



GRADUATE SCHOOL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

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Welcome to Spring 2022
January 7, 2022

As the Director of the UAF Graduate School, I want to welcome our new and continuing graduate students for the Spring 2022 semester. Whether you are beginning or continuing your studies, I thank you for your commitment to graduate studies at UAF. I and the rest of the graduate school team, Shelly Baumann, Felicia Burud, and Erin Kirchner, are here to support you in your success. We are available both virtually and in-person to assist you.

To our new students, our Spring Orientation for new graduate students is Friday, January 7, and is a hybrid event with in-person and online options. You can find all the details on [our website](#). To our continuing students, I am truly impressed with your progress through the ongoing pandemic. As I read the narratives you have submitted with your advisory committee reports, I continue to be impressed with how you have dealt with challenges in both your personal and professional lives posed by COVID-19. I invite you to join our new students at the orientation social at the Pub at 6 pm.

Last May UAF had its first-ever drive-in commencement or “[car-mencement](#)”. Standing out on Yukon Drive that Saturday we shared the excitement of all our graduates as they drove by sporting a wide variety of decorations. On the previous Friday, the graduate school hosted our first hooding celebration, where 15 of our PhD graduates were hooded. The graduates attended with small groups of family and friends, where both advisors and family members got to walk across the stage with the graduate. I congratulate all our students who have received 46 PhDs, 243 Masters’, and 46 Licenses since Fall 2020. I also want to acknowledge the 34 students who received our degree completion scholarships and fellowships in that time. Last Fall, I met 139 new students who attended orientation and introduced themselves to the other members of the incoming class.

This Spring the graduate school is hosting a new program, the [Three Minute Thesis](#) competition. The competition will run with heats on February 17 and finals on February 24. This is an opportunity for graduate students to share their work in an entertaining and informative way. It allows you to develop your communication skills while focusing on the core value of your research and scholarship. The competition allows you to be recognized in an internationally known competition as well as win cash prizes. I invite you to participate by presenting your work or attending as a spectator and voting in the People’s Choice award.

The graduate school wants to continue to hear your stories, both to celebrate your successes, and help you address any challenges. Last year we initiated a [student spotlight](#) that highlights graduate students and their work. We also initiated a [graduate school student advisory board](#) (GSSAB) of 10 of your peers to advise us on graduate student issues and bring graduate student voices from all our colleges and schools to the table. Based on feedback from our town hall

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meetings we adapted the health insurance program to reduce out-of-pocket maximum payments, and also ensure continuity in plan payments over the winter break. We will continue to work with you through the GSSAB and town hall meetings to address your concerns and offer financial support for travel, degree completion, and emergencies.

With the pandemic continuing it is important to remain connected and informed. We will be keeping our website updated with details about our operations and programs this semester. The site supports live chat with our staff. We will also share information through our mailing lists (UAF-GradAcademic@alaska.edu and UAF-GradCommunity@alaska.edu; both of which can be joined in Google Groups) and Facebook page. You can email us at uaf-grad-school@alaska.edu.

The formal orientation on Friday, January 7 will be followed by a social at the Pub that complies with university COVID procedures. Again, I invite all of you, both new and continuing students, to attend and I look forward to meeting you.

Thanks once again for choosing to study at UAF, and all the best for this semester and new year.

- Richard Collins, director of the graduate school