

The University of Alaska asks for \$2 million Natives will benefit

by Soren Wuerth
for the Tundra Times

The University of Alaska included nearly \$2 million in its budget recently to help Alaska Native and other minority students get into college, stay in college and graduate from college.

UA's request called, "Ensuring College Success for All Alaskans" contains provisions that will attempt to ensure the success of Native students in higher education.

Not only would the money support existing programs, such as the Rural Alaska Honors Institute, but it would fund new services, such as bridging programs, aimed at keeping Natives in college once they have enrolled.

"Native programs in general have been given a lot of lip service in the past, but they've never got quite enough support," said regent Eric Forrer, the main sponsor of the increment.

Forrer said he began to lobby the board for support after reading a newspaper story about Alakanuk, a village where he had attended high school.

"I read about a troubled community," Forrer said. "Many of the same



Tisheena Frank visits with Santa Claus, who visited Arctic Village recently. More pictures, see page fourteen.

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people the article talked about were people I remembered from when I lived there. That really drove it home and I thought I had this opportunity to help Natives by being on the Board of Regents."

The \$1.9 million package contains the following appropriations:

- \$77,000 for minority counseling and support for an outreach program at Prince William Sound Community College.

- \$274,500 for the University of Alaska Fairbanks RAHI program.

- \$300,000 for bridging programs for adult students and students with children in campuses statewide.

- \$240,700 for the University of Alaska Anchorage's Minority Student Services.

- \$274,900 for recruitment and retention at UAF and the University of Alaska Southeast.

Another \$750,000 was added for researchers who want to see their projects through, according to Marsha Hubbard, director of statewide budget for the university. Campuses will have

to compete for the money by offering proposals.

"Last year our goal was getting money to do something with rural Alaskan high schools — preparing teachers. That money is on-going," said Hubbard. "Now the focus is on the kids who get here — that there will be something for them."

Alaska's Natives are among the lowest of minority groups to enter and complete college.

Although 17 percent of the state's population is Native, Natives make up only 7 percent of UA's enrollment, according to the university's Statewide Office of Institutional Research.

A National Center for Educational Statistics report showed that only one in 12 American Indians entered college after high school in 1980.

Programs like RAHI, where high school students are selected from rural villages to participate in college-level education, have helped to boost the Native enrollment in higher education.

More than 65 percent of RAHI alumni head for college after high school, compared with 28 percent of seniors nationwide, the university's

research office found in a five-year study.

But the program is in danger of underfunding, according to Jim Kowalsky, RAHI program director.

"RAHI has not been able to do anything to keep up with spending cuts and inflation," said Kowalsky. "We need to update our computers and do more follow-up on students who are in the program."

Lewis Beaver, a resident of Kwigillingok, said had it not been for his summer with RAHI, he would have been less likely to go to college. But for him, the computers were archaic.

"The word processors we were using were hot a few years ago, but now they are not up-to-date," Beaver said.

UA's budget will be approved by the legislature and Gov. Walter Hickel, and either branch of government can delete or accept the installment for Native programs.

The university's budget officials were skeptical about the survival of the request. Brian Rogers, UA's vice-

president of finance, said Hickel's threats of reducing the state's budget may be carried out against the university's Native programs.

Hubbard, statewide budget director, was equally pessimistic.

"It looks pretty good with the legislature, but the governor has been going the other way," she said.

Last week Hickel said in a press release that he would attempt to slice \$110 million from the state's budget.

Forrer, however, said he thought the package would pass.

"I don't think the governor will be in the business of cutting programs that have been positively received," he said.

Hickel's press secretary Vivian Hamilton said that though it is too early to tell what the governor will do with the university's budget, he has made education a priority.

"He would like a child who grows up in a rural community to have the same opportunity as one who grows up in Anchorage," she said.