



Bea Shawanda, left, trainer from the National Native Association of Treatment Directors in Canada, leads a substance abuse workshop sponsored by the Rural Alaska Community Action Program during the ninth Annual Statewide Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Symposium last week in Anchorage. The symposium is put on by the Alaska Council on Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and the theme this year was "Challenge to Wellness." Vera Manuel, right, a participant at the workshop, addresses others attending.

16% of APU students Native

by **Holly F. Hallam**
Tundra Times reporter

Alaska Pacific University may have the highest percentage of Alaska Native students in the nation, according to APU President Tom Trotter.

He said the 16 percent Native student body is a result of the Alaska Native Institute on the campus.

The institute is a type of "support system" for rural and non-rural Native students who may have special educational or language needs, or who may just need help in adjusting to an urban setting.

ANI Director Eric Morrison said a large part of the program's success is its peer tutoring.

"We actually hire upper level students as tutors. That's why our retention rate is 50 percent," Morrison said.

Another plus at the institute is the full-time counseling staff available to assist students who may run into problems or need someone to talk to.

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Morrison said another aspect of the institute, which many people may not know about, is some of the courses APU offers, such as federal Indian law, Alaska land claims and Native American Indian religion and philosophy.

The institute also co-hosts one of the biggest Native events in the state: Spirit Days.

APU and Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka are the only two private, accredited colleges in Alaska.

APU, which gets rural students from mostly the Northwestern and Interior portion of the state, is supported through grants, from a variety of businesses and organizations.

Trotter said he would also like to get the Alaska Native regional corporations involved in supporting the university since they receive so many Native students.

Right now the only funding from Native regional or village corporations is student grants and scholarships.

Trotter said he wants the Native corporations to realize that APU is teaching students what role they will play in the future. And he said the students' future can include employment at the their village or regional corporation.

"We need to keep raising the question — to the Native corporations — that it is in their best interest to help support us," Trotter said.

In supporting the university, regional and village corporations can more efficiently exercise shareholder hire and Native preference hire.

And Trotter said there are companies in Anchorage which are hiring Native graduates from APU. He said these businesses are hiring Natives because of the ties they have with their Native corporations. And he said the companies are interested in developing business relationships with the corporations.

APU, which was formerly Alaska Methodist University and founded by an Aleut man, Gordon Gould, keeps a commitment to addressing Alaska Native students' special needs through the institute and through its curriculum.

Trotter has been president of APU for nearly two years. His vision for the college is to be the best a college can be and to respond to what people want.

And Trotter said the way APU is structured to respond to what is needed makes a difference with the Native student retention rate.

Two of the board of trustees at APU are Alaska Natives who graduated from Alaska Methodist University.