THE UAF EXPERIENCE

UAF – Then and Now

UAF’s Fairbanks campus is four miles west of downtown Fairbanks, on a
low ridge overlooking the Chena and Tanana river floodplains. Artifacts
found on the bluff tell us tribal groups used the hill beginning perhaps
3,500 years ago. It offered a wide view of the flats below and probably
served as a base camp for hunting and gathering.

THE EARLY YEARS

Gold discoveries in the early 1900s brought sudden changes to the
Tanana Valley. In 1906 the hill where UAF now stands became part of a
federal Agricultural Experiment Station, and in 1915 the U.S. Congress
approved money and transferred a piece of land from this station to
establish a school of higher education. The institution began as the
Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, focusing on research
and teaching in support of agriculture and mining. Two years later the
Alaska Territorial Legislature added funding, and in 1922, when the first
building was completed, the college opened its doors to students. In the
first semester, a faculty of six offered 16 classes to a student body of 12.
Commencement in 1923 consisted of a single graduate.

The institution quickly began to grow. In 1931 the federal government
transferred the entire Agricultural Experiment Station to the college. In
1935 the Alaska Territorial Legislature changed the institution’s name to
the University of Alaska to reflect the school’s expanding role in research,
teaching and public service for all Alaska. By then, faculty and course
offerings had grown to include liberal arts, science and engineering.

World War II brought a rapid influx of population and development to
the territory. Wartime national awareness of the need for scientific polar
research in the interests of defense and communications led to the
establishment in 1946 of the Geophysical Institute. Since its inception,
the GI has earned an international reputation for studies of the Earth and
the physical environment at high latitudes. The university awarded its
first Ph.D. degree to a geophysics student in 1955.

STATEHOOD AND BEYOND

The University of Alaska had a significant role in the statehood movement
of the 1950s, when the Constitutional Convention was held on campus.
The Alaska Constitution was drafted in what is now Constitution Hall and
signed in stately Signers’ Hall, now the home of UAF student service and
administrative offices. Alaska became the nation’s 49th state in 1959.

Research expanded broadly in the decade of the 1960s with the
establishment of institutes in several disciplines. The Alaska Legislature
created the Institute of Marine Science in 1960 and the Institute of
Arctic Biology two years later. Since 1969 the Geophysical Institute has
operated Poker Flat Research Range, providing launch facilities for NASA
and the Department of Defense. Poker Flat is the only university-owned
rocket range in the world.

In 1970 the university was designated a federal Sea Grant institution
for marine research. Alaska Sea Grant develops and supports research,
education, and outreach programs and partnerships to help sustain
economic development, traditional cultural uses, and conservation of
Alaska’s marine, estuarine and coastal watershed resources. Stations
in Kodiak and Juneau are also actively involved in marine and fisheries
research.

In 1972 the Alaska Legislature established the Alaska Native Language
Center and provided operating funds. Since then the university has
supported research, documentation and teaching of the state’s 20 Native
languages.

To meet the need for expanding services for all Alaskans, the University
of Alaska statewide system was created in 1975. Campuses in
Anchorage and Juneau were assigned their own chancellors and central
staffs, with the statewide administration and overall university president
remaining in Fairbanks.

Meanwhile, the campus in Fairbanks continued to expand. The University
of Alaska Museum of the North, one of the state’s most popular visitor
attractions, moved into the Otto Geist Building in 1980. An expansion
completed in 2006 nearly doubled the museum’s size and added a
research center, learning center and Alaska art gallery. The museum’s
unique collection offers the public a view of the rich and varied cultures
of the North.

In 1981, UAF enrollment topped 5,000 students for the first time. The
university also began to emphasize its shared scholarship and global
education efforts in a series of agreements with schools in Japan,
Denmark, Canada, India, People’s Republic of China, Russia and other
countries. The institution branched out to include campuses in Bethel,
Dillingham, Kotzebue, Nome and the Interior. Learning centers in other
communities such as Fort Yukon, Galena, McGrath, Nenana, Tok and
Unalaska provide additional education services to rural Alaskans.

UAF’s public service role is filled in part by the statewide Cooperative
Extension Service with its 13 district offices. Public broadcasting stations
KUAC FM and TV, the first public stations in the state, are headquartered
at UAF.

In 1991 NASA named UAF a Space Grant institution for aerospace
research, making it a Land, Sea and Space Grant institution, one of only a
handful of triple-crown universities in the country.

TODAY

UAF’s colleges and schools offer degrees and certificates in 112
disciplines with a variety of vocational and technical programs.
Graduate degrees are available in a wide range of academic study.
UAF is internationally known for its Pacific Rim and circumpolar North
research. It is consistently among the top 100 universities in the nation
for funding from the National Science Foundation. UAF is the primary
doctoral degree-granting institution in Alaska, offering Ph.D. degrees in
anthropology, indigenous studies, several of the physical and natural
sciences, mathematics and engineering. Master’s degrees are offered in
almost 40 fields in the humanities, social sciences, Arctic and Northern
studies, physical and natural sciences, and in professional fields
such as engineering, justice, education and business administration.
Interdisciplinary programs are possible for students who have a research
focus in areas where UAF has faculty expertise and research facilities.

In 2017, UAF celebrated 100 years of making important contributions to
Alaska, helping find solutions to the state’s unique challenges in areas
like Arctic engineering, wildlife biology, health care and education. UAF
helps power Alaska’s economy by turning students into professionals for
Alaska’s workforce.

Students

Individualism and diversity are Alaska traditions. At UAF, students find
not only a broad mix of cultures and ages, but also a climate of respect
for individual rights and preferences. A student from a rural Alaska
village can share knowledge and insights with others from places as
distant as Tallahassee or Tokyo. UAF’s enrollment in fall 2019 was 8,207
students. Of those, 61% are female, 38% male and 1% are unknown; 88%
are undergraduate and 12% are graduate students. UAF students hail
from 49 states and 50 foreign countries.

Many UAF students are nontraditional. They study at night or after work,
and balance schoolwork with family responsibilities. The university offers
a wide variety of evening and weekend classes. UAF students can attend
classes through distance delivery from remote areas of Alaska or from
anywhere in the world. Using computers, telephones and the Internet,
students can take courses or work toward their degrees without leaving
home.

Many students take advantage of UAF’s exchange programs to study
at colleges and universities around the world, or through the National
Student Exchange program, which offers studies at universities
throughout the United States. There are more than 100 different student
organizations on campus, with that number going up all the time.
Students produce the weekly Sun Star online news site, run KSUA, the
campus radio station, and participate in scores of special interest groups.

Faculty
At UAF you find faculty members who are among the best in the country,
and because of the low 10:1 student-faculty ratio, you receive more
personal attention here than you would at almost any other public
university in the nation. Once you have chosen a major, you will be
assigned a faculty advisor from your academic department. Your advisor
will help you choose classes each semester and will explain programs
and requirements. You will get to know the faculty not just as professors,
but as friends, advisors and mentors. Education is an individual process,
different for each person. At UAF, you are an individual, not just a face in
the crowd.

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.

CORE THEMES
• Educate: Undergraduate and graduate students and lifelong learners
• Research: Create and disseminate new knowledge, insight,
technology, artistic and scholarly works
• Prepare: Alaska’s career, technical and professional workforce
• Connect: Alaska Native, rural and urban communities by sharing
knowledge and ways of knowing
• Engage: Alaskans through outreach for continuing education and
community and economic development

Commitment to Quality
UAF has been accredited since 1934 by the Northwest Commission on
Colleges and Universities. UAF acts continually to assess and improve
the educational experience for its students. Students evaluate their
teachers at the end of each semester; those student opinion reports
are available online (https://asuaf.com/archives/teacher-and-course-
evaluations/). Faculty and administrators evaluate courses in the core
curriculum every year. Each degree program and certificate is assessed
at least every five years. Results are used to change and improve