

Rate of Native Enrollment at UA Increases Greatly Year on Year

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During the past two years, the number of native students entering Alaskan colleges has increased several fold.

Next year, the University of Alaska expects at least 100 new native college freshman, to join a student body which already includes more than 250 native students at their Fairbanks campus - out of a total student enrollment of 2300.

For many years, the University of Alaska had less than 100 native students and 90 per cent

of these dropped out before graduation. Other Alaskan colleges report similar statistics.

Even with a great increase in native enrollment, Alaskan colleges are still only recruiting a tiny percentage of the native students who could succeed in college - with sufficient preparation, motivation, and help.

"Only the most outgoing students with the most self-confidence make it to college," reports Joanne Trigg of Juneau, a UA junior who is an alumni of both Mt. Edgecombe H. S. and the Anchorage boarding home

program.

For one thing, she and other students report, Alaska's native high schools do not challenge their students.

"When I transferred to Anchorage, after being a top student, I had to catch up with a lot of work," reported Joanne, who is echoed by many native high school and college students.

At the University of Alaska, Special Orientation Services, a

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Native Students at UA...

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student run counseling and help program for native students, the student advisory board which runs the service is planning its program for next year.

Last weekend, board members attended a conference at Anchorage Methodist University to discuss coordination with the federally funded Upward Bound, Talent Search and Special Services programs in Alaska.

During an inspection trip to Alaska last winter, Leonard Spearman, national director of student services for the education department of the U. S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, was impressed with the fact that Alaskan native college recruitment programs are barely scratching the surface of native talent.

To enable such programs as Upward Bound and Talent Search to expand their search for talented native students, he arranged to nearly double the Alaskan special services budget - to over half a million dollars.

At a conference in Washington in March, project directors of Talent Search, Upward Bound, Amu's Special Services and the state funded UA Special Orientation Services discussed with native leaders and HEW officials possible means of combining, coordinating or revamping the college impetus programs.

One suggestion, according to SOS director Robert Egan who attended the conference, was a consortium approach - an idea which was to be re-discussed in Anchorage.

Studnets on the SOS board want to maintain an independent organization. During the past two years, their accomplishments have been tremendous. SOS now employs a director and a full time native counselor - Helen Atkinson, a former student member of the board, now works as counselor and can apply her own personal experiences as a village student on campus as well.

During the 1970-71 school year SOS had three part time student counselors and the dropout rate among native students in four year degree programs dropped from over 30 per cent to less than 10 per cent.

Special English courses - for regular freshman credit - are also available for the native students as well as the popular SOS lounge where native students can exchange complaints and help over abundant cups of coffee.

According to Martha Aiken of Barrow, a UA junior, the worst adjustment problems arrive with students directly out of the villages. Students who have already been in Boarding Homes or dorms in Anchorage or Fairbanks are more accustomed to the large school, the anomie of a large campus or community and to the require-

ments of making their own decisions and being self-sufficient.

For a student coming to the campus from a small village or a small BIA or SOS high school, the campus experience can be frightening - and many turn around and return to their villages.

During the last year, the SOS board, headed by Martha Jack of Bethel succeeded in instituting four courses in native studies on campus for this fall. They also found a supervisor for the program, which may eventually expand into a native studies program.

Most of the native students feel counseling is one of the single most important ways to help students stay in school. Since SOS instituted its full program last September, students can simply walk into the SOS offices and see a counselor - immediately if their problem is important.

Although they do not want to lose their autonomy, the SOS board is seeking federal funding for another one or two full time counselors and three more part time counselors for next year. At present, their money comes from state and federal funds and initial grants from several oil companies in Alaska.

They hope to join any consortium of federally funded student help programs without losing their autonomy.

Next fall, SOS plans a big brother/big sister program for native freshman. Each older student will be responsible for two freshman - providing an aid to bewildered students who don't know where to turn to find course information, orientation and friends.

Already, students and counselors have been conducting a high school visitation program under UA auspices, speaking to native students about high schools in general and UA in particular.

UA native student board members agree that it is the more aggressive students who have landed in college as of today, while equally talented but perhaps less self-sufficient young natives do not leave the villages for education.

It will still take some time, they believe, before native students from Alaska take advantage of the dozens of opportunities opening up for Alaskan native students at colleges across the country.

However, after their first year of full operation SOS is proving that the native dropout rate can be cut drastically, with sufficient supportive services for native for native students in college. At the same time it has proved that capable native college students can oversee such programs with a lot of hard work and genuine interest drawn from their own college experience.