

## **OPINION:**

# **Students ask for an indigenous study center**

**By Shelley Trainor**

A recent meeting to clarify the desires of the Alaska Native students who feel threatened by the loss of their Native Student Services Center was attended by 35 at the University of Alaska/Anchorage(UA/A). Vice-chancellor of Student Services, Larry Kingery said, in an earlier meeting, he and the university planners had planned to combine the Native Student Service space with the same space as the Minority Student Services and to eliminate the Native Student Services space which has been at the UA/A for 16 years. Only this year did the students gain their first academic Native counselor. Neither is there an Indigenous Studies Center or even a Native Studies Curriculum.

The Native Student Organization takes a Four Point Stand: 1) That an Indigenous Studies Center be established by Jan. 1993. 2) That a Senior Policy Position such as a Vice-chancellor's position be established to head the Indigenous Studies Center by Jan. 1993. 3) That Native Student Services be moved to the Indigenous Studies

Center by 1993. 4) That adequate space be provided by Jan. 1993. Options: a) New Business Building, b) Building-K, c) In the future, a "long House".

More than 40 students took part in two recent marches to make it clear to Chancellor Behrend and the University of Alaska that they definitely did not want to lose their Native Student Services Center. Mary Reeve, past UA Student Regent, David Henson, president of the Native Student Organization, and Marge Edias, Chairwoman for Global Affairs, have been outspoken activists for students. At this time, Reeve is attempting to get on the agenda of the upcoming UA Board of Regents meeting. She wants to make sure that, "the regents understand that putting all students of color into one center is a racist policy and not acceptable in the 1990's." Reeve continued, "The tyranny of a shifting majority should not erase the importance of recognizing the indigenous peoples of Alaska. Our true political history has never been taught in our schools and this has been a form of misinformation and disinformation which has been a deep source of cultural

disparity. The University of Alaska has failed its own mandate." What is ironic is the University of Alaska is a land grant university. The lands have been granted from the original owners of this land, the Native peoples of Alaska. This in itself deserves special recognition for an Indigenous Studies Center. To worry the Native students with the loss of their own Native Student Services space is ridiculous and a reflection of administrators poorly schooled in the political history of Alaska.

The students have talked bitterly of their harsh experiences at the University of Alaska. They expressed themselves in various ways; one felt invisible, one had to become uncaring in order to survive in the university environment, one could not begin to imagine how it would be to make it through the confusion without the support of those other Yupik, Inupiat, Athabaskan, and Aleut contacts at the Native Student Services Center, and it is institutional racism of the worst kind our true social and political history has not been a vital part of the historical studies at the University of Alaska. Virtually all participants spoke in

amazement of the unresponsiveness of the university administration.

Many felt it important to relate a history of themselves since contact with the Euro-Americans. The consequences of British law and colonialization are becoming more clear to the students. All had awakened to the necessity of politicizing their desire for an Indig-

enous Studies Center. The students are talking about the education of their own children in an improved university environment; an environment supportive of themselves, the original peoples of Alaska. The students are requesting support from legislators and traditional councils. Call David Henson at the UA/A Native Student Center at 786-1981.