

OPINION:

Native college: an idea whose time has come

By Paul Swetzof

A Native college in Alaska is an idea whose time has come. The University of Alaska Board of Regents, administration and faculty have not been responsive to the call for a viable Alaska Native Studies Dept. Private colleges such as Alaska Pacific University have done little in the way of Alaska Native studies.

We need an Alaska Native college which also offers Alaska Native language and culture and teaches all subjects in a culturally sensitive way. We need a college which trains and hires Alaska Native teachers who are State certified and those without State certification, have the knowledge and teaching skills needed to teach our people the ways of our respective peoples, past and present.

This idea is not new. There are Native colleges which have been functioning successfully for years in the "Lower 48". They attract funding through public and private grants, tuitions, which are often on a sliding scale, and State, federal and tribal education funding sources.

It seems, to me a Native college should be in Anchorage because this city is the most accessible place for most of Alaska. If,

for example, the college were in Juneau, the cost for a student living in Interior, Northern or Western Alaska to get home would be prohibitive in many cases. Air fare for a student whose home is in Juneau, however, would be no more expensive, and often cheaper, than a student whose home is in some other region of Alaska.

A Native college would provide jobs for Alaska Native teachers, certified and uncertified, and other staffing positions necessary to maintain the college. It would be a major resource center for Alaska Native language, culture, legal issues and ideas. The college

would provide our children with the pride that comes with identity and the education to make it in today's world whether a young person wanted to be a scientist or an effective member of a tribal council.

One idea is to establish a tribal college (which is how the Native colleges Outside were established). A tribal college would be created by authority of tribal resolutions. This method would help assure the college maintains its Alaska Native roots and distinction, would give students and all Alaska Natives a method of identity which can only come from our respective Native governments

and would assure the mission of the college remained intact. It would also attract a higher level of federal funding as well as private grants which are targeted towards Native tribal activities.

This idea has been discussed many times over the last few years. As with everything else, we now have the choice of talking and studying the idea to death or doing it. I support action.