

# BIA COLLEGE AID METHODS ANGER UA NATIVE STUDENTS

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## Claim Humiliation, Paternalism in BIA Dole Methods

Just what does it take for an Alaska Native youngster to attend college?

And once he's there, what does it take for him to stay in—to stick it through four to five long years of studying in the hopes that, with a degree and an education, he will be better armed to face the ills of everyday life?

This week the Tundra Times learned the answers to some of these questions after inter-

viewing angry Native students at the University of Alaska.

"You have to humble yourself to him," one student said, speaking of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Coordinator who doles out the aid-money every year so Native youngsters can go to college.

"It's just like you have to get down on your knees and beg to get a single penny!"

Another student said: "It really destroys your self-respect. I would quit school and go out and get a job before I would go again to him for help."

And so in higher education, Natives graduating from Alaska high schools face a strange paradox.

Today leaders in the state are crying for the need of high school and college graduates among Native young people.

But yet, the attitude of a BIA representative supposed to help students so dampens appetites for college study that many quit before they start.

John Sackett, young president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference and himself a student at the U of A, said this of the BIA Education Specialist working with University youths: "His actions in regards to the grant-in-aid policy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs can be summed up in one word—humiliation."

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# Native Students . . .

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"There are many of us who do not like to ask for aid to continue our education. However, many of us must. Many come from small villages where there is no economy and no jobs, where our parents can't work and where in many cases they are on welfare."

Sackett told the Tundra Times of one exceptionally bright rural youth who came to the university ready to tackle the books and learn.

The student came from a poor family in a poor village. There was no way his parents could help in sending him to school. At Mt. Edgecumbe in his senior year, Sackett said, the BIA had urged him to go on to college, get a degree, and to "not worry about the finances."

With the promise of government help to attend college the student showed up on campus this fall only to face a different story from the BIA representative who actually was supposed to help.

"Have you exhausted all other available sources of help?" the official asked.

There are many ways for university students, Native and non-Native, to get financial help in getting through school. Scholarships are available, loans are available from the University itself and through the National Defense Education Act, and other sources are also open.

However, competition is often fierce for scholarships and loans and often a Native student's application is turned down because—a strange turnabout—he can get help from the BIA.

But help from the BIA was not coming in the instance of the youngster Sackett cited.

The youth was so discouraged he wanted to quit school and go home, back to his village, even before registration for classes began this year.

Sackett and other University students talked him out of quitting and got him to apply for a scholarship—which he was, luckily, able to get.

Others, though, were not so lucky.

## Irate

Students at the university this year are irate over their handling by the BIA.

"I've reached the limit of my patience. I'm tired of groveling and humbling myself before this guy. If the BIA doesn't replace him soon I'm just not coming back to school."

The speaker was a young Native majoring in chemical engineering.

Another student, a girl in her first year, said: "He doesn't have to be replaced. If he would only change his attitude. He treats the money as if you're taking it from his own pocket."

"He's been here as long as I've been going to school," said an older student, a senior, "and every year it's the same way. Lately it seems to have gotten worse, though."

A new angle was brought in by another girl student: "He seems to not want us to go to school here in Alaska. He acts as if he's doing us a great favor to give us pennies going to school here, but then

he tells us that if we change our minds and want to go Outside to school, to a two-year college or vocational school, the BIA will pay all our way, transportation, expenses, clothes and everything."

The girl said she had been offered schooling at a two-year college near Durango, Colorado, with the BIA paying all expenses.

"This is really a switch," she said, "Actually discouraging us from going to school here in Alaska, and wanting to spend all that money sending us outside."

Another girl told of what had happened to her "expenses" supposedly provided by the BIA, for the university.

Her room and board had been taken care of, she said, but when it came to books and clothes for the winter the official had asked her for an estimate.

She figured it up, and then he slashed it by 50% to roughly \$75 for the year.

Books for a normal load of classes, one semester, can run to \$20 or more. Two semesters can total \$50 plus in books for the college courses.

The girl is left with \$25 for clothes and spending money for the entire school year, in a land where a parka warding off -50 degree temperatures can cost \$50 and a pair of shoes at least \$10, saying nothing of other warm clothes.

In this case, the student comes from a village near Unalakleet. She comes from a family of nine. Her parents are poor and on welfare, but still her father scraped up the money to buy her a plane ticket up to the University.

"It left him broke, completely," she said.

Still another student pointed out a significant fact:

"He just doesn't seem to understand what things are like in the bush. He asks you, 'Why can't your parents help?' He doesn't understand that my parents just can't give me any money. I have to give them money! My father is able to find work two months out of the year—and he's one of the lucky ones. From what he makes then, he has to try and support the family year-round."

"He asks you, 'Why can't you get a summer job?' Where are we supposed to get summer jobs? There are no jobs at any time of year, for us or anyone. Occasionally we can go fire-fighting, but then we have to pay our room and board, our living expense through the summer, and often give money to our family to help them. It doesn't leave much left over."

## Indictment

The worst indictment, according to Sackett, is that graduating seniors at Mt. Edgecumbe and other high schools are virtually promised total aid by the BIA in an effort to get them to enroll at the university.

"After hearing about college life through rose-tinted glasses and then getting here and finding this can really discourage anyone," he said.

"What happens in many cases, when students refuse to bow down and be humble,

submitting to the paternalism of the bureau, is that they either leave school completely, or they have to find part-time jobs to help them."

Part-time work around the university is available, but wages are low—in most cases \$1.75 an hour—and the time spent working can have a detrimental effect on the student's studying.

A university faculty member who asked not to have his name used, had this to say: "The first few days in any freshman year are a rushed, critical period of time. The university life is new to everyone and many students, whether Native or not, have trouble adjusting to the new routine."

"Financial worry can sour any student awfully quick on the academic pursuit. Putting this new Native student in a dramatically different type of school, add to it the financial worry of whether or not he's going to get BIA aid, add still the humiliation, and you've got a sure formula for a college drop-out."

About part-time jobs, the faculty member said;

faculty member said: "It's good for any college student to work part of his way through. But the freshman year is so critical that any student takes a chance with his grades when he works while attending classes. This is especially true with the Native student—who is in a new environment and must study many times harder to keep up."

While on the university campus talking to students, an older Native student walked up to this writer. He had his wife and little girl with him. Both he and his wife are enrolled at the university.

"We're just sick of this harassment," he said, "and where before everybody was afraid to speak up and say anything, now it has reached to the point where we can't take it anymore. Something has got to be done."