



### **Introduction:**

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) has a long history of offering academic programs and support services that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous and rural students. These include Rural Student Services, the Rural Alaska Honors Program, the Alaska Native Language Center, our five rural campuses and learning centers, as well as degree programs in Alaska Native Studies, Rural Development, Tribal Governance, Rural Human Services, Indigenous Studies, etc. UAF's second strategic goal (2019-2025) is to "strengthen our position as a global leader in Alaska Native and Indigenous programs". As part of that effort, a committee was organized and tasked with providing guidance and direction to UAF on recommendations to achieve that goal. Simultaneously in January 2021, UAF also began actively participating in the Alaska Native Success Initiative (ANSI) which is a system-wide effort guided by a statewide steering committee and action teams at each of the respective University of Alaska (UA) universities.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the members of the UAF Action Team for their input and dedication to the development of this vision.

Dr. Reverend Anna Frank, *Elder Advisor*

Dr. Charlene Stern, *Interim Vice Chancellor for Rural, Community & Native Education*

Dr. Barb Amarok, *Northwest Campus Director*

Dr. Jessica Black, *Associate Professor of Alaska Native Studies & Rural Development*

Dr. Courtney Carothers, *Professor, College of Fisheries & Ocean Sciences*

Dr. Sean Topkok, *Associate Professor, Center for Cross-Cultural Studies*

Owen Guthrie, *Executive Director, eCampus*

Carlton Huatala, *Rural Student Services Advisor*

Margaret Rudolf, *PhD Student, Interdisciplinary*

Gabrielle Russell, *Indigenous Student Services Manager*

Geri Simon, *Tanana Chiefs Conference*

Brooke Woods, *Student, Fisheries & Ocean Sciences*

A key question that routinely emerged around the ANSI initiative is: What is UA prepared to do to make the changes necessary throughout the system to make our universities a great place for Alaska Native students, faculty and staff? It is critically important that moving forward, strategies to increase Alaska Native success focus on systemic change needed on the part of UA.

### **UAF Priorities:**

1. Expansion of Indigenous and rural student serving programs and places
2. Recruit and hire Indigenous staff with a goal of employing a UAF workforce that reflects Alaska's population (approximately 20% Alaska Native/American Indian)
3. Set a priority of recruiting, retaining and promoting successful tenure and promotion of Indigenous faculty that reflects Alaska's population
4. Launch a campaign to increase Indigenous visual representation across UAF campuses including signage and art
5. Become a leader in Post-Secondary Indigenization Initiatives



### **Priority 1: Expansion of Indigenous and rural student serving programs and places**

As of Fall 2020, 19.6% of UAF's student body self-identified as Alaska Native/American Indian. UAF currently offers a number of highly effective programs that are designed to serve Indigenous and rural students. We propose to build and expand upon best practice models to increase recruitment, retention and graduation rates.

#### *Indigenous and rural student serving programs:*

**Rural Student Services (RSS):** Currently RSS operates with a staff of (4) full-time advisors and a Indigenous Wellness Coordinator. These advisors advise an average of 500 students (over 100 students per advisor) which is double the national best practices ratio (50 students per advisor) for similar comprehensive advising support programs to be impactful. Over the past five years, the number of contact hours between RSS advisors and students has increased (0.9 hours per student per year) while the number of RSS advisors has remained the same. Despite this, the RSS advising model has a positive impact on both retention and graduation rates of Alaska Native/American Indian students. Increased investment in RSS would go further toward increasing these rates.

- Over a 5-year average (2015-2019), the **retention** rate of Alaska Native/American Indian students served by RSS (52.9%) is **8.2%** higher than Alaska Native/American Indian UAF students who are not served by RSS (44.7%). The overall retention rate for Alaska Native/American Indian UAF students is 46.3%.
- Over a 5-year average (2015-2019), the **graduation** rate of Alaska Native/American Indian students served by RSS (16.7%) is **4.6%** higher than Alaska Native/American Indian UAF students who are not served by RSS (12.1%). The overall graduation rate for Alaska Native/American Indian UAF students is 13.6%

Being able to hire more advisors and decrease the current caseload per advisor would allow more time with each student to assure that we are truly providing a wrap-around approach that is more holistic in supporting our students' needs. The additional time spent with each student would go further toward positively impacting graduation and retention rates.



**Examples of additional strategic investments in RSS could include financial support for:**

- **Degree completion advisor** - Over the past five years, a significant number of our students who have completed some college but have not earned a degree or certificate and discontinued taking classes is significant. In one advisor's case load of 110 students, 14 students have discontinued their degrees with less than five classes left to graduate. This is a focus that needs to be addressed quickly before more time passes. A degree completion advisor could focus their efforts in helping students return to finish up.
- **Degree completion scholarship support** - Scholarship support is not only an incentive but helps to offset the costs for students returning to school for degree completion. In many cases, students that have "stopped out" become ineligible for federal and tribal scholarships.
- **Wellness and outreach programming** - Recently RSS hired an Indigenous Wellness Outreach Coordinator. Though the position has only been in existence for six months, the requests for more programming to meet the needs of our students and the community have already become overwhelming. An assistant and more funds to help arrange programming logistics and materials would free up time for the Wellness Coordinator to meet individually with students.
- **Peer mentoring development and academic coaching support** - RSS student feedback surveys and direct students requests have identified advising needs for help with the

following: resume writing, individual homework assignments, helping students to identify what is needed in each class, ordering books, and helping complete scholarships. These requests could be addressed with peer mentoring or academic coaching positions.

- **Tutoring services** - The importance of having paid professional tutors has become increasingly apparent over the years. While RSS has partnered with Development Education faculty to volunteer hours during our RSS Study hall cohort, the demand for in-person tutoring exceeds the availability. RSS has students who require tutoring as part of their weekly schedule to assist with completing assignments and some students often rearrange their schedules and childcare in order to meet with the same tutor weekly. More consistent and robust tutoring services would better help to meet the needs of our students.
- **RSS Cohort/Study hall** - In the past, RSS was able to arrange a RSS Cohort and Study Hall for first year students which included funding for textbooks ahead and scholarship incentives for completing the fall semester in good standing (earning 12 credits with 2.5 GPA or higher). At that time, 100% of participating students met the requirements and registered for the following spring semester. Once, however, the scholarship incentive was not an option, the number of students who met the same requirements the following semester dropped to 45%.
- **RSS sponsored student clubs/organizations** - As part of the effort to provide and build a sense of belonging and community, RSS offers programming including Positive Connection Nights as well as through Alaska Native Student Organizations such as: Alaska Native Education Student Association, Alaska Native Social Workers Association, American Indian Science & Engineering Society, Native Alaskan Business Leaders, UAF Beading & Sewing Club, Iñu-Yupiaq Dance Group, Native Student Union of UAF, Native Games, Troth Yeddha' Dance Group, and Festival of Native Arts. The ability to provide funding for such activities and support for student clubs/organization events helps to maintain their presence and participation on the Troth Yeddha' Campus.

**Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI):** Currently, RAHI receives an average of 100 applications per year, yet is only able to accept approximately 50% of applicants. The majority of students who attend RAHI are Alaska Native (81%) and Alaska Native participants who attend RAHI are nearly twice as likely to obtain a bachelor's degree in the UA system than those who do not attend (19% vs. 10%). RAHI's goals are to increase application acceptance rate to 80% annually, which aligns with the UAF Retention Teams priority to expand summer bridging programs, and to increase support for their alumni as they pursue their degrees. The expected outcomes of these goals are the preparation of more students across the state for college success and an increase in the rate of degree attainment among Alaska Native students.

**Examples of additional strategic investments in RAHI could include financial support for:**

- **Scholarships to RAHI alumni attending UAF, UAS or UAA** - Current scholarship funding includes \$5,000 (one \$2,000 award and two \$1,500 awards) for first-time students attending any UA and \$25,000 (eleven \$2,000 awards and two \$1,500 awards) for first-time students attending UAF. There is currently no financial support for continuing students.
- **A non-represented faculty position that could also serve as an academic advisor for RAHI students and alumni** - Such a position could teach core courses during RAHI and provide academic advising to students at UAF during the academic year.

- **A college success coordinator position for RAHI alumni** - Such a position could support alumni pursuing a degree regardless of where they are enrolled through financial aid, career, and program application assistance as well as coordinate alumni outreach and events
- **Care packages** - Funding for care packages for RAHI alumni would help to provide a sense of support to active students.



***Indigenous and rural student serving places***

**Troth Yeddha’ Indigenous Studies Center** - UAF’s number one capital goal is to construct the Troth Yeddha’ Indigenous Studies Center. A site was officially designated on the West Ridge of campus between the Museum of the North and the Reichardt building and a conceptual design was completed for a 34,000 square foot facility and an outdoor Legacy Park. The fundraising campaign has raised \$1.8 million to date. UAF is currently working with Bettisworth North to revise the design to expand the administrative space from 28 offices to 45+ offices to accommodate program growth. Advancing to the next phase of pre-development would require schematic design.

**Additional residential housing options on campus for Alaska Native and rural students -**

Currently, the College of Rural and Community Development operates the Eileen Panigeo MacLean House on the Troth Yeddha’ Campus. Eileen’s house was established to provide students from the Arctic region and other rural areas of Alaska with a safe, inviting, and supportive community environment that would be helpful in the transition from small, tight-knit rural communities to university life in the city of Fairbanks. The current capacity of Eileen’s House is 20 students (10 male and 10 female spaces). Each fall there is a waitlist for students who want to get a room at Eileen’s house and the demand for additional residential housing with the same mission and focus would allow us to expand this same level of residential and transitional support to more of our incoming students.

**Priority Two: Recruit and hire Indigenous staff with a goal of employing a UAF workforce that reflects Alaska’s population (approximately 20% Alaska Native/American Indian)**

As of Fall 2020, 9.7% of UAF staff self-identify as Alaska Native/American Indian. Having a workforce that reflects Alaska’s population is critical to meeting UAF’s goals of diversity, equity and inclusion. With a student body that is 19.6% Alaska Native/American Indian, we recognize the importance of employing Indigenous staff throughout the university system who can help students (often non-traditional and first generation students) to successfully achieve their post-secondary educational goals. As an employer, UAF is committed to fostering diversity and would utilize strategic investments to “grow our own” workforce to better serve Indigenous students.

**Priority Three: Set a priority of recruiting, retaining and promoting successful tenure and promotion of Indigenous faculty that reflects Alaska’s population**

Currently, 5% of UAF faculty self-identify as Alaska Native/American Indian. Research has demonstrated that educators of color can help close access and opportunity gaps for students of color while being vital to the well-being of students of all races. By ensuring more Indigenous faculty in UAF classrooms, Indigenous students will have greater opportunities to see themselves represented which leads to numerous positive outcomes. Lundberg and Lowe (2016) found that higher quality relationships between Indigenous students and faculty were positive predictors of academic competence. Strategic investments in this area would help to expand faculty and course offerings in high demand areas including Alaska Native languages, Tribal Governance, and Indigenous Studies as well as in disciplines where Indigenous faculty have been historically underrepresented.

Specific strategies may include:

- Identifying current Indigenous term and adjunct faculty for rank changes to tenure track faculty positions.
- Identifying systematic barriers to tenure & promotion of Indigenous faculty and faculty of color
- Assessing tenure and promotion processes (including unit peer criteria) for inclusivity of Indigenous knowledge production and dissemination as well as opportunities for Elders and other knowledge keepers to engage in the evaluation of candidates.
- Ensuring representation from Indigenous faculty on tenure & promotion review committees as well as educating all faculty who serve on these committees on Indigenous inclusivity
- Identifying best practices for incorporating Indigenous knowledge production and community service into unit criteria across all departments
- Creating a program around Indigenous mentoring to support emerging Indigenous scholars’ contributions to their respective fields, to provide guidance with Indigenous faculty career paths by tenured Indigenous faculty and leadership, and to nurture a positive rapport with university employees, students, and communities.

#### **Priority Four: Launch a campaign to increase Indigenous visual representation across UAF campuses including signage and art**

UAF, like all UA campuses, is located upon the ancestral lands of Alaska Native peoples. As part of that recognition, UAF is planning to undertake a campaign to increase Indigenous visual representation at our Troth Yeddha' campus in Fairbanks, Community and Technical College campus, and at our rural campuses. Strategic investments in this area would help to support signage and art installations that aim to honor and uplift Indigenous peoples, languages and places in the physical campus environment.



#### **Priority Five: Become a leader in Post-Secondary Indigenization Initiatives**

Indigenization of post-secondary education is the practice of acknowledging and redressing the ways in which Indigenous Peoples, their scholarship, history, culture, and ways of knowing have been excluded from or made invisible within post-secondary institutions and post-secondary education. Post-secondary Indigenization Initiatives is less of a prescriptive plan and more of an ongoing commitment on the part of a higher education institution. The ANSI team would continue to work on identifying areas of particular importance that can help provide direction to UAF in this regard.

Examples of initiatives could include:

- Development of IRB protocols with working with Indigenous communities, including data management practices.
- Development of innovative co-production of knowledge practices and approaches
- Exploring how other Universities are approaching the decolonization of policies and practices
- Strategize on engaging more from the UAF community to engage in initiatives that advance equity

- Renormalization of the use and incorporation of Indigenous languages and Indigenous knowledge in academia