

# Native Oriented Studies at U of A

They call it black studies at some schools, Indian studies at others, third world culture, mi-

nority studies and a dozen different names and labels. Though the courses differ and were often instituted through violence the concept is the same:

Not all students identify with white, middle class American society. College students from other cultures want to study their own people, culture, history and politics.

Despite lots of publicity the four new Native Studies courses at the University of Alaska this semester have not shaken any bastions. Quietly, with a good deal of forethought, organization, imagination, students are studying the literature, the traditions, the politics and the crafts of Alaska's varied native peoples.

As the 1971-72 school year opened at UA, TUNDRA TIMES talked with Dr. Walter Soboleff,

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the man chosen by the student members of the Special Orientation Services Board to organize the native studies program.

As he, the instructors in native politics, history, literature and skin sewing have planned the courses, each of the four courses are unique.

Three of the classes—politics, history and literature—have each invited 12 expert native speakers from all over Alaska to address their classes on specific subjects.

The speakers range from Mrs. Genevieve Soboleff, who led off the Indian, Eskimo, Aleut literature class with a talk on Haida legends to such noted figures as AFN President Don Wright,

invited to speak to the native politics course on the vital subject of land claims.

Most of the speakers on native literature are native story tellers, often old people with an encyclopedia knowledge of the traditional literature of their people. Much of this tradition has never been recorded. The native students in the literature course will record these stories and legends as their class projects—assuring that at least a portion of their tradition will not die with the older generation.

Each of the four present native studies courses is part of a different academic department. None of them will use textbooks,

there are none.

The University professors who lead the courses are enthusiastic and experimental. Professor Gordon Harrison, who leads the native politics class, has adopted the TUNDRA TIMES as required class reading material.

He hopes to interest one or more students in native journalism as a participation class project. For native literature, many students will return to their villages to collect traditional stories.

Native studies is burgeoning out in the curriculum of many high schools and colleges in Alaska within the last few years, says Dr. Soboleff.

At UA, they have more native students on campus than ever before—almost 300. At the UA and other Alaskan schools, courses have cropped up in Eskimo and Indian languages, in Tlingit, Eskimo, Athabascan and Aleut cultures.

Both native and non-native students have flocked into the courses. The heritage class at UA drew almost 50 students before the University closed it. The other native studies courses have students on waiting lists for next semester.

Dr. Walter Soboleff, former president of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, political figure, educator, forsee an expansion of native studies to a point where a student can major in the study of a native people in Alaska—perhaps to fill one of the burgeoning positions in Alaska which demand people who know about their own native culture and about the other native cultures in Alaska.