

# THE UAF EXPERIENCE

## UAF – Then and Now

UAF's Fairbanks campus, also known as the Troth Yeddha' (<http://catalog.uaf.edu/overview/campuses/troth-yeddha/>) 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 106 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 more than 40 fields in the humanities, social sciences, Arctic and Northern studies, and 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 2021 was 7,471 students. Of those, 62% are female, 37% male and 1% are unknown; 87% are undergraduate and 13% are graduate students. UAF students hail from 49 states and 53 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 online Polaris News site, run the KSUA 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. 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 also 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 and Vision

*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

### VISION STATEMENT

#### **Excellence through transformative experiences**

The University of Alaska Fairbanks is renowned for its Arctic research, Alaska Native and Indigenous programs, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and hands-on, personalized learning. UAF provides a

world-class, inclusive experience — energized by innovative research, community engagement, student-centered teaching and creative expression.

## 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 the education provided by UAF. The learning outcomes expected for each degree program can be viewed on the provost's website (<https://www.uaf.edu/provost/assessment-review/assessment/>).