

## Teaching Notes

### *How Can the University of Alaska Fairbanks Improve Their Retention Rates of Alaska Native Students?*

By Cathy Brooks

#### Learning Objectives

- Identify factors that may impact Alaska Native students from completing their degree
- Identify challenges that universities may have in retaining Alaska Native Students
- Briefly describe the mission and activities of the Rural Student Services program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks
- Explain why retaining Alaska Native students is important
- Identify possible solutions to retaining Alaska Native students for completion of their degree

#### Intended Audience

This case can be used with a gathering of multi-discipline faculty and staff vested in ways they and their institution might improve retention of Alaska Native students. The case might also be used in college courses from disciplines such as education, Alaska Native studies, rural development, economics, and sociology.

Themes: education, education reform, cultural activities and events, retention, student support, student success

#### Implementation

This case can be utilized in several ways. If using the study with faculty and staff, divide the group into small groups of 3-7 people with each group reading, discussing, and reporting on assigned questions. Designate someone within the small group to record the main thoughts and ideas shared during the discussion and have each group share with the entire group after a designated amount of time. If the discussion is taking place in person, large sheets of paper and markers can be used to create the notes used to share with the entire group.

This case may also be used with college students using the small group method above or you may want to divide the students into four small groups and assign each group one of the example students described in the case to discuss, brainstorm, and formulate some specific suggestions that the example student might make to increase their chances for successfully completing their degree. Designate someone within the small group to record the main thoughts and ideas shared during the discussion and have each group share with the entire group after a designated amount of time. If the discussion is taking place in person, large sheets of paper and markers can be used to create the notes used to share with the entire group.

Another possible use for the case would be to assign the participants one of the possible positions listed below and create and present a case for or against the position.

#### Possible positions to take on the issue and ways to implement

1. Retention of Alaska Native students is not really an issue for the University of Alaska Fairbanks.
2. Open enrollment should change, to have strict guidelines for accepting students who are ready for college. Criteria?
3. UAF needs to create mandatory study halls for all first-year students.
4. Developmental students must enroll in a cohort.
5. The only way to prepare students is to send them to a boarding school in Alaska or stay at home and do distance learning?
6. High school students should learn how to be comfortable using tutors before attending college. How implemented?
7. Do more research on why students stay and leave before deciding what is needed.
8. Other ideas?

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why should a university care about retaining Alaska Native students?
2. What challenges may exist for an Alaska Native student to stay in school?
3. What is RSS doing to retain Alaska Native students? What are the strong aspects of the program? Possible gaps and challenges?
4. What are other ways to improve the retention rate of Alaska Native students?
5. The dual-credit cohort model was one idea shared as new path; what are the pros and cons of selecting this pathway?
6. Who is responsible for retaining Alaska Native students at the university?
7. What responsibility does the student have for their own retention?
8. Other important questions you recommend exploring?

#### **Additional Research Suggestions**

Students could do further research on cost estimates for different suggestions; Students could research what other higher institutions serving indigenous students do for retention (including international institutions); Students could explore and research opinions of higher education within various communities and organizations with high Alaska Native populations or employees through interviews or surveys.

#### **Evaluation and Assessment**

Student understanding can be assessed through exams, research papers, essays, discussion question responses, and personal/group performance (if done as a group activity).