



Academic Program Review

Program Name: Rural Development - Master of Arts

Academic Year 2025/2026

Recent Recommendations

Using your most recent review, please respond to all feedback and recommendations.

Response:

Overall recommendations: Improve time to degree - while the data provided does not provide an explicit "time to degree" we believe that the time to degree is decreasing with the addition of the coursework only option. We continue to bring back students who feel out of the pipeline and those students may be keeping our time to degree numbers high. Improved student advising will also help keep students from missing required course offerings in the semester they are offered. Increase enrollment: enrollment has been relatively steady, with a small drop between 2021 and 2025 (from 28 to 25). However, this also reflects the high number of graduates in 2024. Increase scholarly productivity: It is difficult to increase scholarly productivity when we now have two faculty positions that have not been filled. Improve pass rate of [REDACTED] students: We are uncertain of where this recommendation comes from. The data available seems to be university-wide, not RD MA specific. One issue that we are aware of is that many of our students take Incompletes. Improve enrollment of [REDACTED] students in the program: this is influenced by many factors, including cultural and economic factors, and without additional resources there is little we can do except to reach out and be welcoming of [REDACTED] students. Follow the SLOA as written: we have gotten closer to collecting employment data on graduates, although we have not implemented a survey. We have not taken it out of the SLOA because we want to reach that goal once capacity is expanded. VP Feedback on identifying SLOs. We note that the SLOA plan in Airtable for the RD MA is from 2011. We provided updated SLOA plans in 2013/2014, 2015/16, and 2020/2021. We are uncertain whether this recommendation comes from the updated SLOA plan or the 2011 plan. Our current SLOA includes demonstrating fluency in RD principles and applying knowledge and skills, as demonstrated through their portfolio/comprehensive exam and, if they are in the research pathway, their project or thesis. We plan on updating the SLOA after receiving feedback on this mid-cycle review.

Student Learning Outcomes

Describe the assessment of your student learning outcomes (SLOs). Discuss your findings, changes you are making, and what you hope to see as a result.

Response:

Learning outcomes data was collected for a total of 7 students taking the capstone/comprehensive exam course RD 691 in Spring 2024, where students complete a portfolio demonstrating their knowledge and application of the core key concepts of the program. Learning outcomes 1 (demonstrating fluency in knowledge of the discipline) and 2 (apply knowledge and skills): All MA students during the review period passed their comprehensive exam (received a grade of B or better on their portfolio), exceeding the 90% threshold. In addition, Six out of the seven portfolios were reviewed by DANSRD faculty (one portfolio was unavailable due to technical issues). Of the six reviewed, all six portfolios were rated as "outstanding" for their articulation of key concepts, five out of the six were rated as "outstanding" in the categories of comprehension of key concepts and application of key concepts, one was rated as "good" in the categories of comprehension of key concepts and application of key concept. One student was on the research pathway and passed her project defense. Portfolio format and access is still an issue that needs to be resolved and/or standardized within the department.

Learning outcome 3 (continuing community engagement): No survey was conducted. However, the department does maintain contact with, and an informal database on, recent graduates and found that all seven students are employed with local, tribal, State, regional, or international entities serving Alaska Native peoples.

Did you make any curricular changes based on your most recent SLOA? If so, discuss what changes were made. If no changes were made, please discuss the strengths of your curriculum based on the assessment of your outcomes.

Response:

Based on our review, we have chosen to make no curricular changes at this time. The program is successfully producing graduates with a strong foundation in community and Indigenous-based development strategies and practices who go on to serve their communities in both formal and informal capacities. Portfolio review and faculty reports indicate that writing disparities have continued to decrease among RD MA students. Curricular strengths: 1) Students can take courses from the RD MA program entirely by distance delivery for most courses, which increases access for rural students. 2) Guest speakers bring real-world experience, inspiration, different pathways to leadership, and important networking. Throughout the RDMA program, students learn from culture bearers, Elders, and other experts, developing long-term relationships that benefit individuals, communities, and organizations throughout Alaska and beyond. 3) Core course topics: Each core course provides students with a foundation in essential concepts and themes that students can then use to develop their own approach to development. We have not found any gaps in this core course foundation. 4) Students and applicants really appreciate the non-research pathway and it has resulted in an increase in RD MA applications and interest. A large majority of RD MA students are already leadership practitioners and are not looking to become researchers, so the coursework only pathway is better suited to them. RD 650 Community based research methods course provides hands-on research experience and knowledge for RD MA students who are heading towards research careers.

As of 2017, all Baccalaureate programs are required to embed communication outcomes within their SLOA Plans. This is optional for non-Baccalaureate programs.

Communication outcomes in the SLOA plan are: **Not Embedded**

Check the checkbox to certify completion of the following tasks:

☒ Upload supporting documents to the Supporting Documents folder. This includes artifacts, rubrics, and other documents related to your SLOA.

☒ Upload your most recent SLOA to the Supporting Documents folder, even if no changes have been made since the last review.

Have changes been made to your SLOA document since your last review? **No**

If so, please summarize what changes were made.

Response:

High Impact Practices

Please indicate which high impact practices are currently being implemented in relation to the program's student learning outcomes.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☒ Capstone Courses & Projects | ☒ Graduate Level Research |
| ☐ Collaborative Assignments & Projects | ☐ Writing-Intensive Courses |
| ☐ Diversity/Global Learning | ☐ Publications |
| ☒ ePortfolios | ☐ Communications |
| ☒ First-Year Seminars and Experiences | ☐ Scholarly Activities |
| ☐ Internships | ☐ Studios |
| ☒ Service or Community-Based Learning | ☐ Practicum |
| ☐ Undergraduate Research | ☐ Other |
| ☐ Labs | ☐ None of these |

Discuss how the HIPs in the program are reflected in the SLOA. If you have identified HIPs that are not included in the SLOA, please consider an update.

Response:

Our capstone, RD 691, includes a portfolio with a series of segments looking at how key concepts apply to students' academic, work, community (volunteer), and personal lives that then culminate in a final synthesizing paper where students develop their own model for rural development. The majority of these are ePortfolios, but there is an option for students to create a physical portfolio shared through a pdf. While most students take the "non-research" pathway, we continue to have students take the research pathway and conduct research and projects. One of the RD MA SLOA goals is to educate leaders with a broad understanding of interrelationships between rural communities and the dynamic global economy. Community-based learning is included in our SLOA and most of our RD MA students are already working in their communities and working to improve their communities. RD 600 acts as a first year seminar for RD MA students to support students on their RD MA journey.

Student Success

Please reference the [Resources tab](#) for information on accessing the Student Success Data Dashboard and contacting your designated data liaisons.

Student Success Data Trends

Persistence: [No Change](#)

Pass Rates: [Decrease](#)

Student Credit Hours: [Decrease](#)

Majors: [No Change](#)

Degrees Awarded: [Increase](#)

Other Trends (if applicable):

RD MA graduate numbers tend to fluctuate between larger and smaller cohorts. For example, the program graduated twice as many students between 2023 to 2024 and then dropped in 2025.

However, overall graduate numbers are increasing. RD MA students are generally slightly younger than they were a few years ago, with fewer older students entering the program. We believe this will decrease the time to degree, but also do not want to discourage older and non-traditional students from entering the program. The program still has an overwhelming amount

of female students.

Achievement Disparities

Discuss any achievement disparities identified in your disaggregated student success data and explain how you plan to address them.

Response:

Demographic characteristics show that [REDACTED] students in our program are still being outpaced by their [REDACTED] peers; 77% of our degrees were obtained by [REDACTED] students in 2023 and 75% in 2024. DANSRD still has a high percentage of [REDACTED] students, 60% in 2023 and 61% in 2024. We plan to increase marketing/social media around [REDACTED] graduates of our program going forward to hopefully increase [REDACTED] participation.

Closing the Loop

Please discuss how your student learning outcomes are reflected in high impact practices and student success data.

Response:

Currently, the graduates reviewed for this cycle are working at the following institutions: Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, Husli Tribal Council, North Slope Borough (Museum curator), State of Alaska Department of Labor, Tanana Chiefs Conference, and Alaska Legal Services Director. One of the RD MA student learning outcomes is **Students will apply knowledge and skills gained through the RD MA program in their coursework, projects/research, employment, and lives**: One example is a language project by one of our recent graduates - [REDACTED] is using the research from [REDACTED] project in [REDACTED] job/position at [REDACTED]. Another student learning outcome is that **Graduates will contribute to community, Indigenous, and rural development throughout Alaska and beyond**, as illustrated by the list of employers, we are definitely seeing our graduates contributing to the state and world - for example a recent graduate is serving on the Yukon Flats Fish & Game Advisory Committee and using their voice to advocate for Indigenous peoples of Alaska.

Academic Program Profile

The following questions help show how your program supports the university's mission, connects with other UA programs, engages with the community, contributes through service courses, and supports student success after graduation. Please use this section to highlight the value your program brings to students, the university, and beyond.

UAF's Mission:

The University of Alaska Fairbanks is a Land, Sea, and Space Grant university and an international center for research, education, and the arts, emphasizing the circumpolar North and its diverse peoples. UAF integrates teaching, research, and public service as it educates students for active citizenship and prepares them for lifelong learning and careers.

In what ways does your program advance UAF's mission?

Response:

RD MA program offers research courses for graduate students such as RD F650 Community-Based Research Methods. Many courses include the circumpolar North and its diverse peoples; for example our core course RD F601 Political Economy of the Circumpolar North. Arts, education, politics and policy courses can be taken as electives toward the RD MA then course RD F655 Circumpolar Health Issues focuses on health of people living in the circumpolar north.

How is your program related to others in the UA system?

Response:

The RD MA program is related to the RD BA program and the RD ANS program, as many courses are cross-listed. The political science, education, history, and arts departments are also related to the RD MA program as many courses are cross-listed with those departments. The RD MA program is related to the UAF College of Business and Security Management (CBSM) program as we collaborate on the annual Arctic Innovation Competition (RD MA students judge the contest each year) and DANSRD offers RD F430/630 Indigenous Economic Development, Entrepreneurship and Leadership courses. The RD MA program is related to the Anthropology department as we offer ANTH F610 Northern Indigenous Peoples and Contemporary Issues as a possible elective. In recent years Indigenous Studies PhD students as well as One Health, Natural Resources, MBA, and Emergency Management students take a lot of our courses, demonstrating that RD MA courses offered by our department are sought after by students from other departments.

Who are your key community or external partners?

Response:

Fairbanks North Star Borough (professional development, teachers, counseling); Tanana Chiefs Conference (Education projects); Doyon, Limited; Doyon Foundation; Iditarod Area School

District (career/tech Ed support/design); Alaska Native Tribes (infrastructure projects); Alaska Native nonprofits including Alaska Native health organizations; and Alaska Native social service organizations are key community and external partners of our department. One of DANSRD's faculty has a joint appointment with IARC (International Arctic Research Center), another faculty is doing work with Sami people in Finland and has research partners in Germany and other countries. DANSRD faculty members work extensively with various community members and organizations, providing expertise and knowledge on relevant rural development issues.

What role do your services courses play, if any?

Response:

Community-based learning happens in RD 600 Indigenous Leadership Symposium through leadership practitioners and through an Elder-in-Residence experience during the week-long intensive portion of the course. Starting in 2025 RD 600 will be a "service" course as students plan a conference. We support real-time projects happening in rural Alaska communities, not just theoretical learning.

How do your graduates succeed after leaving the program?

Response:

RD MA graduates succeed into leadership roles throughout the state. Examples of RD MA graduates succeeding: 1) Vice President, Arctic Conservation at Ocean Conservancy, 2) another works for the Inuit Circumpolar Council and 3) a third graduate is the Fab-Lab Program Manager in the Youth Education Department at Cook Inlet Tribal Council. We are also witnessing an increase in small business ownership among our recent graduates.

Submitter and Collaborator Names:

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Committee Review

Program Name: Rural Development - Master of Arts

Academic Year 2025/2026

Overall Recommendations

The college or school committees set the tone for helping each program feel seen during this process. We have provided you with feedback tags to attach to this program review. Please select as many as applicable.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Insufficient Narratives | ☐ Report Incomplete |
| ☐ Address Achievement Gap | ☒ Consider Curricular Revisions |
| ☐ Develop Online Offerings/Options | ☒ Improve Time to Degree |
| ☒ Increase Enrollment | ☐ Increase Graduates |
| ☐ Increase Retention/Persistence | ☐ Strengthen Advising Practices |
| ☒ May be asked to share Effective Practices | ☐ Recommendation to University-Wide Committee |

Explanation of Overall Recommendations

Response:

The program responded to the recommendations from the 2023 full-program review. Time to degree completion was addressed as was enrollment trends. Noted that there was a loss in faculty which limits the ability to teach courses which would attract students to the program. Did demonstrate that there was an increase in the enrollment of male students, student credit hour production, and grantsmanship and research. Provided some data to support these positive trends, more detail would better support the noted outcomes. Also addressed the concern regarding the SLOA and noted a plan to revise the SLOA prior to the 2027 full-program review. For the full-program review in 2027, should include additional evidence to document this outcome specifically for all SLOs to support the narrative overviews. Additional evidence will also strengthen the section on continuous improvement and closing the loop.

Student Learning Outcomes Feedback

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☒ Strong | ☐ Developing |
| ☒ Requires Minor Revision | ☐ Requires Major Revision |

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Feedback

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☒ Strong Alignment with SLOA Plan | ☐ Clear, Concise Presentation of Findings |
| ☐ Compelling Learning Story | ☐ Missing a Direct Measure |
| ☐ Missing Active Verbs | ☐ Missing Curricular Connection |
| ☐ Missing Collaboration within Department | |

SLOA Feedback Narrative:

Provided 3 SLOs, all of which have clear and well-defined procedures for assessment and implementation plan (that includes where in the program the SLO must be completed and assessed in the program). The assessment plan and implementation processes for each SLO were strong; the artifact/rubric used for assessment was included in the supplementary documents folder. Evidence (data) on how the SLOs is being met was provided in primarily narrative form for some of the SLOs. For the full-program review in 2027, please provide evidence for all SLOs as a narrative with data and/or as a supplementary document(s). There were no changes to the curriculum or the SLOA since the last program review in 2023, but there are plans to make changes prior to the 2027 full-program review.

There were no curricular changes since the last program review. The program did discuss the curricular strengths which was very insightful and appreciated.

The program provided a discussion on how SLOs are reflected in the HIPs and student success data. Documenting continuous improvement and the closing of the loop are important components of the program review process, not just as an exercise, but to demonstrate that assessment results are used to make meaningful, evidence-based changes that enhance program quality and student learning. This process ensures accountability, fosters a culture of ongoing improvement, and provides clear evidence to accreditors and stakeholders that actions lead to measurable outcomes. For the full-program review in 2027, should include additional evidence to document this outcome specifically for each SLO to support the narrative overviews.

Student Success and Equity Feedback

Narrative:

The program summarized trends from the Student Success Dashboard accurately, noting stability in student persistence and in the number of majors, along with an increase in degrees awarded. Variations in student demographics and cohort size were appropriately identified as factors influencing trend fluctuations. The program highlights student engagement with community organizations and integration of those experiences into academic work, and community-based learning is noted as part of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA).

The program acknowledges that admission rates are lower than and plans to address this through future social media marketing efforts. It will be important for the program to implement these strategies and provide evidence of outcomes in the 2027 full report. No formal strategies to improve retention or graduation are reported, and the program cites limited faculty hiring as a constraint. Evidence of inclusive practices appears primarily through the nature of the degree, the demographic makeup of the cohort, and the program's work with community partners.

For the 2027 full program review, it is recommended that the program expand its discussion of inclusive practices and provide detailed evidence of implemented strategies supporting recruitment of students.

High Impact Practices Feedback

Narrative:

High impact practices that were identified showcase the important touch points along their graduate journey along with bridging student work/life experiences. There is flexibility in research/non-research paths for students, accommodating various interests and needs. Bringing together HIPs and student learning outcomes is a key part of the SLOA process, and how these HIPs are designed and assessed is key in overall program and student success.

Reviewer Names: