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Students in TVC’s dental hygiene program put their skills to work at TVC’s on-site dental hygiene clinic. Photo by Todd Paris.

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Physician Assistant Program Offers More Opportunities, Closer to Home

Becoming a physician assistant in Alaska just got a little easier, with the expansion of the UAA MEDEX physician assistant training program. The program, which is offered in collaboration with the University of Washington (UW) School of Medicine, will double its class size and offer all training in Alaska starting next fall.

The MEDEX program, which is a two-year bachelor’s degree program, has been offered at UAA since 2002. In the past, students spent their first year in Washington completing classroom education before returning to Alaska for a year of clinical rotations. With the expansion, students may now complete all two years of training in Alaska, marking the first time the entire program has been offered outside of Washington.

The expansion also increases the opportunities for students to get into the program. Previously, six to nine students were accepted each year. Beginning next year, the program will accept up to 20 students annually.

“We’re excited. We’re remodeling new space and hiring new faculty, so we’ll be ready for the students,” says John Riley, physician assistant program coordinator. He adds that the program is currently preparing classroom space on the third floor of UAA’s Diplomacy Building, and will be hiring two full-time faculty members and one part-time faculty this spring.

The MEDEX program prepares students to become physician assistants, who are licensed to practice medicine under the supervision of a physician. This occupation is among the top 10 fastest growing positions in the United States. In the coming years, physicians and institutions are expected to employ even more physician assistants to provide primary care and to assist with medical and surgical procedures, as they are cost-effective and productive members of the health care team.

In Alaska, physician assistants are especially important. According to the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force, physician assistants are a critical component of delivering health care services in Alaska, especially in rural areas.

Having an adequate number of physician assistants will also help address the growing need for health care in Alaska. The task force recommended that Alaska maintain a higher ratio of physician assistants and other mid-level providers than the national average, saying that will make it more feasible to provide high-quality, timely care to Alaskans.

“The MEDEX training model creates opportunities for second-career students with prior health care experience to move up into the health care practitioner role.”

The MEDEX program is unique in that it is designed for people already working in the field. Before being accepted into the program, applicants must complete a rigorous set of prerequisites and have significant health care experience.

“The MEDEX training model creates opportunities for second-career students with prior health care experience, such as community health aides and practitioners, paramedics and emergency medical technicians, military medics, nurses and allied health workers, to move up into the health care practitioner role,” says Riley, adding that nearly half of the physician assistants currently working in Alaska were trained through the MEDEX program at UAA.

After completing the program, students are awarded a bachelor of science degree in health sciences from UAA and a physician assistant certificate from UW. Students are also eligible to sit for the National Certifying Examination for Physician Assistants.

In addition to the bachelor’s program expansion, MEDEX is also launching a master’s program in 2009. Students who have completed the physician assistant training and become certified may choose to complete a master’s degree through the new MEDEX extended master’s in clinical health services degree option.

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Going the Extra Mile to Deliver Workforce Training

Melanie Burtis is an assistant professor at UAF’s Northwest Campus in Nome, but on any given day, you may find her teaching classes in small communities throughout the Bering Strait region.

Since joining the Northwest Campus as the assistant professor of applied business last year, Burtis has traveled to Elim, Golovin, Teller, White Mountain, Shishmaref, Stebbins, Wales and Unalakleet, where she has led intensive, multi-day classes on topics including QuickBooks and grant writing.

The classes are the result of a concerted effort by Northwest Campus to offer more workforce training opportunities within the remote villages of the region.

“When I was hired three years ago, one of our goals was to deliver more courses and better training opportunities to Bering Strait villages on a regular basis,” says Lee Haugen, the Northwest Campus director. “In the past, if employers needed to train an employee, they had to send them out. The result was a lot of travel, but no real improvement of skills.”

“We want to provide more opportunities for individuals to train without traveling out of their village,” she continued. “This contributes to the overall economic stability of the region, and results in a larger labor pool of highly skilled individuals who live and work at home.”

The campus’ efforts are supported in large part by Kawerak, Inc., a nonprofit, Alaska Native corporation that serves 20 tribes in 16 communities throughout the Bering Strait region. Through the partnership, Kawerak pays for the course instructor’s travel and per diem; lodging is usually provided by the local community. Kawerak will also cover the cost of tuition, if a student does not have the means to pay.

“It is costly for students to travel, and is much more cost-efficient for the instructors to come to the villages,” says Dawn Salesky, Kawerak’s vice president of employment and training. “Plus, students can learn in their own communities. We’ve found if students take classes at home, they are more successful.”

In addition to Kawerak, the campus also receives funding support from the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III grant, as well as other grant sources. For example, Burtis applied for and received a $25,000 grant from UAF last year, which she used to purchase 13 notebook computers and software for her village-based QuickBooks and other computer classes.

The classes offered are in direct response to requests made by organizations within each village. Northwest Campus and Kawerak organized a series of educational forums in several villages last year to elicit feedback about what types of courses were needed in each community.

“We asked for ideas on what was needed, and the applied business courses, especially QuickBooks, received the highest responses,” Haugen says. “It’s been terrifically successful. Over the past year, we’ve trained 127 students in eight villages in basic courses like QuickBooks, and we’re anticipating training close to 100 more in the coming year.”

“These courses are definitely filling a big need. There are lots of office jobs in rural Alaska, and many of them use QuickBooks,” Salesky adds.

In addition to last year’s community forums, the campus also relies on feedback from the Northwest Campus advisory council, input from Kawerak’s education and training committee, and direct requests from the community to guide its course offerings.
While the village-based courses are a large part of the campus’ workforce development efforts, the work doesn’t end there. For example, in response to requests from numerous local employers, the campus offered a supervisory skills course in Nome last fall. This spring, the campus will also offer a public speaking course for paraprofessionals in the Bering Straits School District, to ensure they have the skills required by the No Child Left Behind legislation.

As part of its workforce development activities, the campus is also in the process of developing several occupational endorsements, which are programs ranging from nine to 30 credit hours that provide training in a specific field. At the top of the list is an occupational endorsement in office administration.

“Last year, we gathered leaders from many community organizations to brainstorm what they needed, what skills employees are lacking, and what they wanted to see. We’re now developing the occupational endorsement in partnership with those organizations,” Burtis says.

“Our goal was to get them ready for a job, to have basic skills like dressing for work, phone etiquette and basic computer skills. This occupational endorsement is something we’ve wanted for a long time,” Salesky says.

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Northwest Campus continued on p. 5

Spotlight

Melanie Burtis

As long as she can remember, Melanie Burtis wanted to live in Alaska, but it took a job at UAF’s Northwest Campus in Nome to finally bring her here. Burtis, who is originally from Pennsylvania and has also lived in California, Oregon and Idaho, moved to Nome last summer to accept the position of assistant professor of applied business at the Northwest Campus.

For the past year and a half, Burtis has taught business and computer application courses, such as supervisory skills, accounting, Microsoft programs, intro to PCs, QuickBooks and grant writing for community development. While some of her courses take place at the campus in Nome, Burtis also spends a lot of time traveling to the remote villages throughout the region, where she delivers workforce training.

“I work with our local partners and other local organizations in developing workforce training programs. I teach many of my classes by request – local leaders request certain classes for their employees and I do my best to plan and fit them into my schedule,” Burtis says.

“I came on three years ago, and it was my goal to get out into the villages on a regular basis. We hired Melanie to help us do this,” says Lee Haugen, campus director. “We got lucky. We found someone who had the education and wanted to come to Alaska. We have a fantastic faculty in Melanie.”

Burtis, who has a PhD in education from the University of Idaho, and a master’s in education and a bachelor of science from Idaho State University, spent about 15 years in the information technology field prior to joining the faculty of Northwest Campus. She worked as a computer operator, computer programmer, network engineer and IT manager for a variety of industries, ranging from steel to a ski resort, and health care to a regional airline. Burtis also taught at the University of Idaho, Idaho State University and College of Southern Idaho.

The travel and working with the local people are the two things Burtis enjoys most about her work. Outside of her job, Burtis does community presentations, including one on her recent trip to Peru and an upcoming presentation on her travels in India. She also serves on the editorial board for the Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research, and takes the opportunity to volunteer in the community, as she is able.

Burtis also enjoys dog mushing, and is currently working with a team of 13. She says she hopes to participate in some major events, like the Serum Run, in the future. Burtis also likes to travel and continue her own education.

“I take full advantage of my tuition waiver benefit, and have taken enrichment courses such as sign language, framing and matting, mold-making for sculpture, and ceramics,” she says.
Northwest Campus continued from p. 4

In addition to office administration, the campus is also developing small business and leadership/supervisory skills occupational endorsements. While meeting the needs of local employers, Burtis says the occupational endorsements will also benefit employees by upgrading their skills and offering increased opportunities for employment, pay raises and promotions. Burtis says local employers may also offer to pay the tuition for employees wishing to obtain an endorsement.

Everyone involved is excited about the expansion of the Northwest Campus’ workforce development efforts – and the positive effect it is having on the region.

“The employers we are working with represent a wide range of industries like health, natural resources and seafood processing. By helping to train people for jobs within their communities, we are directly impacting these industries,” Haugen says.

“I don’t know what we’d do without the Northwest Campus,” Salesky adds. “We totally support them in their educational role.”

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Northwest Campus (NWC), which was originally established as Northwest Community College in 1976, is now a community campus of UAF and part of the College of Rural and Community Development.

Located in Nome, NWC serves a population of 10,000 people in 15 villages in the Bering Strait region, a 44,000-square-mile area that is approximately the size of Indiana.

NWC and the villages it serves are entirely off the road system, requiring residents to rely primarily on air travel, even for travel between villages. Therefore, attending college on campus with face-to-face instruction is out of the question for most of the region’s residents.

To address the unique needs of its region, NWC utilizes both traditional and distance delivery methods for its courses. In addition to the main campus in Nome, there are also learning centers located in St. Michael, Savoonga, Shishmaref and Unalakleet.

NWC responds to the vocational, academic and community needs within the Bering Strait region. Many courses, programs and degrees are offered in cooperation with regional health and tribal organizations, school districts and corporations.

NWC offers certificates, associate’s degrees, bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees in areas of study including allied health, applied business, education, high latitude range management, human services, information technology, rural development, and social work. NWC and regional partner agencies are also currently working to make Nome an outreach site for the UAA School of Nursing associate degree program.

The campus’ high latitude range management certificate program is unique in the United States. Created in cooperation with employers and area reindeer producers, the program prepares students for natural resource-related jobs or further education in related fields.

In addition to these degree programs, NWC works with area school districts to offer dual-credit courses, giving high school students a preview of college. The campus also partners with local businesses and organizations to offer needed workforce training both in Nome and throughout the region.

Beyond academics, NWC also offers extracurricular activities including Iditarod week festivities, a travel slideshow series, and the International Polar Year Speaker Series.

Photo by Todd Paris

Lee Haugen, Director

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New Program Prepares Dental Hygienists to Enter Workforce

UAF’s Tanana Valley Campus (TVC) launched its new dental hygiene program in January 2008, and the first class of six students is now only months away from entering the workforce. After receiving their degrees in May, the graduates will likely have no trouble finding work, as dental hygiene has been identified as a high-demand career field in Alaska.

For example, according to an article in the October 2004 issue of Alaska Economic Trends, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development predicted a more than 40 percent increase in the need for dental hygienists – one of the highest rates of anticipated need among the occupations tracked by the state.

“The demand for dental hygienists is great in Fairbanks, as well as in the rural communities. It is a strong job market and predicted to remain that way in the future,” says Rena Bower, dental hygiene program coordinator and assistant professor at TVC. “Our program was developed to address the current shortage of dental hygienists.”

TVC’s two-year program, which is accredited by the American Dental Association’s (ADA) Commission on Dental Accreditation, awards graduates with an associate of applied science degree in dental hygiene. It also prepares students to take the ADA National Dental Hygiene Board examination, and the Western Regional Examining Board’s clinical examination and anesthesia examination, which are required to obtain a license and practice in Alaska.

“The students are given the skills and knowledge that allow them to enter the profession of dental hygiene with confidence,” Bower says.

Through the classroom curriculum, students study anatomy, embryology, histology, pathology, pharmacology, periodontics, radiography, dental hygiene techniques, nutrition, current

periodontal therapies, dental health, and oral pain control.

In addition to the classroom, students also put their skills to work through clinical practicums at TVC’s on-site dental hygiene clinic. The clinic, which is open to the general public, allows patients to receive dental hygiene services at a greatly reduced fee. Under the direct supervision of an Alaska-licensed dentist and dental hygienist, the students complete medical history reviews, take x-rays, assess patients’ oral health, perform teeth cleanings, administer therapies like scaling and root planing, apply sealants and fluoride treatments, practice oral pain control, and provide patient education.

“Educating the patient is the biggest part of the dental hygienist’s responsibility. The students provide the patient with information to improve their oral health and their overall health,” Bower says.

In addition to the patient benefits, such as quality dental hygiene care at a reduced cost, the clinic also offers great benefits to the students – and their future employers.

“The clinic is state-of-the-art. We strive to provide the most current products and equipment to the students, so they will be familiar with a broad spectrum of instruments and procedures once they graduate and enter the profession,” Bower says.

“Students get to practice their dental hygiene skills under direct supervision, in a safe and controlled environment,” she adds. “There are several dedicated dentists who provide the supervision, and it is very beneficial for the students to have exposure to different concepts and practice methods when treating patients.”

Bower says the dental community has been very supportive of the new program. In addition to supervising students at the TVC clinic, local practitioners have also welcomed students into their offices for observations, willingly answered questions, and generously donated time and materials to the program.

After the first class graduates in May, TVC will be gearing up for the next class, which will begin in fall 2009. Bower says a new class of six students will be accepted into the dental hygiene program each fall.

In addition to the program at TVC, UAA also offers a dental hygiene program, which graduates approximately 12 students per year.

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TVC to Host Career Tech Expo 2009 in February

UAF’s Tanana Valley Campus (TVC), in partnership with the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District and James T. Hutchison High School, will host Career Tech Expo 2009 on Saturday, February 21, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the James T. Hutchison Institute of Technology at 3750 Geist Road in Fairbanks. The event is free and open to the entire community.

“This is a great event that allows all ages to explore and become aware of the different career opportunities available to them in technical fields,” says Amy Bristor, professional development and community outreach coordinator at TVC.

The expo, which coincides with National Career and Technical Education Month, will highlight career and technical education opportunities available through TVC. Attendees can meet program faculty, as well as local business, industry and labor representatives, and learn about education, training, apprenticeships and jobs in Fairbanks and Interior Alaska. Participants can also win door prizes and enjoy hands-on activities.

“This event brings awareness to our programs and to the connection that we have with industry partners across the state of Alaska,” Bristor says. “It also helps make the connection between our programs and jobs in related fields. For example, participants are able to talk to TVC allied health faculty about their program, and then talk to Fairbanks Memorial Hospital about what they are looking for in possible employees.”

This is the fourth year TVC has organized the expo, which typically draws 500 to 600 attendees.

“This is an opportunity for everyone from middle school students to adults to explore the kinds of career and technical education options that are available to them.”

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▲ Attendees of the Career Tech Expo can learn about training and educational programs at TVC, while also talking with local business, industry and labor representatives about current employment opportunities.

▲ The Career Tech Expo, which coincides with National Career and Technical Education Month, highlights education opportunities available through TVC, including TVC’s allied health programs.
Growing Geology Program Garners Industry Support

In just its fourth year of offering a geology degree, the department of geological sciences at UAA is already proving to be a valuable resource for Alaska students and industry alike – and Alaska companies are returning the favor by showing support of the blossoming program.

The department, which offers a bachelor’s in geological sciences, with a focus in either general geology or environmental geology, is one of only two schools in the state offering a geology degree. UAF also offers a geology degree, although UAA is the only school with an environmental geology track.

“The degree was developed primarily for two reasons. The first was student demand and the second was community demand, due to the large number of geology-related jobs in the state in oil and gas, mining and environmental industries,” says LeeAnn Munk, department chair.

Geology is considered a high-demand job area by the UA statewide system, she adds.

When the program was launched in 2004, there were just 12 students enrolled. By the beginning of fall 2007, there were more than 58 declared geological sciences majors at UAA – a nearly five-fold increase in just three years. With continued student interest, as well as the projected growth of Alaska industries, participation in the program is expected to remain high.

To accommodate the growth of the program, an additional faculty member was recently hired, bringing the total number to five full-time faculty and two part-time, adjunct faculty members. The department is also scheduled to move into the new ConocoPhillips Integrated Science Building when it is completed in fall 2009. In the new facilities, the program will have additional, updated laboratory space for both instruction and research.

Through a curriculum that incorporates Earth materials, geologic Earth history, Earth surface processes, and Earth’s environmental systems, the program prepares students for any Earth science-related job or graduate studies.

Munk says the minerals and mining industry and environmental industry are benefiting most from the program’s students. Graduates also find work with state agencies, such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources, as well as federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“Previously, employers in Alaska had to rely heavily on employees from out of state because they could not find enough appropriately trained geologists in Alaska, particularly those ready for the minerals- and environmental-related jobs,” Munk says.

Industry support of the program is apparent by the financial...
contributions and opportunities provided to students. For example, during the 2007 – 2008 academic year, funds from private donors helped to underwrite a week-long field course for 12 students to visit the Grand Canyon, where they learned about the geologic history of the canyon and hydrology of the Colorado River.

That same year, a generous contribution from TeckCominco allowed UAA geology students to visit the Red Dog Mine, where they observed the mine in operation and learned about the geology of the DeLong Mountains, Brooks Range and the nearby Seward Peninsula.

Private support also helps fund student and faculty research projects, such as UAA student Jessequa Parker’s study of the glacial history of the Matanuska Valley and Munk’s Nome River investigation, which seeks to better understand the sources, means of transportation and fate of metals in the watershed.

“These field courses and research projects are an integral part of the undergraduate education in geology at UAA. They give students hands-on experience that helps prepare them for jobs and graduate school. Many of these experiences are what inspire students to become scientists,” Munk says.

UAA. They give students hands-on experience that helps prepare them for jobs and graduate school. Many of these experiences are what inspire students to become scientists,” Munk says.

Donations are also assisting the department with major equipment acquisitions, including the purchase of six reflected light microscopes, which will be used to help student geologists better understand the composition and origin of various types of ores, minerals and rocks.

“The UAA department of geological sciences is honored by the support of so many generous donors to help enhance the educational offerings provided to UAA students,” Munk says. “Private support helps to make possible the many extras not otherwise available to students at a public institution. This margin of excellence will help to prepare Alaska’s next generation with the skills and experience they need to succeed in Alaska’s workplace.”

Munk says the department plans to expand upon industry support and involvement in the program by developing a community advisory board, comprised of representatives from the oil and mining industries, environmental consulting companies, the USGS and UAA geology alumni.

“The advisory board is designed to help the department develop additional community partnerships, while ensuring that our curriculum is relevant and meaningful to both private and public employers,” she says.

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Students Jumpstart Careers with Tech Prep Programs

Through the efforts of the Alaska Tech Prep Consortium, Alaska high school students are figuring out their career plans, getting a head start on their post-secondary education, and increasing their chances for success with academic performance, graduation and employment. Meanwhile, Alaska’s businesses and industries are starting to see an influx of young, interested potential employees, prepared to enter high-demand career fields.

The Alaska Tech Prep Consortium is a statewide initiative that links secondary and post-secondary career and technical education programs into an integrated program, which allows students to earn college credit for courses they take in high school. Tech Prep programs enable students to transition smoothly from high school to college, avoid duplication of courses, successfully attain post-secondary credentials and enter high-skilled, high-demand, high-wage jobs in Alaska.

“Tech Prep works to improve academic rigor, reduce remediation and connect students’ education to employment through a sequential course of study,” says Diane Maples, statewide Tech Prep coordinator.

The consortium, which is funded by a federal grant through the Carl D. Perkins Act and is administered by UAA, was formed in May 2004 as a result of discussions among Alaska’s vocational/technical education providers (VTEP) to build a statewide system.

“Our goal is to expand Tech Prep programs and the understanding of what Tech Prep is in Alaska, by building dynamic partnerships between schools, business and industry, families and community leaders, and local, state and federal agencies,” Maples says.

The consortium’s work is facilitated by the statewide coordinator, located in Anchorage, and two Tech Prep specialists, located in Petersburg and Fairbanks, who work with other Tech Prep staff at UA campuses around the state. To guide its efforts, the consortium also has a nine-member advisory board comprised of secondary and post-secondary educators, as well as business and industry representatives.

“Our advisory board includes a wide array of business representatives, from hospital directors to construction managers and trainers. They are an integral part of the Tech Prep program,” Maples says.

Alaska Tech Prep programs focus on subjects that are vital to Alaska employers, and seek to prepare students for technical careers in fields with strong employment growth and earnings potential.

In fiscal year 2008, there were more than 24 articulated programs at UA, in areas including accounting, allied health, architecture, automotive, aviation maintenance, business administration, computer and network technology, construction, culinary arts, diesel technology, dietetics and nutrition, drafting, early childhood education, fire and emergency services, fisheries, health care assisting, information technology, logistics operations, medical assisting, refrigeration and heating, and welding.

Last year, more than 3,000 secondary students were enrolled statewide in Tech Prep programs, which included 182 UA courses. An additional 445 post-secondary Tech Prep students were enrolled in UA during 2008.

In the coming year, Maples says the consortium plans to expand the use of educational technology and distance delivery methods; work with secondary, post-secondary, apprenticeship and educational...
institutions to develop K-14 Tech Prep programs; provide equal access to special populations; and expand Tech Prep programs statewide, among other objectives.

As the Tech Prep system matures, the consortium expects to see results similar to those of the Rio Grande Valley Tech Prep system, where Tech Prep students graduated from high school at a rate of 93 percent, compared to 65.1 percent for non-Tech Prep students. Rio Grande Tech Prep students also had a college graduation rate of 26 percent, more than twice the 11 percent college graduation rate for other students.

“Through Tech Prep, many students have the opportunity to develop employability skills that are not always offered at the general high school level. Tech Prep also offers students the opportunity to both eliminate and identify a career pathway of choice, gain the confidence necessary to pursue their goal, and attain the academic skills, abilities and tools needed to be successful in the workplace,” Maples says.

Anthony Kaplanis is just one of many Tech Prep success stories. Kaplanis earned eight computer and networking technology Tech Prep credits in high school at the King Career Center, and is currently pursuing an associate’s degree in telecommunications, electronics and computer technology at UAA. In addition, he works full-time as Alaska Regional Hospital’s diagnostic imaging administrator, where he is in charge of all of the hospital’s digital radiology images.

In addition to these benefits, Tech Prep programs also allow students to save time and money for college. For example, in 2006 – 2007, college students paid $120 per credit, while Tech Prep students paid just $25 – a $95 savings. The consortium also awards scholarships; since 2006, more than $11,000 was awarded to 239 students.

“All of the (Tech Prep) classes that I took transferred to UNC … (saving) over $12,000 for tuition, personal expenses, room and board, books … I can graduate a year sooner and start working in my career,” says Luke Schafer, a former Tech Prep student who is currently enrolled at the University of North Carolina (UNC).
Growing the forest products industry in Alaska is the focus of the Forest Products Project, which is administered by UAF’s School of Natural Resources and Agriculture Sciences.

The Forest Products Project is funded through a U.S. Department of Agriculture special grant for Wood Utilization Research (WUR). Authorized and funded by Congress, WUR is tasked with stimulating innovation and generating new knowledge and technologies, which are necessary to balance the sustainable use of U.S. forest resources with the need to maintain a strong forest products industry.

“Our goal is to promote the wood products industries in a positive way. Many people don’t like to see trees cut down. We promote the facts that there is enough timber, forests are sustainable, and we can harvest in ways that can work for everyone,” says Dr. Valerie Barber, director of the Forest Products Project.

WUR currently supports research and outreach through 13 land grant university partners at 11 centers across the country. At UA, the project is operated through the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at the Palmer Research and Extension Center.

“Originally, the Forest Products Project was focused on Southeast Alaska due to the closure of the pulp and paper mills, and the subsequent collapse of the wood products industry,” Barber says. “The project has shifted focus to promote the forest products industry throughout Alaska.”

The Forest Products Project utilizes a mix of research, education and outreach to promote the forest products industry. In one example, the project was involved in a large, in-grade testing project with research partners Dr. Kevin Curtis at the Ketchikan Wood Technology Center and Dr. Allen Brackley at the USDA Forest Service-Sitka Forest Products Program. The project evaluated the strength of several Alaska species, including cedar, hemlock and spruce, and resulted in new design values for Alaska lumber.

“This new knowledge provides confidence in Alaska lumber as a replacement for imported lumber,” Barber says. “Through the in-grade testing, we were able to add value to Alaska wood.”

Among the project’s new initiatives is a research project, led by Dr. Andy Soria, to discover potential bio-fuel and bio-based products from the chemistry of Alaska trees. Soria, a pioneer in the liquefaction of wood using supercritical fluids, is building a new bio-fuel laboratory at the UAF Palmer Research and Extension Center to develop and test bio-fuels made from low-grade wood, woody biomass, and fire and insect-killed trees. These bio-fuels may offer alternatives to petroleum products and help alleviate the high energy costs experienced across the state.

The project’s education outreach efforts include educational workshops, which range from marketing to log cabin construction. Last May, the project sponsored a log cabin-building workshop in Sitka. Led by two master log builders from Fairbanks, 12 students built a log cabin, which will be used as a handicapped-accessible recreational facility by the U.S. Forest Service.

During the workshop, participants learned each step of the building process, from selecting and harvesting the logs to de-barking and
ANSEP Partners Permanently Endow Chair for Alaska Native Science and Engineering Students

Industry partners and Native corporations have stepped up with the Rasmuson Foundation to create the Herbert P. Schroeder Endowed Chair of the Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP). The endowment, with pledged gifts in excess of $4 million, will ensure stable funding for a full-time, year-round faculty member dedicated to students enrolled in ANSEP.

In December 2007, the Rasmuson Foundation contributed a $2 million challenge grant to fund the creation of the endowed chair position. The Rasmuson Foundation has been a long-time supporter of ANSEP because of its tremendous success in recruiting and retaining Alaska Native science and engineering students.

“ANSEP has made a lasting difference for Alaska Native students,” says Diane Kaplan, president and CEO of the Rasmuson Foundation. “This program has created a supportive learning community, allowing students to excel and graduate at unprecedented levels.”

Alyeska Pipeline was the first to step up to the challenge in September. Seven other partners followed their lead by donating to the chair, exceeding the amount of funds needed for the match. Commitments include Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, ASRC Energy Services, BP, Chevron, CIRI, ConocoPhillips, Rasmuson Foundation, Shell Oil and Udelhoven Oilfield System Services.

“These contributions to the endowed chair ensure that there will be a faculty advocate for Native students on our campus in perpetuity,” says Herb Schroeder, ANSEP founder and executive director. “Together with our partners, we are having a profound and positive impact on the lives of our students, their families, their communities, our partner organizations, and the state that will endure for generations to come.”

The Herbert P. Schroeder Chair of ANSEP will oversee and provide strategic direction for ANSEP and the related partnerships with other universities. The chair will be the key individual identified with ANSEP, responsible for building awareness and support of the program both within Alaska and throughout the United States.
Mat-Su College Joins Johnson Controls’ CareerConnect Program

Textbooks, curriculum and possibly even equipment for the college. Training opportunities for instructors. Tuition assistance and guaranteed jobs for students. And a pipeline of well-qualified potential employees for the company. These are just some of the many benefits stemming from a recent partnership developed between UAA’s Matansuka-Susitna College and Johnson Controls.

After about a year of discussions, the relationship was finalized last September, when Mat-Su College became a participant in Johnson Controls’ CareerConnect program.

“CareerConnect is Johnson Controls’ vehicle to help develop, recruit and retain the top new talent that is coming into the job market,” says Shannon Lippold, the CareerConnect program manager with Johnson Controls. The company, which is a global leader in automotive component manufacturing, building efficiency systems and power solutions, has 140,000 employees in more than 1,300 locations around the world.

“There is a national shortage of skilled technicians in the HVAC (heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and refrigeration) industry. Johnson Controls has taken a proactive approach to recruiting.”

Mat-Su College is now the 14th partner in the CareerConnect program, joining colleges in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, South Carolina, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Georgia, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Canada.

The CareerConnect program, which specifically targets the refrigeration and heating technology program and the computer systems technology program at Mat-Su College, has four primary goals – to enhance student curriculum, promote faculty development, increase community awareness and develop a pipeline of recruits.

Johnson Controls and its partner colleges work toward these goals in a number of ways. For example, to help enhance student curriculum, the company donates learning materials and sometimes equipment to the partner schools. To promote faculty development, instructors at partner colleges have access to discounted training opportunities offered through Johnson Controls. And to develop a pipeline of recruits, the company participates in campus career days and conducts on-site recruiting events.

Through the partnership, students in Mat-Su College’s refrigeration and heating technology program and computer systems technology program are also eligible to apply for Johnson Controls’ Future Hires program. If selected, the students are guaranteed a job with Johnson Controls upon graduation, and also receive $1,500 to put toward their education costs. Up to five Mat-Su College students may be selected each year for the program.

“There is a national shortage of skilled technicians in the HVAC (heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and refrigeration) industry,” says Dan Mielke, assistant professor of refrigeration and heating technology at Mat-Su College. “Johnson Controls has taken a proactive approach to recruiting. They’re connecting with students when they are entering a program and assisting them through the program, with the goal of selecting the best of the students.”

“It gives them the opportunity to look at students ahead of time and see who they would like to have work for them, which results in a more stable workforce,” adds Dennis Clark, director of Mat-Su College. “Companies like Johnson Controls are going to need a lot of employees in the not-too-distant future. This is a way to ensure they have employees ready and willing to go to work, and that those employees have the knowledge they need.”

Recruiting tools like this are important for companies in the HVAC industry, as the total number of HVAC-related, skilled trade positions is expected to grow nearly 10 percent nationwide by the year 2016, resulting in 77,000 new job openings, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics.

To date, two Mat-Su College students have already applied for the Future Hires program, and additional applications are expected early this year. Nationwide, Lippold says Johnson Controls has already hired nearly 30 employees through the Future Hires program, and expects to recruit an additional 60 to 75 students this spring.

While the CareerConnect and Future Hires programs offer multiple benefits to Johnson Controls, students are also reaping the benefits, which include access to the latest technology, learning tools and industry experts, reduced student debt, and the promise of employment once they successfully...
complete their education.

“It’s a real advantage for students
to know they will be part of a
successful company after graduation. It
gives students a focus,” Mielke says.

The win-win partnership is also
good for Mat-Su College.

“Johnson Controls is an excellent
resource for training materials. They
don’t require us to use those materials,
but it’s available. They also donate
equipment, as the need arises and as
equipment is available. They’re very
supportive,” Mielke says.

“The total number of HVAC-related,
skilled trade positions is expected to
grow nearly 10 percent nationwide by
the year 2016, resulting in 77,000 new
job openings.”

“Arrangements like this help keep
our faculty current,” Clark adds. “It
also provides us with support, so we
can give our students hands-on
knowledge of what’s out there right
now.”

Lippold says there were numerous
reasons why a partnership between
Johnson Controls and Mat-Su College
made sense.

“First of all, Mat-Su’s and
University of Alaska’s strategic
direction were well-aligned with the
CareerConnect program,” she says.
“Additionally, some of the strengths
that Mat-Su brought to the table were
its diverse population, strong recruiting
practices with local schools, (and)
multiple degree programs of interest.
Most importantly, we have a strong
need to hire talented people to fill key
roles in Alaska! All of the pieces fit
together nicely.”

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Easy, Effective, Affordable Training for Harbor Personnel

Through a new online training program offered through UAS–Sitka, employers at ports, marinas and harbors now have an easy, effective and affordable way to train their employees. The program, called Career Training for Ports and Marinas, launched its first online course in October 2007. To date, three courses are available and more are in development.

The training program, which is a partnership between UAS, the Pacific Coast Congress of Harbormasters and Port Managers (PCC), Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators, and the Harbour Authority Association of British Columbia, was originally proposed by Ray Majeski, the harbormaster in Sitka and the president of PCC.

“In the past, harbors may have just hired people off the street,” Majeski explains. “But as the years have gone on, the job has become far more technical. A harbor is not simply a place to park a boat. You have to maintain clean water and maintain the facilities. You have to know how to deal with customers and keep computerized records. Now, it’s really big business and it’s more necessary than in the past that harbor personnel are knowledgeable.”

“Ray approached UAS to see if it was possible for the university to do something about the incredible need for training within his industry,” says Mary Purvis, Title III director at UAS.

To address this need, the university requested – and received special permission – from the U.S. Department of Education to use Title III grant funds to develop non-credit, continuing education courses for the new program.

“We worked very closely with Ray and other harbor personnel on what employers need, and then made a plan for meeting those needs,” Purvis says. “It’s a good partnership. We know education, and they know harbors.”

“It works for UAS and it works for us. It’s like a marriage made in heaven,” Majeski adds. “UAS has been a phenomenal group to deal with.”

The program offers a very attractive alternative to employers, who previously had to pay hundreds – if not thousands – of dollars for airfare, food, lodging and tuition for their employees to attend on-site training sessions. Comparatively, UAS’ training courses cost only $150 each and are offered completely online – allowing the student/employees to complete courses whenever and wherever is most convenient.

“Harbors are getting a bargain because they don’t have to send people out. Before, they would have had to pay for airfare, food, a hotel. Now, employees can get trained in a subject for $150,” Majeski says.

Through the program, UAS is currently offering courses in facility safety, which teaches marina employees about the major safety issues they will deal with on a day-to-day basis; oil spill prevention, preparedness and response, which focuses on the nature of oil spills and their consequent environmental and economic impacts; and marine structures and materials, which covers major structures and building materials found in harbors and small ports. The courses take an estimated 15 to 20 hours each to complete, and students are given a three-month period to finish the work.

UAS is currently working with content experts to develop additional courses, including operations and maintenance planning, harbor administration, fire safety, hazardous materials and waste removal, dockside cranes and straddle hoists, electrical and water systems, future developments in harbor operations, and customer service and community relations.
Following completion of the three currently available courses, students are eligible to receive a basic certificate in port, harbor and marina management from the PCC. As additional courses are offered, more advanced PCC recognition certificates will be made available.

“We wanted to create a certificate program for harbor personnel, so they have a vehicle to move up the career ladder. This way, they have documentation to prove they’re educated in this career field. It shows they are knowledgeable about the business they have been hired for. It also gives people the opportunity to move up, and improve themselves economically and educationally,” Majeski says.

“When you have a certificate and walk in the door to apply for a job, you’ll have an edge over the other applicants,” Purvis adds.

To date, approximately 50 people have registered for courses. During the first year, all of the students were based in Alaska – from Dutch Harbor to Kodiak and Sitka to Haines. This year, the program has expanded nationally and even internationally, drawing students from California, Washington, Oregon and British Columbia.

The training program is expected to continue growing and becoming more successful – a fact that brings a deep sense of personal accomplishment to Majeski, who plans to retire this spring.

“I’m on fire for this. This is the legacy I wanted to leave behind for PCC and their personnel,” he says.

“This all happened because of Ray and his involvement with PCC. He was dedicated to finding a way to get training,” Purvis adds. “It’s exciting to be working on something that means so much to people.”

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CITC Partners with UACP to Offer Workforce Training

Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC), a nonprofit subsidiary of Cook Inlet Region, Inc. that provides social, educational and employment services to Alaska Natives and Native Americans living in the Cook Inlet region, wanted to offer training to help job-seekers become more competitive for positions involving customer service and leadership roles.

To accomplish this, CITC partnered with UA Corporate Programs (UACP) to develop and deliver a customized training program at the CITC building in Anchorage.

The first two-week training session, led by an instructor from UAA’s Matanuska-Susitna College, was held in June 2008, and a second session took place in September. Three additional training sessions have been tentatively scheduled for January, March and June of this year.

To date, approximately 29 people have completed the training, which is available to individuals receiving services through the Alaska’s People Career Center at CITC and CITC’s Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF).

According to Richard Perry, career center coordinator at CITC, a majority of the participants have either found work or are seeking additional training or education.

“With this effective level of training and support, I believe we are meeting our goals and are also able to refine our future objectives to better match the dynamic needs of our participants,” Perry says.

The two-week, interactive training, which included presentations, discussions, small-group breakouts, exercises and case scenarios, was specifically developed to meet CITC’s objectives and the anticipated needs and interests of the participants.

Week one of the training focused on customer service, including workplace communications skills, employment readiness, conflict resolution, teamwork, effective meetings, workplace conduct, enhancing a professional image, and performance improvement strategies.

Week two of the training focused on an introduction to management training, and incorporated topics such as supervisory training, effective business writing, dollars and sense, managing projects, understanding organizational culture, and developing leadership skills.

As part of the training, instructor Sara LaForest invited members of the business community to present on appropriate topics. For example, Wells Fargo staff gave a presentation on handling money and fraud prevention, and a Lowe’s representative spoke on managers’ perceptions of hiring needs and priorities. Both organizations also presented on career opportunities in their industries.

“From the beginning, I felt it was important to include key community CITC continued on p. 18
Empowering Disadvantaged Youth to Succeed in Education, Employment

The Youth Job Training Program at UAA's Kachemak Bay Campus (KBC) of Kenai Peninsula College in Homer is having a tremendous impact on disadvantaged youth, as well as benefitting local employers.

“This program allows us to keep young people from falling through the cracks or choosing a less healthy path. It also provides employers with employees who have great work skills,” says Carol Swartz, director of KBC. “We’re very proud of what we do.”

The program, which is funded through a Workforce Investment Act grant from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, serves eligible, low-income youth, ages 16 to 21, who face barriers to employment, such as lack of job experience, disabilities, economic disadvantages and homelessness.

Established in 2002, the program provides a wide range of services designed to prepare youth for success in employment and/or post-secondary education or training. There is a focus on providing participants with the skills necessary for careers in high-growth, high-demand industries.

For participants, the program offers “a safety net for youth trying to catch up. It gives them an equal shot at training and becoming contributing citizens in their local community,” Swartz says.

For employers, the program provides employees “who know they are supposed to be on time and dressed appropriately, who call in if they are sick or late, who have the basic skills and who are able to learn,” says David Lewis, program coordinator.

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CITC continued from p. 17

stakeholders and help participants really understand the lens of the employer. Partner entities may grow in the future,” LaForest says.

While the primary goal of the training was to provide participants with customer service and leadership skills, organizers believe it did much more than that.

“A lot of the people in these trainings come from challenging backgrounds and came into the training with very low self-confidence. This training has gotten folks to focus on what they can do. It gave them the self-confidence to walk into an interview and walk out with the job,” says Bruce Rowe, UACP manager.

The participants’ improved self-confidence was apparent during the graduation ceremonies that were held at the end of each training session.

“Participants each received their certificate of completion and provided a personal presentation on the value of their participation. This is a very touching event, which we plan to build upon,” LaForest says.

To offer continued assistance after completion of the training, CITC initiated an alumni peer group, which offers professional and personal support to participants while they look for employment, transition into their jobs, or work toward achieving other goals.

“A wonderful byproduct of the trainings is that the participants created sincere, positive relationships, which they continue to maintain,” LaForest says. “This support will be invaluable in assisting folks to continue to move forward.”

With one successful project underway, the partnership between CITC and UACP is poised to continue and possibly grow. For example, according to Perry, CITC is now looking to supplement the customer service and leadership training, by partnering with UACP to offer additional training in areas like Microsoft Office.

“We’re working with CITC to develop other training and expand opportunities,” Rowe says. “UACP is the single point of contact for CITC. We help to identify CITC’s needs and opportunities, and then connect them with appropriate resources within university.”

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△ CITC participants celebrate their success during a graduation ceremony held at the completion of a recent customer service and leadership training session.
Youth Job Training continued from p. 18

“Most communities in Alaska have challenges finding young people to move into skilled positions,” adds Swartz. “This project provides employers with local, trained employees. We’ve developed quite the reputation for making sure this project will be able to provide a labor force.”

The program takes a very individualized approach to each youth participant. After youth are accepted into the program, the first step is an in-depth assessment that looks at their current skill sets, interests and needs. After the assessment is complete, program coordinators work with the youth to develop a personalized action plan. Case management services are then provided to ensure youth participants make progress toward their goals.

Depending on the specific needs of each youth, they may receive services including help earning a GED or completing a high school diploma, applying for classes or job training programs, tutoring, résumé writing, interviewing, leadership, teamwork, customer relations and communication skills. Other services may include career guidance, financial planning, mentoring, help finding employment, and opportunities for work experience. All services are provided free of charge.

Funding is also available to help pay for GED costs, tutoring, job training programs or college courses, and job-related expenses like uniforms, glasses, driver’s licenses and health care. Once a week, the program also offers a job club, which features presentations on different professions, led by members of the local business community.

“It’s very individualized. Some of the youth are just figuring out what they want to do. Some are already enrolled in classes. Many are just getting the basic skills,” Swartz says.

After youth attain their job training goals, they may receive follow-up services for one year. Follow-up services provide continued support and job-related funding for youth to continue with their post-secondary education, training and/or employment. At the end of the program, youth receive a basic certificate of completion.

To date, the program has served a total of 105 students. Currently, the program is serving 38 youth, including 21 active participants and 17 in the follow-up phase.

According to a recent review by the Department of Labor, the program is far exceeding expectations. For example, program organizers estimated that 37 percent of the youth participants would attain a degree or certificate. In actuality, 92.3 percent accomplished this goal. Organizers also estimated that 73 percent of participants would enter into employment. That number was actually 100 percent.

“We’ve exceeded all requirements,” Swartz says. “I think we’re successful in contributing to the quality of life in our community.”

The program’s success is dependent on a number of collaborations with other KBC programs, local agencies and businesses, including Homer Job Center/One Stop Center, Independent Living Center – TA LENTS/YES program, Homer High School, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Homer Flex Alternative High School, Alaska Housing Authority, public health and public assistance agencies, and local mental health and general health providers.

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Students in KBC’s Youth Job Training Program participate in the Alaska Host Training Program.
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If you would like more information about articles in this newsletter, please contact UA Statewide Corporate Programs at 1815 Bragaw Street, Suite 102, Anchorage, AK 99508.

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