

# Dropout Rate Drops—

## *Phenominal 90 Per Cent to 9.7*

In the fall of 1969, the dropout rate among Native students at the University of Alaska was a phenomenal 80 to 90 per cent. By spring of 1971, it had dramatically fallen to 9.7 per cent.

Dr. Walter A. Soboleff, coordinator and lecturer for Native studies, attributes a large part of this reduction to the Student Orientation Services. The SOS lends students, especially Natives, support in adjusting to campus life.

“Social adjustment on cam-

pus is not an easy thing and also coming in from a rural area to Fairbanks is quite an adjustment.” Add to this the fact that most Native students are the first in their families to attend college and the problems become even more difficult.

About 400 Native students are currently enrolled at the University, a majority of them freshman. They come from all over the state, ranging as far north as Barrow and as far

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south as Annette Island.

Besides the SOS, the University also has a program of Native studies, instituted three semesters ago for anyone interested. Each course comes under an established college department.

There is a course in Alaska Natives in Politics, under the political science division, one in Skin Sewing in the home economics, an Alaska Native Heritage class in the history department and an English course in Alaskan Natives Myths and Legends, to name a few.

In addition, the linguistics department offers courses in Inupiat and Yupik Eskimo, Tlingit and Haida Indian and special topics courses in nearly any Native language for which an instructor can be found.

Starting next fall, students may get a bachelor's degree in Eskimo languages.

Currently, the orientation service runs an advisory board that maintains contact with the students. Among other projects, they are making a study suggesting a minor in Native studies, with future possibilities for a major.

"We have existing programs we could coordinate without any trouble. It wouldn't be hard to pull together 12 credits," commented Dr. Soboleff.

The board also gives suggest-

ions to the whole orientation program.

"It becomes their concern, and I think that's the way it should be," he said.

The University of Alaska is not the only one interested in Native studies, as Dr. Soboleff's correspondence proves. Colleges and universities as widely scattered as Wisconsin, California and Canada write about programs they are developing along the same lines.

All of this "kind of brings a

sense of pride, a sense of belonging," says Dr. Soboleff. "The interest in these courses has been extremely high."

In some cases, they have had to be divided into two sections when they grew to large.

And that's what the Native studies department and the orientation service are all about. Helping students adjust to new surroundings, teaching them about their culture and heritage — and an intangible but very real thing known as pride.