

Fairbanks UA Students View Quality of College Education

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meet the need for more Native college graduates that is being generated by the Native claims settlement and economic growth in Alaska," the report said.

Previous studies indicated that poor academic preparation and poor social adjustment were the major causes of Native students failing or dropping out. The ISEGR report suggests that academic demands on beginning students, at least at the University of Alaska, have been adequately adapted to the needs of the students.

A junior majoring in education, John Pingayak of Chevak, said the main problem he and his wife had when they came to the university was studying.

Charles Nicolai, a freshman from Kwethluk said attending Mt. Edgecumbe School in Sitka helped prepare him for life in a college dormitory, but he added, "When I first came here I didn't know what to do and SOS helped me out."

SOS is the acronym for Student Orientation Services, a program set up in 1969 to help Alaska Natives improve their chances of succeeding at the University of Alaska. SOS offers special courses to teach the new students how to take lecture notes, handle long reading assignments, and write a research paper. Special counseling is available for academic and personal problems. Tutors provide help, mainly in math and science.

Dennis Demmert, director of Native Studies at the University, acknowledges the efforts of SOS but contends the program is operating under a handicap:

"The educational system we have at the university is not designed for all Alaskan people. It is being paid for to serve all Alaskan people but it isn't designed to do that, Native people are designed out. SOS is kind of an attempt to design Natives back in again; that shouldn't be the case."

Demmert said although the SOS program has received high marks from evaluators, that doesn't mean the university is fulfilling its responsibility adequately. He suggested that SOS should receive more funding in proportion to the ratio of Natives to the total

population. Demmert said SOS should offer additional basic instruction in subjects besides English. Academic counseling and tutoring should be upgraded, he said.

Most Native students interviewed were generally satisfied with the SOS program and felt it had contributed something to their academic experience. But one does not live by academics alone.

The ISEGR study states, "Our case studies of individual students who do not succeed in college suggests, for example, that they often lack a sense of direction. Many are unable to resist social pressure to 'party' or cannot relate college success to their personal goals."

Agnes Pete Griffith, a senior journalism major from the Bethel area said, "The city has a lot of attractions that the little village doesn't have, so when they come here, they are studying but they're also experiencing a different kind of social life that might make it a little more difficult."

The ISEGR study does not deal with the problem of social adjustment and there does not seem to be a consensus among Native students as to the magnitude of the problem. Some students who felt isolated or alienated from non-Native classmates when they first came to the university are satisfied they have overcome the problem. Married students seemed to feel their married status freed them from the problem. However, one student cited several specific instances of racial prejudice that she has witnessed or experienced herself.

Demmert questioned the common understanding of what social adjustment is:

"I have some problem with the concept of social adjustments as I have heard it discussed frequently that is in regard to Native students and Native people, because what's implied too often is that the social adjustment should be on the part of the Native student or Native person. I'm not sure the predominant society is all that great for adjusting to. The term social adjustment to me implies

changing my way, whatever it is, to the predominant way. And I'm not sure that's all that great an idea. It would be useful in some ways but I also have to question the kind of loss that goes with that."

Demmert said the purpose of the Native program of which he is director is to enhance understanding of Native culture and assist in the educational development of Native students.

The program was started four years ago at the request of Native students to insure the relevance of higher education to Native lives.

The Student Orientation Services lounge at the UA, Fairbanks campus provides a place for Native students to mix and socialize among themselves. Cribbage tournaments, films, free coffee and an occasional party are sponsored by SOS. Although SOS and the complementary Upward Bound program are designed to serve all rural students, rural Native students are the predominant users of the programs.

Asked if SOS tends to prevent integration of Native students in a wider sphere of activities, SOS Director Toni Jones said, "We probably start over-protective, but an effort is made to develop in the student an assurance to call on others besides SOS. We try to maintain maximum flexibility."

Most students interviewed agreed. Nicolai and his roommate Ben Hopson, of Wainwright, said SOS encourages students to get involved in other things. William Gumlickpuk, of New Stuyahok, also agreed but was reluctant to generalize about the feelings of his fellow students. He stressed that in spite of common problems and backgrounds, each Native student has different needs and desires.

However, Linda De Witt, of Wrangell, suggested that some students are actually hindered by SOS when they become too dependent on special services. She added that sponsorship of a student by SOS can create a reaction among regular instructors. "A lot of teachers remind me that SOS has programs to help me rather than helping me. They just keep saying 'You can get a tutor at SOS.'"

One of the more common problems of Native students, not necessarily related to social adjustment, is just plain homesickness.

Students miss families and old friends. They miss the rural scene. One student from Toksook Bay said he hadn't been home in seven years except vacation periods. He recently left school in the middle of the spring semester. Although he will not receive academic credit for the work he completed, he seemed satisfied with his decision and was confident that he would be back in the fall.

Sue McHenry, head counselor at SOS, cautioned against using the term "homesickness" to describe the desire of some students to return home in the middle of the semester. To some people, she said, it carries a stigma of weakness or moodiness which does not necessarily apply to the student's situation.

She pointed out that dropping out of college for a period of time, unlike dropping out of high school, can be a positive experience. Events are happening back home that are directly tied to the passage of the seasons. They won't wait for the official break, or Christmas or the end of the semester. Many students who attended high school at Mt. Edgecumbe or outside Alaska literally haven't been "home" for years.

Nancy Gray, a student from Barrow majoring in business administration, views her dropping out the first time around as part of her learning experience. She said it gave her a chance to look around and see what was available.

Griffith said there is usually no reprimand or sense of failure when a student returns to a village. It is possible that the feelings of a student's parents will strongly affect his decision to stay in school or return home. She suggested that students who drop out and return at a later date are more serious about their education and willing to apply themselves.

Some students return home to see aging grandparents before these sources of knowledge are lost. Some return to hunt or get

married.

Increasingly, however, there is another attraction, the trans-Alaska pipeline. At least six students during the Spring, 1975 semester, dropped out of the University of Alaska for pipeline jobs. There is no way to assess at this point what the educational future of those students will be.

A characteristic which seems to be common among Native students is a sense of commitment to the problems of Alaska Natives as a whole. References are made to working among and helping "my people".

Roger Kunayak, of Little Diomed, dreams of setting up an art school "wherever" Native students need him. Nancy Gray speaks of a management position with a Native corporation. Gumlickpuk, concerned about Native college graduates taking their talents out of the rural areas to the monied urban areas, wants to teach Yupik Eskimo in his home area. John and Teresa Pingayak say they have "no big dislike about the university" but it's "always a good feeling when we go home."

There can be little doubt that events since the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 have greatly increased a sense of Native pride and community. This growing awareness, a potential source of political and cultural strength, seems to be rubbing off on Native students even though they are not directly involved in politics or corporate management.

The study by ISEGR points out that the general social climate has enhanced Native understanding of the importance of higher education.

As higher education improves in the urban areas and plans are developed to take higher education to the bush through community colleges and regional learning centers, it will be interesting to observe how this year's Native college graduate becomes involved in the decisions which will effect his younger brothers and sister, and eventually his own children.

Fuel Shortage...

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increase," Dorsey added. "With the increasing costs of fuel, community stores are limited in the amount of money they can lay out for something that only turns over once per year—the more fuel they have to buy and hold during the winter, the less they can put on their shelves."

Joe Chase, head of BIA housing in Juneau, told the Tundra Times that the agency expected there could be some problems but they would probably not come until after the structures were completed in June of 1976.

"From what we can gather, most of these homes will be replacing old ones, so we're not expecting an increase," Chase explained. "They're not going to be occupied this winter so the problem will probably wait until the people can deal with it."

Communities to receive housing include Galena, Fort Yukon and Tanacross in the Doyon region; Kotzebue, Noatak, Noorvik, Shungnak, Gambell and Savoonga Nana region; St. Michael, Stebbins, Unalakleet and Teller in the Bering Straits region and Emmonak, Hooper Bay and St. Mary's in the Calista Region. Six of those communities are land-locked and will be receiving the houses by other forms of transportation.

Dorsey went on to explain how

the fuel storage program had developed. He said it began some four years ago when ANICA went to SOCAL for assistance. Since then, SOCAL has provided loans and technical assistance for over 41 communities which needed bulk fuel storage.

SOCAL has provided over \$500,000 in financial backing for fuel storage, but because of the world wide demand for capital in the oil business, it is now diverting more of that money into exploration expenses. However, SOCAL still remains as the only oil company in the state which provides direct financial and technical assistance.

"While underneath the activity SOCAL is a major assistance force, it it weren't for the determination of the local people and the cooperation of ANICA and the village and regional corporations, as well as the other agencies, nothing would happen," said George Kent, Marketing Manager for SOCAL's Western Operations, Inc. "I think the future looks good for the villagers' fuel storage requirements — the expertise is available to provide the storage, they now have money from the land claims settlement and they are rapidly moving ahead to provide for themselves without having to depend on others."

did say that IHS was "basically looking around" for funds to assist the MPH programs.

IHS does financially support the Desert Willow Training Center in Tucson, Ariz., which primarily trains Community Health Representatives (CHR) to work in tribal communities. No formal graduate training in administration or supervisory positions is currently offered at Desert Willow.

In his letter, Hunter listed four possible reasons of why IHS has "turned its back on our program... the largest single course of training Indian professionals in the public health field (that) is being discontinued."

— The first argument is that IHS may not be able to "absorb that many" Indians with MPH degrees. Currently, only 10 of the 57 MPH graduates from the Berkeley program are working for IHS.

The others are working for tribal governments and public health areas other than health administration. Hunter stated that "there are few Indian professionals with formal graduate public health training working with Indian people with their numerous health needs."

Quipped one MPH graduate: "Damn, we've managed to flood the market with less than 100 Indians." There are 57 Berkeley graduates and 25 from Oklahoma.

He further added, "The reason

why there are so few of us working in IHS and which I and others have experienced, is when we apply, IHS just can't seem to find a place with them so we have to look elsewhere."

— "MPH programs are not training Indians to work for IHS" according to statements made by IHS personnel. Hunter pointed out that trained health personnel are needed "whether inside or outside of IHS." He said that IHS is developing administrative training at Desert Willow and "this is being used as an answer for eliminating support for formal graduate training."

"And," he added, "credentials from Desert Willow are unsatisfactory in the long run should the Indians ever be put in a competitive position with the non-Indians and are almost useless in other than a segregated health system."

— Several IHS personnel have stated that the Berkeley MPH program "was not a good one for Indian students." Hunter questioned these remarks "when many non-Indian IHS personnel have received their MPH degrees from that University, including the Director of IHS."

According to a reliable source, IHS is currently supporting a medical doctor (non-Indian) who is attending Berkeley and working on a MPH degree "grooming him for the position of Service Unit

Director in Santa Fe. IHS won't take any Indians with MPH degree for the Santa Fe position, especially those from Berkeley. It seems we're looked upon as uppity..."

— IHS personnel reportedly have told the two MPH programs to "go find some other source of funding. Don't look to IHS." Hunter said that the MPH programs had looked to other funding sources, "each referring us back to Indian Health Service."

The Berkeley source said that "After the MPH programs were started, Johnson (IHS Director) indicated IHS would provide long term training support but rescinded this decision after he looked over the Berkeley graduates. Berkeley is a good school and has turned out excellent people but I guess that isn't what IHS is in the market for."

Expenditure declined to state officially whether IHS has included the MPH programs in the FY 76 budget request. Hunter stated that the Berkeley program needs \$179,000 of new money to continue for another year. The Oklahoma program can continue for another year and "then they will be closing if they can't find funding sources."

The first of three budget hearings was held on April 10 during which only IHS personnel

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