

College Orientation Program for Natives Proves Worth

COLLEGE—Findings of an "education for survival" test program conducted for four years by the University of Alaska "contain implications for educators of Alaskan Natives at all levels", a new University publication asserts.

The project, known as COPAN (College Orientation Program for Alaskan Natives), was operated from 1963 to 1967, in an era when more than half of the Eskimo, Indian and Aleut students entering the University were likely to drop out at the

end of their first year and when only one of 50 entering freshman was likely to get the baccalaureate degree after four years.

The test program was followed by the institution, in 1969 of Special Orientation services (SOS), a continuing University department that has slashed the dropout rate tremendously.

The 186-page report on COPAN, which helped set the pattern for SOS, was written by Lee H. Salisbury, professor of speech and theatre arts, as the principal investigator, and published by the University's Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, directed by Victor Fischer. It is priced at \$5.

In recent years about one-eighth of the entering freshman class at the University have declared themselves to have at least one-fourth Eskimo, Indian or Aleut blood.

For four summers during COPAN, Native students participated in seminar discussions of Native social issues and problems, roomed and boarded with Western professional families worked on study skills, guided reading and motion picture viewing, individual testing and counseling and a formal freshman-level course in Anthropology.

Typical replies submitted to questionnaires after the Anthropology class sessions included these:

1. "All of my life I've lived in a small village, where almost sub-consciously I've felt ashamed of being 'Native'. This summer has helped me to realize (almost) that individuals are important, not for race, but for themselves."

2. "This gives the whites a better chance to understand the Alaska Natives. The Native students who have this class learn to appreciate their heritage and their state as well."

3. Statements like these, Professor Salisbury comments, "indicate that an introduction to cultural study, when taught by an anthropologist who specializes in Alaska cultures, can provide the Native student with uniquely valuable perspectives and increased feelings of self-worth."

4. Professor Salisbury says that COPAN students not only showed a higher college survival rate than Native students who did not take the orientation course but that the "student personality integration" increased and anxiety level decreased during the program.

5. "In the three years of highest COPAN survival," he continues, "the students also showed higher English grades than did their non-COPAN Native peers."

6. "The examples of student writing included in this report contain important implications for the Alaska educator and provide rich insight into the process of cultural transition.

Further, they represent the beginning of a freer and more open dialogue between Native and non-Native necessary for improved education in Alaska.

"Finally, they illustrate that the climate for learning and communication depends largely upon the degree of mutual trust and respect that develops in the classroom."