

Teachers for Rural Alaska Program now recruiting students

by Sue Cortte

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — The University of Alaska-Fairbanks is recruiting students for a new teacher program designed for educators who intend to teach in rural Alaska high schools. The program will be the first in the nation to use recent research findings on effective instruction in rural, cross-cultural classrooms, according to the program's director, Dr. Bill McDiarmid, assistant professor of education at UAF.

Funded by a federal grant, the Teachers for Rural Alaska Program is a two-year, post-bachelor degree sequence of courses followed by an internship. Students will be certified to

teach at the end of the first year, and will earn a master of education degree upon completion of the program.

"We know that to be effective in rural Alaska, teachers not only have to be technically proficient," said McDiarmid, a former rural Alaska schoolteacher. "They also have to be cognizant of the cultural, political and social circumstances in which they work."

McDiarmid recently published the results of two major studies which examined the effectiveness of the state's small rural high schools, and identified successful teaching strategies in rural cross-cultural classrooms. "The findings of this research will form the

academic backbone of the master teaching program," said McDiarmid.

Another key component of the Teachers for Rural Alaska Program is the use of mentor-teachers. Selected by colleagues, village leaders and project staff, mentor-teachers will supervise teacher-interns in their classrooms and provide an important link between university instructors and rural schoolteachers and districts.

Other special features of the program include:

Proseminar which will involve a variety of university faculty members who have conducted research in rural Alaska as well as subject matter experts from other departments within the university and from rural schools.

Internship will provide a smooth transition for beginning teachers in their critical induction year of teaching.

Infusion of Research-Based Knowledge will use the accumulating body of knowledge on effective schools and teachers in rural Alaska and involve researchers directly in training teachers.

Students will spend the first semester of the program on campus focusing on recent research findings and broadening their knowledge in areas outside their academic field. "The skills and knowledge that teachers in rural Alaska need now are unique," reports McDiarmid. "Not only must they work in cross-cultural situations, but they must teach in very

small schools where their responsibilities extend across subject-matter areas. More than half of all rural teachers are teaching subjects outside of their academic specialization," he said. During the second semester, students will student-teach in rural high schools.

In the second year of the program, teacher-intern will assume regular teaching duties in rural school districts, under the guidance of mentor-teachers. To earn the master of education degree, students will complete their course work during summer sessions at the university and produce a scholarly paper on an aspect of teaching.

To qualify for admission into the Teachers for Rural Alaska Program, a student must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution. "We're looking for generalists — people with broad educational backgrounds, a variety of practical skills, and who are interested in teaching in small rural high schools," said Dr. Judith Kleinfeld, a professor at UAF, who will become the program's director next year. "A degree in education is not required," she said.

Application forms can be obtained by writing the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, 99775. They must be postmarked no later than May 1, 1986 to be considered for the fall semester. Students will be notified by June 1.