Advancement within my company.”

“Yes.”

“I plan to go on to Registered Nursing, and I believe this will help my resume.”

“Yes, I’m sure it will help to prove my knowledge.”

“No. I am 60 years old and retired.”

“It would help on my resume. I will be the first in my family to get a degree.”

“Personal reasons only.”

“When I go back to work it will be a big help receiving a job.”

- “Not employed – future yes. Makes me appreciate past courses.”
- “Trying to move up in company. Better pay with AA degree.”
- “Not really. My husband is in the Air Force. So it helps to transfer.”
- “It will assist in keeping current employment, proof needed.”
- “The AA degree will open new doors that were closed before. I can apply for jobs with my current employer now that I was not able to apply for in the past.”
- “Yes. I work for my family’s company.”
- “I hope it will support personal improvement and help with getting a promotion.”
- “Yes. A difference in degree with a new job opportunity in the future.”
- “No. I need to feel like I’ve made some type of life accomplishment.”
- “No. I eventually want to obtain my bachelor’s in psychology, but it won’t be for a while. I’m working as a flight attendant while I’m still young.”
- “No. I feel that receiving an AAGS degree will be a stepping stone to a bachelor’s degree.”
- “May provide new employment opportunity.”
- “Yes, I’m trying to better myself.”
- “I believe this will help me advance in my career or if I decide to find another job.”
- “Yes, with Target.”
- “Yes, it will give me a promotion in the field of work that I am pursuing.”
- “It will help secure a better job in the future. It will also transfer to other schools, in and out of state.”
- “No, just for personal satisfaction of having a college degree.”
- “I am hoping that having AA will look good on scholarship applications.”
- “The AA degree will help me move into a better job.”

Seventeen students simply answered “no,” and two answered “N/A” to this question. Five students answered, “yes.” Some did not write in an answer. Many students seem to believe that the AA will be helpful in getting a job or a promotion.

Student Characteristics

Student characteristics are analyzed annually. Ninety-seven (97) students filed degree plans in 2008-2009.

Year	Total # Students	% Change
2008-2009	97	+8%
2007-2008	90	+3%
2006-2007	87	+26%
2005-2006	69	-9%
2004-2005	76	-6%
2003-2004	81	8%

The number of students who earn the AAGS and/or a bachelor's degree should be noted. It is often into the next academic year after the degree plan is filed that the degree is earned.

Year	# Earning a Degree	# Filed a Degree Plan
2008-2009	45	97
2007-2008	56	90

Forty-five (45) were native UALR students, and forty-two (42) were transfer students. 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 %
2008-2009	45	46%	52	54%
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%

The average age of students applying for the AAGS this year is 31 years of age, with an age range of 19 - 62. This is somewhat higher than the average age for 2008 undergraduate students, 26. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the AAGS applicants are female, and twenty-seven percent (27%) are male.

An associate degree is traditionally considered a “two-year” degree. However, the students completing the UALR AAGS seem to take longer to finish. This could be due to several reasons. In reviewing the length of time it took to complete the degrees this year, an interesting observation was made. Transfer students seem to take longer, on the average, than UALR students to satisfy requirements for the AAGS. Transfer students took an average of 6 years to complete the AAGS, with a range of from 3 to 35 years and an average range of 13 years from start to finish. Native UALR students took an average of 4 years to complete the AAGS, with a range of from 2 to 36 years and an average range of 6 years from start to finish. When transfer and UALR native students are figured together, then the average length of time to complete the AAGS is 5 years, and the average range of years from start to finish is 10. Transfer students appear to be a more “non-traditional” group of students who apply for the AAGS.

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

Conclusions:

The number of students applying for the degree is up by 8% in 2009. The percentage of students satisfying the “new” (2003 and later catalog) continues to increase each year, which means that these graduates have completed the UALR Core.

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 seems to represent a sense of accomplishment for many. Additionally, students also check “job opportunity/advancement” as a major reason, and the students’ comments support this. Given the current economic conditions, it is easy to understand that students want to put themselves in the best position to get a job or a promotion.

Completing the Associate of Arts supports UALR retention and graduation efforts. Of the 54 students who completed the AAGS in 2007, 57% are still enrolled in school or have already completed a bachelor’s degree. We also know that some students transfer to schools such as UAMS for a bachelor’s degree upon graduation here.

Recommendations

There are no new recommendations for 2009-2010.

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.