

# UA Native Students Find Lower 48 Indian Collegians Face Similar Schooling Obstacles

By CHARLENE YACOFF

Indians looking over other Indians? That's exactly what five of us had a chance to do on a trip to the Lower 48 last month.

I was one of five University of Alaska students who, with our advisor, Robert Egan, visited four universities in the Lower 48 who have or are in the process of developing programs to graduate more Indian students from their schools. Our mission was to look over their programs to gather ideas to start a similar program at the University of Alaska. And ideas we got!

Our group included Helen Atkinson, senior from Metlakatla; Liz Charles, sophomore from Bethel; Dorothy Jordan, freshman from Tanana; Sam Towarak, sophomore from Unalakleet, and myself, Charlene Yacoff, senior from White Mountain.

The Alaska Federation of Natives convention in Anchorage was our first stop, where Sam and Liz had an opportunity to tell the convention our purposes for going on the tour. From there we proceeded to the University of Montana and Eastern Montana College in Montana, Fort Lewis College in Colorado and Brigham Young University in Utah.

The trip was a real eyeopener! Like many native students attending the University of Alaska, the Indian student outside has many obstacles to face and overcome if he is to finish his college education. While a couple of the schools are making an all-out effort to keep their Indian students in school until graduation, the other two seem unaware that there are several large reservations nearby.

At the University of Montana, with a student body of 6,000, only 40 Indian students are enrolled. Eastern Montana College has 115 Indian students enrolled compared to a total enrollment of 3,000.

This is a very small percentage of Indian students as there are seven reservations in Montana totalling an estimated population of 25,000. Ten per cent of the student enrollment at Fort Lewis College are Indians, representing 35 tribes—27 of these students are from Alaska.

Brigham Young University has approximately 300 Indian students in their student enrollment of 25,000.

The most revealing aspect of the trip was our contact with the students. We had many opportunities to exchange ideas in class, club meetings and informal get-togethers to which we were invited.

At Montana, we were surprised to discover that the tribes

still feud among themselves. Historically, their disagreements date way back. Even as we talked with the students from the various tribes, their tribal disagreements were expressed.

The students themselves admitted that whenever the tribes try to work together their attempts are often beset by discord. Too, according to the students, the old tribal leaders have a strong hold at the reservations so that when a young person returns to his reservation steaming with new ideas, he is often rejected.

We visited one class at Eastern Montana College—speech. Like

many students at the University of Alaska, the students in this class were afraid to speak up in class. Though most of the class was Indian, the students were still shy. According to the instructor, they are experimenting to see if such a class would help the student out of his reticence.

Fort Lewis College has a very successful inter-cultural program in operation especially geared to Indian, Spanish-American and foreign student.

The Indian students welcomed us with fried bread and Indian tea. The center itself gave me a sense of belonging—the walls

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## Poem—

### Off the Shelf

Willie Smitus went to school  
He knew not what he was,  
After many years a fool  
He knows what he does.

He was taught the laws of life  
He knows the Golden Rule,  
His teacher knowing all the strife  
Lead Willie as a tool.

The question that I ask myself  
How can good work be done?  
Take Willie Smitus off the shelf,  
Teach our Native Son!

—CHRIS G. ANDERSON &  
NELS A. ANDERSON, JR.



# Schooling Obstacles...

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were covered with Indian art work done by the students. The students were cordial and willing to talk about their center.

Some of the services available at the inter-cultural center are counselling, tutoring, special classes in English and math; during the summer a pre-college orientation program is offered to prospective freshmen students.

Many of the freshmen with whom we spoke felt that the orientation program was the biggest factor to their adjusting to college life.

Brigham Young University has developed a department on Indian education. BYU is operated by the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints and admitted to having a religious obligation to the Indian.

They recognize the unique cultural background of their Indian students and therefore have developed their own teaching methods and materials to meet this difference.

We visited a history class where the instructor had developed his own syllabus for the students to follow his lecture. According to the staff, the Indian students are being taught by their best instructors on campus. Their efforts are proving worthwhile, as BYU's Indian student dropout rate last year was 13 per cent compared to their overall dropout rate of 14 per cent.

The tour of the four universities and our contact with the students themselves was revealing. These observations helped our group to shape ideas for the program underway at the University of Alaska.

As Helen put it, "It made me realize what we have here in Alaska and how hard we have to work if we really want to succeed."

Sam felt that the visit to "Fort Lewis College and Brigham Young University shows that the problems of the native student can be solved."

The five in our group hope to use the ideas we learned on the trip to develop a similar program at the University of Alaska. We, together with Dorothy Napoleon, junior from Hooper Bay, comprise an advisory board to the University of Alaska program aimed toward the native student on campus.

Mr. Egan, who was former director of the Upward Bound Program at the University, acts as advisor to the board as well as being counsellor to students seeking counsel.

Since returning from our visit to the four universities, the six members of our advisory board have met and developed some recommendations to the University of Alaska's Academic Coun-

cil and have received overwhelming support.

Alaska is in the midst of a boom, and no one is more aware of its implications than young people. The opportunities are there for future young leaders and many are preparing for the responsibilities ahead through higher education.

Each year more and more Alaska native students are attending the University. Unfortunately, along with this increase the number of students who leave before graduation has increased as well.

The six on our board have experienced many of the problems faced by new students from the bush areas and, therefore, feel we can help them. We hope eventually to pool our ideas together into a proposal to implement tutoring, counseling, a study area with a typewriter perhaps, student visitation to the bush areas to tell villagers and prospective students the college story, and so forth.

Later it is hoped that classes especially geared to bi-lingual students can be implemented.

Special Orientation Services (as the program is called) was begun last year by a volunteer committee of interested University of Alaska faculty members including Mr. Egan.

These committee members wrote a preliminary outline of what to include in the program. In the meantime, Mr. Egan had opportunity to visit several universities in the Lower 48 to look over their programs adapted toward their Indian students.

His visit provided many of the ideas for a preliminary proposal. On September 1, 1969, SOS was able to open an office with a gift of \$10,000 from the Humble Oil Company.

Presently, Mr. Egan's office is located in a former apartment at Hess Hall. The walls need paint, the carpet is worn and the furniture is second-hand, but it is a place where students can feel free to come. There is a coffee-pot going all day, and always someone with whom to talk.

Some students find the lounge a convenient place to study; others come to tutor or be tutored.

Every day during the past weeks students have been coming in for tutoring services in mathematics, English, Spanish, Russian, psychology, sociology and anthropology.

Does this work? One freshman student claims that she wouldn't have made it through registration and the first weeks of school without the help of the services available through the center. SOS is determined that there will be many others.



INDIANS PROBE INDIAN EDUCATION—Native students from the University of Alaska recently toured four Lower 48 universities to look into the education of Indians under the direction

of Robert Egan, right. Helen Atkinson, left, was one of the students who went along. Center, is Audrey Ambrose.

—ROBERT KOWELUK Photograph