

# Native Student Leaders at UA Develop Courses

**COLLEGE**—Without threats or confrontations Native students at the University of Alaska have won authorization for the incorporation of three, possibly four, courses on Native culture in the curriculum next September.

Eskimo and Indian student leaders look upon this step hopefully as the first move toward the eventual establishment of a full department of Native studies.

The Academic Council late last week approved courses in Aleut, Eskimo and Indian Literature, Political Science of Alaska Natives and the Art of Skin Sewing. Also under consideration is Alaska Native Heritage, a history course. The Council accepted the idea of seeking a coordinator to help develop the Native courses.

The introduction of a Native program has been the objective of Native student leaders since the University opened its 1970 from scratch. They were unacquainted with different learning levels. It has been a real education for them."

Almost 250 students have been on the campus this year, with a dropout rate of 18.7 per cent, according to Mrs. Jack. This was less than half the rate two years ago. Native leaders expect more than 300 Natives, half of them freshmen, to enroll next Fall.

A senior major in sociology Mrs. Jack, the wife of Fred Jack, an electronics technology student, agreed with Miss Atkinson that the present SOS staff of two fulltime counselors and three parttime student counselors needed to be doubled next Fall to handle the work load. This consists of helping Natives with physical tests, course selections, housing and personal problems.

"Some of these kids," Mrs. Jack said, "don't like to bother people." Before SOS came into existence students would come from the bush so scared at registration time that, rather than ask questions they gave up at the start and went home."

"Yes," Miss Atkinson interjected, "they may have had the ability to go through college but they didn't have a chance."

Mr. and Mrs. Jack and four other students were among a half dozen who appeared earlier this year before a hearing in Juneau of a joint senate and house finance committee, discussing the University budget.

Mrs. Jack's hope has been to get a Master of Social Work degree but she said it was not offered in Alaska.

"I don't want to leave Alaska," she confessed, "so I'll work here as a counselor after graduation and try to work out some interdepartmental program looking to a master's degree."

Miss Atkinson was a business education major with a minor in psychology. Her first aim, she said, was teaching—"I would like some time to go back to my Native village and teach in high school."

Serving with Mr. and Mrs. Jack on the Native students' advisory board are Sam Towarak, Dorothy Napoleon, Martha Aiken, Patsy Aamodt, Elena Tikun, Nastasia Andrew, secretary, Myron Naneng and Agnes Ivanoff, head of the tutor program.

Helen Atkinson, a 1970 graduate of the University from the Indian village of Metlakatla, who is a counselor and adviser in the University's two-year-old Student Orientation Services (SOS), has been working closely with Mrs. Jack and her committee on the Natives courses project.

"We'd never had anything like this before," Miss Atkinson recounted. "We have an Alaskan



**STUDENT LEADERS**—Native student leaders at the University of Alaska are developing native courses in history. Such a leader is Mrs. Martha Jack, right, who is working hard on the project with the help of Helen Atkinson, counselor and advisor in the UA's Student Orientation Services.

history course in the curriculum but it deals with statehood and things like that, not the Natives and their history. But last Fall Dr. (Donald) Theophilus, vice president for academic affairs, gave us his O.K. and we started meeting with a variety of people from deans through department heads and instructors."

She said that when the movement began some participants thought a Native studies department would be the first step. But beginning with a few courses was decided upon as more realistic.

"A lot of realities had to be faced," recalled Robert H. Egan, head of SOS, which was set up specifically to help Native students adjust to University careers after living in villages where they had spoken Native dialects and frequently had had no encounters with the campus brand of civilization.

"By last November it became obvious that the University bud-

get could stand only so much. Two years ago nobody would have dreamed of what might develop. Students had never been involved in curriculum development, so they had to start Fall term. Student Advisory Board members, all of whom are Indians and Eskimos headed by Martha Jack, an Eskimo from Bethel, adopted this as a major project.

"We put our heads together, put down in the form of recommendations what we wanted, and we met with department heads and deans after formulating our wishes," Mrs. Jack

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"It is hard to get a new course started, from the Natives' point of view. Everybody had to work real hard. All of us learned a lot about the University administration; this was an education in itself. We learned as much as we did in any course on the campus."

With a broad smile she added: "We've tried to be firm but

humble."

Mrs. Jack said the students pursued a course of "not backing down but being respectful".

"We have worked constructively with the University administration and faculty," she continued. "I hope we never have to turn to a radical military movement. I don't believe in it and I think the Native students generally feel the same way."

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