

Conflicting Date Plagues Meeting-

Alaska Center for Northern Education Meet Goes Anyway

Back around the beginning of November, UA Professor Frank Darnell called AFN executive director Harry Carter inquiring about a good date for the first meeting of the Policy and Evaluation Council of the new University of Alaska Center for Northern Education.

"How about the ninth," Darnell asked.

"Well Frank," Carter replied, "we've got a Charitable Trust meeting and an AFN board meeting and the bill..."

"I mean the ninth of December," Darnell replied.

"Oh, there's nothing on our calendar for December," Carter replied. "I'll be looking forward to seeing you there."

Well, just as nobody expected the House-Senate Conference Committee was still in its final stages (or not so final stages) of deliberation when December 9th rolled around.

AFN Board Members were tied up in Washington and AFN executive director Harry Carter was tied up planning how to reconvene the AFN Board a week later.

However, if AFN participation was scarce, a whole raft of other native people—in education, literature, and government, showed up for the first meeting to plan the direction of the University of Alaska Center for Northern Education.

The Center, which was formed this past year by the University of Alaska, is designed as a program development and research center for problems in public education in Alaska.

One major focus of the center is on the bilingual community Alaska varied, multilingual cultural groups. It is designed as a resource center—a place to which villages or native groups can turn for ideas, technical expertise, or a place where they can send their own people to work on specific problems while having access to the resources of the University.

Education has historically been one of the primary foci of native political activity and interest. During the convention which formed the Alaskan Federation of Natives in 1966 educational problems were a priority concern for all delegates. Only the urgency of clarifying land rights put them temporarily in the background.

For the opening meeting of the Policy and Evaluation Council of the Center for Northern Education, representatives were invited from all regions of the Alaska Federation of Natives, as well as from pertinent government offices, schools, and agencies.

AFN turnout, due to the focus on Washington, was poor. However, discussion was intense on the direction a Northern Studies Center should take in trying to aid educational progress in Alaska.

Already, with Ford Foundation grants still, in the future,

the Center has undertaken several projects.

Last Fall, University and community school board representatives, under the auspices of the Center, traveled to Barrow for a School Board orientation session. There, they discussed school board duties, problems and procedures.

At the present time, the Center is developing a native studies curriculum for students at Mt. Edgecumbe H.S. A third project—the Allakaket Learning Center is presently under construction as an "alternative education" idea in that village.

With the aim of helping to upgrade public education in Alaska, the Center is seeking Ford Foundation funding for its programs. At present, a small travel grant and the "loaning" of personnel from other branches fills the gap.

What areas should a Northern Education Center research?

During past months, the Center has developed many proposals.

Among these are development of means for local education control, training local policy makers, developing appropriate curricula, teacher training, specific "native studies" curricula, research into special education and a host of others.

Bilingual language curricula are a special concern to Alaska's native people. At the policy meeting last week, members saw a film on the bilingual program at Akiachuk—a program which begins teaching Eskimo children in Eskimo during their primary grades—using English as a second language.

Though the program is the most comprehensive in Alaska, it is not the first.

Harvard's William Demmert, a Tlingit from Klawock, instituted a grades one through eight bilingual program in Klawock when he was principal of the school there. One of the earliest comprehensive programs, it is still in existence.

The meeting that drew Bill Demmert from Harvard, where he is head of their American Indian Education Program and Joseph Senungetuk from San Francisco shows the widespread areas Alaskan natives have gone into.

Although the educators there may have been aware of problems, some of the presentations given showed how severe the gaps are in Alaska's public education system.

Edna MacLean, a girl from Barrow with a M.A. in education from Berkeley cited statistics to show the need for the native education program she is developing for Mt. Edgecumbe.

In a questionnaire filled out by students, less than seven per cent could correctly describe the Alaska Federation of Natives. RurAL CAP, an organization which runs programs in nearly

all their villages, was just as vague to these native high schoolers.

The program that Mrs. MacLean is developing along with UA professor Judi Kleinfeld and Tlingit Frank Berry is designed not only to close these serious gaps, but to "increase their pride in being a native," Edna told the group.

In Allakaket, the Center for Northern Education is taking a completely different direction. Here, the village is developing a Community Learning Center.

Two village teachers designed the grant for what will become a place for "generating new ideas and uses"—a space available for crafts and projects, center for village creativity in a village where housing space is at a premium. Village participation in all aspects of decision making is at the core of the program.

Next year, as the Center gears into full operation, it will probably move into many of these different directions, according to Director (UA Department of Education head) Frank Darnell.

The aspect which could make this research center different from previous ones is the search for native participation, says Darnell. The University hopes the Center will develop to coordinate and centralize education research programs in Alaska. It will draw funds and grants from State Operated Schools, borough school systems, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, etc. to carry out research programs within a structure that encourages native participation.

So far, it is just beginning.