

THE CORNERSTONE ON TROTH YEDDHA':
STORIES OF ALASKA NATIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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Abstract

Since the late 19th century, higher education has played three different roles in the Alaska Native rights movement: nurturing Native political leaders towards the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (1891-1971), teaching Alaska Native peoples how to manage their land and resources (1971-1990), and developing Native academic leadership from within universities (1991-2013). The previous studies revealed Alaskan universities' inadequate and discriminatory responses to Alaska Native peoples' educational needs/wants after the 1960s, and further identified a wide range of factors affecting Alaska Native college students' academic achievement and well-being. The historical examination and the literature review collectively delineate Alaska Native peoples' experiences with universities in the past.

In order to understand the status quo of Alaska Native higher education, three Alaska Native college students were interviewed about their college experiences and thoughts on higher education during the spring of 2019. All three students mentioned the benefit of having an Indigenous community on campus, and giving back as a reason to pursue postsecondary education. Each student also had a unique perspective that the other students did not share, which included the importance of Alaska Native language courses for cultural well-being, place identity crisis caused by the relocation from a home village to an urban campus, and the prejudice against the services Alaska Native college students receive. These findings can be used as a starting point for a discussion on how to improve higher education for future generations of Alaska Native peoples.

As the very persons experiencing the long-standing effect of colonization, Alaska Native college students have a strong power to transform higher education. Hearing their stories is the key to achieving multicultural higher education and creating an equitable society in Alaska.

Table of Contents

Abstract..... i

Table of Contents iii

List of Figures..... v

List of Tables..... v

List of Appendices..... vi

List of Abbreviations vii

Acknowledgement..... viii

Chapter 1 Introduction..... 1

Chapter 2 History of Higher Education and Alaska Native Peoples..... 5

 2.1 Introduction: Education in Alaska..... 5

 2.2 Political Leadership toward ANCSA (1891-1971)..... 6

 2.3 Inadequate Responses to Educational Needs (1971-1990)..... 14

 2.4 Politics to Academia (1990-2013)..... 18

 2.5 Conclusion: Reclaiming Ownership..... 21

Chapter 3 Research on Alaska Native Higher Education..... 23

 3.1 Purposes and Focus of Literature Review..... 23

 3.2 Educational Policy Analysis..... 25

 3.3 Academic Success Research 28

3.4 Psychological Research.....	34
3.5 Summary of the Literature Review	36
Chapter 4 Alaska Native College Student Voices.....	38
4.1 Needs for Hearing Their Voices.....	38
4.2 Aims and Research Questions.....	39
4.3 Methodology	39
4.3.1 Student Voice.....	39
4.3.2 Decolonizing Methodologies	41
4.3.3 Collective Case Study	42
4.4 Recruitment and Participants	43
4.5 Method	45
4.6 Voices.....	48
4.6.1 Elitnauryaraq – Pursuing Education.....	48
4.6.2 Community & Keeping My Heart at Home.....	51
4.6.3 Thanks & Keep Up the Good Work.....	55
4.7 Discussion	62
Chapter 5 Conclusion	67
References	72
Appendix	79

List of Figures

Figure 1. Number and Percentage of Alaska Native (AN) Students on UA Campuses	19
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List of Tables

Table 1 The demographic information of project participants	44
Table 2. Three methodologies informing the method.....	47

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Institutional Board Review Exempt Letter	79
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer.....	80
Appendix C: Combined Submission and Informed Consent Form	81

List of Abbreviations

AACSM: Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines

AEC: Atomic Energy Commission

AFN: Alaska Federation of Natives

AI/AN: American Indian/Alaska Native

ANB: Alaska Native Brotherhood

ANCAP: Alaska Native Community Advancement in Psychology program

ANCSA: Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

ANS: Alaska Native Sisterhood

ANSEP: Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program

CCC: Chukchi Community College

CCREE: Division of Community College, Rural Education, and Extension

COPAN: College Orientation Program for Alaska Natives

NSS: Native Student Services

REA: Division of Rural Educational Affairs

RSS: Rural Student Services

SOS: Student Orientation Services

UA: University of Alaska

UAA: University of Alaska Anchorage

UAF: University of Alaska Fairbanks

UAJ: University of Alaska Juneau

UAS: University of Alaska Southeast

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the 21st century, college education has never been more important in the United States, despite not being a part of the national mandatory education. Obtaining a college degree is a ticket to economic and job security, and the correlation between achievement in postsecondary education and future income is well recognized to the public. Yet, people can also choose to take college classes just for fun. Whatever motivations they have, going to college has become the natural next step for U.S. high school graduates in recent years. Alaska Native youths are not an exception for this trend. The number of Alaska Native college students has been rapidly increasing.

The increased enrollment in universities seems beneficial to the society in that more people learn highly specialized knowledge and skills. However, college education also causes and perpetuates social stratification. In order to succeed in a university, students have to save enough money to pay for tuition, become familiar with Western educational expectations, and achieve a high level of college readiness in pre-secondary schools. Therefore, students whose parents have a high socioeconomic status and Western cultural background are quite likely to succeed in renowned universities, which in turn ensures them a position of high socioeconomic status in the future. In this hierarchical system of reproducing educational inequity, Alaska Native students remain one of the most struggling ethnic groups in postsecondary education in the United States today.

The problem of Alaska Native college students' low academic achievement needs to be examined in considerate and critical ways, because it has deep roots in the history of colonization. Alaska Native peoples were colonized and assimilated into the Western monetary society by Russians and Americans since the 18th century. Alaska Native peoples' social structure and

education system, which were based on their own worldviews, were in many cases discouraged or discontinued. Alaska Native peoples were obliged to learn the Western ways in primary and secondary schools. Although they were not forced to receive college education, it was necessary for them to further familiarize themselves with Western ways in college to navigate the Western monetary society. Therefore, college education was not something Alaska Native peoples asked for or hoped to receive. It was originally out of necessity that Alaska Native peoples began pursuing postsecondary degrees. The educational disadvantage that Alaska Native college students currently have is merely a consequence of the colonization and assimilative education imposed on the previous generations.

I am originally from Japan, a country which has one of the most competitive college entrance systems in the world. I remember having to spend more than 15 hours a day studying for college entrance exams in my senior year of high school. It was not until taking educational sociology courses in a university that I realized the negative influence of this meritocratic education system on social equity as well as student well-being. Moreover, after teaching children in actual educational settings, I noticed that this education system allows little time for students to think about who they are and what they want to do. That is why I flew 3,500 miles from Japan to Alaska and studied multicultural education for minority students. In my master's program, I learned about Alaska Native culture, language, and education from Alaska Native faculty and community members. I became friends with some Alaska Native students attending the university as well. My experiences in Japan and Alaska collectively motivated me to write this thesis and contribute to the improvement of higher education for Alaska Native peoples as their ally and friend.¹

¹ Hereafter, I use college education and higher education interchangeably in the thesis. For the purpose of this thesis, both of the terms indicate education in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels as defined in the

This thesis aims to look into the past and present of Alaska Native higher education and discuss possible ways to improve higher education for future generations of Alaska Native peoples. In order to accomplish these aims, this thesis analyses Alaska Native higher education through three different approaches; historical examination, literature review, and participatory research. A chapter is dedicated to each of these approaches, and thus the thesis consists of three main chapters in addition to the introduction and the conclusion chapters.

As the first of the three main chapters, Chapter 2 tells a history of the relationship between higher education and Alaska Native peoples, and provides a critical examination on Alaska Native higher education. Looking back on history helps us to acknowledge the past events and to better understand the current situation. Without knowing what has shaped the current situation, it is difficult to truly understand the problems of Alaska Native higher education discussed in later chapters.

With this historical background in mind, Chapter 3 provides a literature review on the previous academic studies about Alaska Native higher education. Alaska Native higher education has been researched since the 1950s, and there has been an increase in the number and variety of academic studies in this topic over time. The purposes of this literature review are to broaden the understanding of Alaska Native higher education from a research standpoint, as well as to examine the significance and limitations of the previous studies.

Some of the limitations found through the literature review motivated me to start the Alaska Native College Student Voices Project, which is presented in Chapter 4. This project aims to highlight Alaska Native college students' perspectives by amplifying their voices and to gain insight to improve higher education for Alaska Native college students. The project was carefully

International Standard Classification of Education 2011.

designed so that Alaska Native college students could feel comfortable sharing their college experiences and thoughts on higher education. Three Alaska Native college students participated in the project, and their voices are included in the chapter. This project represents my original contribution to the field of Alaska Native higher education.

The thesis is concluded by an interdisciplinary consideration of Alaska Native higher education, a statement of limitations of the current research, and my self-reflection on the research process. I contend that, sharing a story of educational journey, as simple as it may seem, is the key for Alaska Native peoples to mitigate their struggles caused by colonization and transform higher education.

Chapter 2 History of Higher Education and Alaska Native Peoples

2.1 Introduction: Education in Alaska

When did education for Alaska Native peoples start? It is a question that requires broad historical knowledge to answer. Was it 1884 when the Alaska First Organic Act mandated the provision of education for all school-aged children without reference to race? Or, was it 1858 when Saint Innocent built the New Archangel Seminary in Sitka as Alaska's first school? Neither of these turning points, however significant, are an appropriate answers to this question. The fact is, Alaska Native peoples had their own way of educating children long before the arrival of the colonial powers. In Alaska Native peoples' ancestral ways, children acquired subsistence skills by observing adults' techniques and learned about their culture by carefully listening to Elders. Everyday survival was proof enough of their ability. Their educational practices, which were maintained over millennia, have changed drastically through less than 200 years of colonization and Westernization. Alaska Native ways of education were significantly different from Western schooling, as explained in the following excerpt:

Before the erection of school houses and the introduction of professional teachers to whom Western civilization entrusts the minds of their children, education was growing in a village. Education was done in the home with the father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, brother and sister, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends. Education was also given by the weather, the sea, the fish, the animals, and the land. Children at a very early age came to terms with the elements. We did not have to worry about relating education to life, because learning came naturally as a part of living. Education was the process of living from the land, of subsisting, of surviving.²

² Art Davidson and Harold Napoleon, "Education and the Subsistence Way of Life," in *Alaska Native Education: Views from Within*, ed. Ray Barnhardt and Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2010), 241–42.

What replaced the Alaska Native education system was the United States formal and institutionalized education system. After the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, communities slowly, but steadily developed in the northern land. As the local government structure improved, Alaska Native peoples started going to elementary school, middle school, and eventually, high school. They were segregated, and many Alaska Native children had to leave their homes to attend boarding high schools in the Lower 48 states. In the boarding schools, they were forced to assimilate into Western culture oftentimes through physical punishment. While this assimilative education had negative impacts on their individual cultural identities, it also gave them an ability to navigate in Western society.

Universities are the highest-level institutions on the educational pathway. For Alaska Native peoples, universities were entirely foreign. Nevertheless, some of them decided to go to college and obtain a degree. This chapter examines who among Alaska Native peoples attended college and for what purpose, as well as how this trend has changed over time. Rather than focus on a specific time period, this chapter tells a brief history of the relationship between Alaska Native peoples and higher education from its origins in the late 19th century to the present day.

2.2 Political Leadership toward ANCSA (1891-1971)

The first Alaska Native to enroll and complete a college program was Edward Marsden, a Tsimshian man.³ He was born in Metlakatla, British Columbia in 1869. Metlakatla was established by William Duncan, an Anglican missionary, as a utopian community for Tsimshian people. After Duncan split with the Church of England and created his own nondenominational church, he and the Tsimshian people, including teenaged Marsden, moved about 70 miles from Metlakatla to

³ William Beattie, *Marsden of Alaska: A Modern Indian Minister, Missionary, Musician, Engineer, Pilot, Boat Builder, and Church Builder* (New York: Vantage Press, 1955), 12.

Annette Island in the territory of Alaska. They named this new home “New Metlakatla”.

Duncan tutored Marsden throughout his childhood, and Marsden hoped to obtain more education. So, he sent a letter to Sheldon Jackson, Commissioner of Education in Alaska. Jackson let him study at the Sheldon Jackson Institute, a boarding school in Sitka. Seeing his talent, Jackson arranged for Marsden to attend the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, an assimilative Indian boarding school founded by Captain Richard Henry Pratt. Then, he enrolled in the Marietta College in Ohio in 1891 and graduated in 1895.⁴ He also attended the Lane Theological Seminary in Ohio and graduated in 1898. After that, he came back to Southeast Alaska and served as a minister and community leader. Like Marsden, other Alaska Native college graduates in the early 20th century tended to become familiar with Western culture and academic concepts in boarding schools and then went to college in the Lower 48 states.

In 1915, Territorial Judge James Wickersham introduced a bill to establish the first higher education institution in Alaska. The college’s focus was on agriculture and mining, and the institution was aptly named the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines (AACSM). On the Fourth of July 1915, longtime college advocate Wickersham excitedly placed the college cornerstone on a vacant lot of land in Fairbanks to much community fanfare. AACSM was legislatively established in 1917 and was opened to students in 1922.⁵ It was later renamed the University of Alaska (UA) in 1935. To Alaska Native peoples, this meant that they could obtain college degrees without leaving their homeland. While some Alaska Native peoples preferred to get a college education near home, others still chose to attend college in the Lower 48.⁶

⁴ Beattie, 36–68.

⁵ Terrence Cole, *The Cornerstone on College Hill: An Illustrated History of the University of Alaska Fairbanks* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1994), 3–10.

⁶ Wayne Jones and Ida Greiner, “Alaska Native Graduates of the University of Alaska” (Fairbanks: University of Alaska, 1976); John Eichman, “Who’s Who in Alaska 1895-1967” (n.p., 1967).

It was around this time that the problems of Alaska Native rights came under the spotlight. Only two days after Wickersham laid the cornerstone, he attended a meeting with six Athabascan leaders from the Tanana river basin. In the meeting, the government officials explained that the Alaska Railroad construction would make it difficult for Alaska Native peoples to keep land titles, and Wickersham suggested that they should choose either Native allotments or reservations. The chiefs did not accept these options, because neither was sufficient to continue their subsistence traditions. After discussing other concerns, such as medical assistance and education, the Tanana Chiefs demanded to be informed about future actions affecting their subsistence life. This was a pivotal moment in that Alaska Native peoples took a clear position on the land issues that had never been discussed officially since the initial colonization and the purchase of Alaska.⁷ From then on, Alaska Native leaders all across Alaska, the majority of whom were college-educated, began a series of movements to tackle the problems of Alaska Native land titles and human rights.

In Southeast Alaska, the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) was formed by Tlingit and Tsimshian people in 1912 to win citizenship status for Alaska Native peoples.⁸ In 1915, the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) was formed for the same purpose. William Paul, a Tlingit man, was an important member of ANB. Paul was born in Tongass in 1885. After studying at the Sheldon Jackson Institute and the Carlisle Indian School, he attended the Banks Business College, the Whitworth College, and the LaSalle University in the Lower 48. In 1920, he came back to Alaska with a law degree, became the first Alaska Native attorney, and joined the ANB. He defended Alaska Native peoples in court cases related to the 1887 Dawes Act, which stipulated that citizenship was to be granted for Alaska Natives “who adopted the habits of civilization.” After

⁷ William Schneider, *The Tanana Chiefs: Native Rights and Western Law* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2018).

⁸ Michael Jennings, *Alaska Native Political Leadership and Higher Education: One University, Two Universes* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 54–56.

the 1924 Citizenship Act assured citizenship for all Alaska Native peoples, Paul immediately ran in the election for the Territorial House of Representatives seat in Ketchikan. Because the majority of Ketchikan Alaska Natives did not read English prior to World War II, he gave them a cardboard cutout that would cover all but Paul's name when placed on the ballot. That is how he became the first Alaska Native legislator in 1924.⁹ Procuring a Native legislator was the first big win for ANB and ANS in their early years of activism during the Alaska Native rights movement.

During the 1920s, Paul focused his political efforts on Alaska's segregated school system. In 1921, Paul nearly succeeded in integrating Native and non-Native schools in Wrangell by forcibly closing the Native school. In 1929, he defended two mixed-blood Alaska Native girls who were expelled from the Ketchikan Public School in court. He won the suit, and the court reaffirmed that mixed-blood Alaska Natives were allowed to attend any schools. During the 1930s, ANB and ANS established the Tlingit Haida Central Council. In 1936, the two groups filed a lawsuit against the federal government over timber sales within the Tongass National Forest with the help of Paul's legal knowledge.¹⁰

During the 1940s, there was another movement in anti-discrimination policy against Alaska Natives. Earnest Gruening was appointed as territorial governor of Alaska in 1939. When he came to Alaska, he was shocked at the "No Natives Allowed" signs on the streets. He introduced an anti-discriminatory bill in 1943, which failed to pass. Gruening, who was also fighting against the fishing industry's bloc voting, increased the number of legislature seats and asked ANB to pick some Alaska Natives for the following election. As a result, Frank Peratrovich of Klawock and Andrew Hope of Sitka became legislators. After multiple instances of Alaska Native

⁹ Stephen Haycox, "William Paul, Sr. and the Alaska Voters' Literacy Act of 1925," *Alaska History* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 17-38.

¹⁰ Terrence Cole, "Jim Crow in Alaska: The Passage of the Alaska Equal Rights Act of 1945," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1992): 434, <https://doi.org/10.2307/970301>.

discrimination in Alaska including the arrest of an Alaska Native girl, Alberta Schenk, who sat in the non-Native Dream Theater section in Nome and the discrimination against Alaska Native peoples by the United States Army during World War II, the anti-discriminatory bill hearing was finally held in 1945. During the hearing, several white Alaskans voiced their generally racist opinions about the bill. After all of the racist speeches, a Tlingit woman named Elizabeth Peratrovich rose to give the final speech of the day. She was a graduate from the Ketchikan High School who later studied at the Bellingham Normal School in Washington and eventually married Roy Peratrovich, the then president of ANB.¹¹ In this hearing, she gave an eloquent and moving speech about how it felt to be turned away from a place of business and denied housing accommodations in certain areas of Juneau. She asked those who argued that the bill would not eliminate discrimination, “Do your laws against larceny and even murder prevent those crimes?” Responding to the territorial senator Allen Shattuck saying "Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites, with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?," she said “I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with five thousand years of recorded civilization behind them, of our Bill of Rights.”¹² She got a big applause from the galleries and Senators, and consequently, the bill was passed.

Years later and far away from the political scene in Juneau, a terrifying project was underway. Edward Teller, the Father of the H-bomb, proposed an experiment to carve an instant harbor at Cape Thompson in northwest Alaska in 1958. This plan, named Project Chariot, was a part of the study for the peaceful use of atomic bombs. It was funded by many investors and

¹¹ Annie Boochever, *Fighting in Velvet Gloves: Alaska Civil Rights Hero Elizabeth Peratrovich* (Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press, 2019), 19. Elizabeth and Roy both enrolled at the Bellingham Normal School for only one quarter due to the Great Depression, and got married just after leaving the university.

¹² Boochever, 56.

politicians, including the UA president William Wood. The United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) explained to Iñupiaq residents of Point Hope that the experiment would not have any negative effects on humans and animals nearby, which later turned out to be a lie. Iñupiaq people, as well as some brave scientists, opposed the project and attempted to cancel it. Howard Rock, a 50-year-old Iñupiaq man, happened to be in the village of Point Hope at the time of the proposed project. After attending the White Mountain Vocational School near Nome, Rock apprenticed with an artist in Oregon and studied art at the University of Washington. After suffering from alcoholism in Seattle's Skid Row, he returned to his home for mental rest in the spring of 1961. The Point Hope Village Council asked Rock to write a protest letter to the Secretary of the Interior regarding Project Chariot, because he was "the only one who could write letters pretty well."¹³ In the letter, he pointed out that it was illegal for AEC to use the Iñupiaq people's land. Also, the Iñupiaq people asked him to start a newspaper to share with the public what was happening in the North Slope. In 1962, he started *Tundra Times* without any previous journalism experience. A passionate editor of *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* Tom Snapp assisted Rock in editing and publishing the newspaper.¹⁴ His letter to the secretary and articles on *Tundra Times* greatly contributed to the cancellation of Project Chariot.

Tundra Times had another impact beneficial to Alaska Native peoples. By 1964, a total of seven Alaska Native organizations were formed in response to Alaska Native land titles movement.¹⁵ For example, the Tanana Chiefs Conference was formed by interior Athabascans in 1962 to oppose the Rampart Dam project, which unsuccessfully attempted to create a huge dam

¹³ Dan O'Neill, *The Firecracker Boys: H-Bombs, Inupiat Eskimos, and the Roots of the Environmental Movement* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 1994), 215.

¹⁴ O'Neill, 257–59.

¹⁵ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 61–62.

across the Yukon River. Tundra Times enabled geographically isolated Alaska Native organizations to share information with each other. The newspaper inspired Emil Notti, a Koyukon Athabascan and the president of the Cook Inlet Native Association. Notti studied aeronautical and electrical engineering at the Northrop University, and served under several Alaskan governors after he graduated. He and other Alaska Native leaders knew that land titles were a common concern among these organizations and that Alaska Native peoples needed to be united in order to win the land claims. Therefore, in 1966, Notti called a statewide meeting of the seven Native organizations in Anchorage. There, it was decided to create a statewide Alaska Native organization, the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), with a goal of winning the land claims. Notti became the first president of AFN.

The person who placed a final piece of the puzzle to the land claims movement was Willie Hensley, an Iñupiaq man. He studied political science and economics at the George Washington University and then enrolled in a master's program at UA. In the spring semester of 1966, he took a constitutional law class taught by Judge Jay Rabinowitz. In writing a term paper titled "What Rights to Land Have the Alaska Native: the Primary Issue," he realized that Alaska Statehood Act in 1959 would allow the state to claim "vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved" lands including Alaska Native peoples' lands and that the state indeed was in the process of selecting lands to claim.¹⁶ He shared with Alaska Native communities that they were about to lose their lands upon the completion of the state's land selection, and urged Alaska Native leaders to run for the coming election to gain political power. As a result, eight Alaska Natives from rural areas, including Hensley himself, won seats in the state legislature in 1966; seven in the House and one in the Senate. They formed the "Bush Caucus" for bloc voting on Alaska Native issues. While some

¹⁶ Willie Hensley, *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow: A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People* (New York: Picador, 2010), 86–150.

people called them “Brooks Brothers Natives” from their appearance, they called themselves “Ice Brock.”¹⁷ AFN suggested to the Secretary of the Interior that the state’s land selection should be suspended or “frozen” until Native land claims were settled. Avoiding the strong opposition by the new governor Walter “Wally” Hickel with the Bush Caucus’s political power, Alaska Native peoples successfully maintained the “land freeze” situation until December of 1971. During this period, the large number of bills were drafted and amended in order to settle the Alaska Native land claims. The bill eventually selected by Native and non-Native leadership was to divide the state into 12 regions, create for-profit corporations owned by Alaska Native peoples in each region, and let the corporations manage the claimed land and protect shareholders' interests. This bill approved Alaska Native peoples’ claim for 44 million acres of land and compensated the Native corporations 962.5 million dollars for the land they did not get. Therefore, after lengthy negotiation between Alaska Native peoples and state/federal officials, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was finally passed on December 18, 1971.¹⁸

The pathway to Alaska Native human rights and land claims settlement shows that some of the college-educated Alaska Native people, such as William Paul, Elizabeth Peratrovich, Howard Rock, Emil Notti, and Willie Hensley, made great contributions to the Alaska Native rights movement and the passage of ANCSA. College education, as well as boarding school education, gave these leaders high English proficiency, academic knowledge, and familiarity with Western politics.¹⁹ Education enabled them to become qualified leaders of Alaska Native

¹⁷ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 63.

¹⁸ Hensley, *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow*, 159–60.

¹⁹ It should be noted that there are Alaska Native leaders who did not receive college education that directly or indirectly contributed to the Alaska Native rights movement and the passage of ANCSA. For example, the majority of the Ice Brock members were not college educated, and most of the Elders who led Alaska Native communities did not have a college degree either. What is emphasized in this section is that challenges against Western people/society were not possible without some Alaska Native leaders' knowledge and skills gained through secondary and post-secondary education.

communities in the Westernized and rapidly changing society. Many other Alaska Native college graduates received education degrees, became schoolteachers in Alaska, and taught Alaska Native students.²⁰ Therefore, whether it was in politics or education, most college-educated Alaska Native people helped other Alaska Native peoples' adaptation and resilience to the new Western society in Alaska. The passage of ANCSA was the culmination of their efforts.

2.3 Inadequate Responses to Educational Needs (1971-1990)

After the passage of ANCSA, AFN lost its original purpose and was no longer united. AFN needed to redefine its new role. Alaska Native leaders recognized that proper management of the land and resources transferred under ANCSA would be necessary and that higher education would provide future generations of Alaska Natives with skills required for the management. Specifically, leaders of the Native corporations recognized that vocational skills, natural resource management, financial management, education, Native cultures, corporations, and general business administration were important topics for Alaska Native peoples to learn in college.²¹ Even those in small remote villages recognized the importance of postsecondary education in the monetary society they now found themselves in.²² So, AFN decided to assist the implementation of ANCSA by improving higher education. The Bush Caucus agreed with this new objective.

UA noticed the urgent needs of Alaska Native college students in advance of ANCSA. However, the urban campuses of UA realized that the existing higher education system has too many barriers for Alaska Native peoples. To help Alaska Native freshmen become more self-

²⁰ Jones and Greiner, "Alaska Native Graduates at UA"; Eichman, "Who's Who in Alaska."

²¹ Alaska Native Foundation, *Higher and Adult Education Needs in Rural Alaska: A Report* (Anchorage: Alaska Native Foundation, 1974), 12–22.

²² Curt Madison and Yvonne Yarber, *Henry Beatus Sr.* (North Vancouver, BC: Hancock House Publishers Ltd., 1980), 28–29.

confident and adaptive to university culture, the university implemented a six-week summer program called the College Orientation Program for Alaska Natives (COPAN) in Fairbanks from 1963 to 1967.²³ Shortly after COPAN, the 1969 House Concurrent Resolution No. 56 ordered the university to develop a plan to support Alaska Native college students.²⁴ To respond to this resolution, the university formed Student Orientation Services (SOS) in Fairbanks in 1970. SOS utilized the knowledge accumulated during COPAN to assist Alaska Native students at UA. Data shows that not only the number of enrolled students, but also their academic success rate greatly increased in the 1970s thanks to SOS.²⁵

In 1975, UA President Robert Hiatt initiated a plan to reorganize the university into three separately accredited universities under one UA system. Each of the urban UA campuses were renamed University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), and University of Alaska Juneau (UAJ), which was later renamed again as University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). Thus, these universities began making efforts to support Alaska Native college students separately. UAF had already started programs in the 1960s and early 1970s and overhauled SOS, which was later renamed Rural Student Services (RSS) in 1982. UAF also established a series of Alaska Native related organizations in the 1970s. In 1981, “Alaska Native Programs” was launched, which was the consolidation of six Native-related programs: Alaska Native Art Center, Alaska Native Language Program, Alaska Native Studies, Festival of Native Arts, Cross-Cultural Communication, Special Services, and Student Development Program. At UAJ, the Committee for Alaska Native Education, which was formed by a part-time volunteer

²³ Lee Salisbury, *College Orientation Program for Alaskan Natives COPAN: Education for Survival*, ISEGR Report: No. 27 (College, Alaska: Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, University of Alaska, 1971), III–IV.

²⁴ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 82.

²⁵ Judith Kleinfeld, Robert Travis, and Velma Hubbard, *Native College Success in the Seventies: Trends at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks* (Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska, 1982), 5.

English lecturer and external Native organizations in 1981, began small programs to help Alaska Native students succeed academically.²⁶ Additionally, in 1984, Diann Morrison, a Haida woman, proposed a new Alaska Native Studies program at UAJ as a part of her Master of Public Administration program. She concluded her proposal by saying “The University of Alaska, Juneau has waited long enough to put forth a policy regarding Alaska Natives. The time is now.”²⁷ At UAA, Elaine Abraham, a Tlingit woman, initiated Native Student Services (NSS) in 1987 and took care of students like extended family members.²⁸ She also started several Alaska Native student organizations and let students take initiatives in Alaska Native issues on campus. The common feature of these UA programs is that they were developed and implemented almost entirely by Alaska Native peoples themselves. Some non-Native administrators, faculty, and staff were strongly opposed to these programs and expressed their discriminatory opinions about Alaska Native peoples. The university administrations were often reluctant to allocate any part of the budget for these programs, and Alaska Native peoples had to constantly claim the usefulness of the programs.²⁹

On the other hand, community colleges in rural areas struggled with the problem of autonomy. Not understanding what types of courses were needed by rural Alaska Native peoples, the UA system provided heavily academic-oriented courses and hobby classes. When Alaska Native peoples complained about it, however, UA hardly changed the course provision.³⁰ Knowing the importance of decentralization and self-determination of rural education, the Bush Caucus actively attempted to create policy-level positions for rural education on community campuses

²⁶ Joan Wauters, “Design of a Developmental Communication Skills Program for Southeast Alaska Native College Students” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1982), 152–65.

²⁷ Wauters, 24.

²⁸ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 138–41.

²⁹ Jennings, 131–32.

³⁰ Fred Bigjim, *We Talk: You Yawn: A Discourse on Education in Alaska* (Portland, OR: Press-22, 1985), 15–20.

within the UA system. The pressure from the Bush Caucus and other Native organizations forced UA President Hiatt to create the Division of Rural Educational Affairs (REA) in 1975. Elaine Abraham was appointed as the vice president for REA. She had a substantive background in education, administration, and language revitalization. However, because she did not have a PhD, some non-Native people including faculty, staff, and President Hiatt himself were skeptical about her qualifications.³¹ As a result, the president almost fired her and ceased providing financial support for REA thereafter. Just two years later, the Community College, Rural Education, and Extension (CCREE) division was created to replace REA. To put it simply, REA was reduced into one part of the dean-level division.

Another incident happened at the Chukchi Community College (CCC) in 1980. The Alaska Native senator from this region, Frank Furgeson, was very frustrated about the centralized rural education system and the irresponsible university. He wanted to operate CCC under the Northwest Arctic Borough School District rather than the UA system. So, he removed CCC from the UA budget request list and attempted to transfer the appropriated budget to the district. Even though his act was not illegal, the university forcibly stopped the transfer and CCC ended up having no budget for the following year. Consequently, CCC was closed for one year. This incident exacerbated the conflict between rural Alaska Native peoples and UA. Under such a bad situation, however, UA President Donald O'Dowd set out another centralizing reorganization plan in 1986, in which all the community colleges would be merged into the three main universities. This centralization was planned to save money, in response to the large state budget cut. This plan was highly controversial among both Natives and non-Natives.³² Of course, Alaska Native peoples

³¹ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 97–98.

³² Will Jacobs, *Becoming UAA, 1954-2014: The Origins & Development of the University of Alaska Anchorage* (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage, 2014), 108–10.

were strongly against the plan. The community colleges themselves also opposed the plan to maintain their autonomy.³³ Even UAF Chancellor Patrick O'Rourke opposed the reorganization. Nevertheless, the UA president never changed his mind. Eventually, the plan was carried out in 1987, and each community college was merged into either UAF, UAA, or UAS. This reorganization symbolizes UA's inadequate and improper response to Alaska Native peoples' educational needs after the passage of ANCSA, as well as non-Natives' discriminatory attitude towards Alaska Native peoples within UA during this period.

2.4 Politics to Academia (1990-2013)

Although they had strong political power in the 1970s and early 1980s, why couldn't the Bush Caucus stop the reorganization with their political powers in 1987? One possible reason is that the main members of the Bush Caucus left the legislature and the UA Board of Regents. However, there might have been another possible reason for it. When asked about Alaska Native leaders' little opposition to the restructuring in 1980s, Willie Hensley stated,

Initially we believed we could convince the university to deliver useful education programs out in the regions, job skills, business skills, and things that would be of use to the regional and village corporations. To help us get up and running after ANCSA. As time passed, we discovered that the university was not going to provide those types of courses, so we shifted our focus to elementary and secondary education. Besides, other issues were demanding the time and energy of the Native leadership.³⁴

Hensley's account confirms that political power of Alaska Native leaders significantly diminished in the area of higher education after the restructuring in 1987. However, it does not

³³ Community College Coalition of Alaska, *Community College Coalition of Alaska Plan to Preserve and Strengthen Community Colleges* (Anchorage: Community College Coalition of Alaska, 1987).

³⁴ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 123.

mean that Alaska Native peoples gave up seeking better higher education. A new type of Alaska Native leaders appeared within the university system, and they have replaced the leadership role in Alaska Native higher education in the 21st century.

After the restructuring in 1987, the university structure has been relatively stable. Under this new education system, the number of Alaska Native college students have been rapidly increasing, especially on urban campuses (Figure 1).³⁵ As resource exploitation businesses in Alaska have declined, Alaska Native peoples’ need for vocational training has decreased. Instead, more Alaska Native students enroll in academic programs to get a bachelor’s degree today. Especially, STEM programs attract the large number of Alaska Native students. At UAF, Master of Arts in Rural Development and PhD in Indigenous Studies programs were started in the 2000s, which encouraged Alaska Native peoples to get graduate degrees to help their own communities. As of 2015, more than 70 Alaska Native peoples had received a doctoral degree in various fields from UAF and other out-of-state universities.³⁶

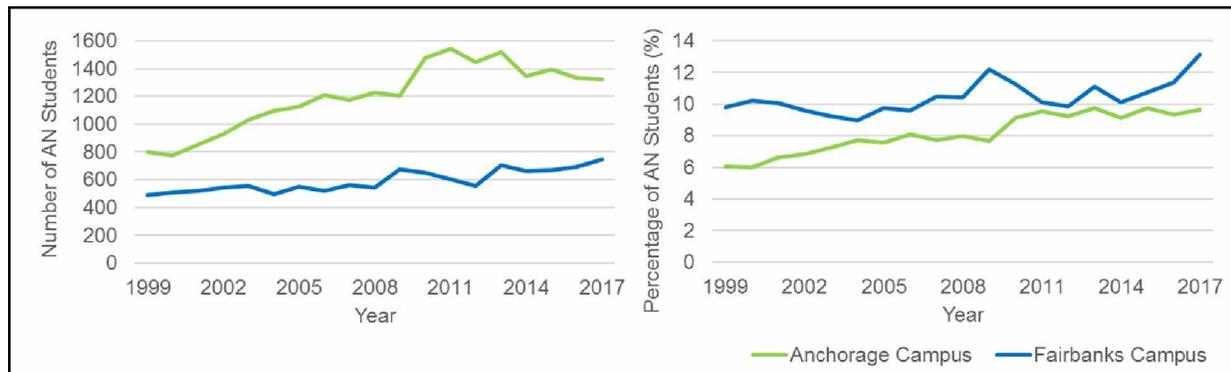


Figure 1. Number and Percentage of Alaska Native (AN) Students on UA Campuses

³⁵ This data represents headcount of Alaska Native college students at the end of fall semester of each academic year. These numbers are from the UAA Reports (<https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/uaa-reports.cshtml>) and UAF PEAR Factbook (<https://www.uaf.edu/pair/factbook/index.php>). The enrollment data for the other UA campuses was not available at this time.

³⁶ Alberta Jones, “Alaska Native Scholars: A Mixed Methods Investigation of Factors Influencing PhD Attainment” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2018), 81–84.

More support programs are now available on campus. For the increasing number of Alaska Native college students. UAA, which had only a few Alaska Native programs in the 1970s and 1980s, established Alaska Native Studies Department, Alaska Native Community Advancement in Psychology (ANCAP) program, and Cama-i Room. UAF and UAS have continued to provide almost all of the Alaska Native programs from the 1980s and further improved them. All three campuses added Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), new dormitory options for Alaska Native students, and culturally responsive teaching training for professors. Although their retention rate has been still lower than other ethnic groups, more Alaska Native students graduate from the universities today compared to the late 20th century. The establishment of these new programs became possible thanks to Alaska Native faculty and staff's efforts, UA's recent anti-discriminatory policy and strategic planning, and financial support from the Native corporations.

It is pointed out that the number of Alaska Native faculty and university administrators is still small.³⁷ These people have been actively working to improve education and research for Alaska Native peoples, and the intercampus collaboration called Alaska Native Studies Council began in 2010. UAA professor Beth *Ginonidoy* Leonard recollected the formative period of the council.

The Alaska Native Studies Council started as an informal gathering of affiliated Alaska Native faculty across the different University of Alaska campuses beginning in the fall of 2011. The University of Alaska has just a handful of Alaska Native faculty, and the goal of organizing monthly teleconferences was to share respective activities, courses, plans, and curriculum development. The monthly teleconferences initiated an exchange of ideas,

³⁷ Olga Skinner and Beth Leonard, “‘A World in Which [Alaska Natives] Make the Important Decisions’: Re-Examining Institutional Discourses and Governance in Higher Education,” in *Handbook of Indigenous Education*, ed. Elizabeth Ann McKinley and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Singapore: Springer, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1839-8_33-1.

including the formation of the Alaska Native Studies Council in late 2011.³⁸

The Alaska Native Studies Council hosted Alaska Native Studies Conference at UAA in 2013, in which more than 300 of Alaska Native and non-Native scholars, students, teachers, policy makers, Elders, and other community members participated and discussed Alaska Native issues. This conference has been held every year since then. So to speak, Alaska Native peoples with postsecondary degrees have taken initiatives within universities and played a new leadership role in Alaska Native communities, taking over the large portion of Alaska Native political leaders' responsibility for higher education. Leonard summarized the role of this emerging leadership.

... UAF and the UA system need consistent, collaborative guidance and oversight from Alaska Native faculty, staff, and students, many of whom provide critical links to Alaska Native communities – communities from which “Indigenous knowledge[s]” is generated. Also, communities must have ownership of the processes and protocols through which Indigenous knowledge is both “documented and disseminated.” The formation of a University of Alaska Statewide Alaska Native Studies Council will fundamentally shape and transform relationships within and outside academia, enhancing recruitment of Alaska Native scholars, increasing opportunities for collaboration and power-sharing with Alaska Native and Indigenous communities, and advancing the validity of Indigenous theory and methods within the academy.³⁹

2.5 Conclusion: Reclaiming Ownership

In 2013, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names officially recognized Troth Yeddha' as the name of the Fairbanks campus site. This name means “Indian Potato ridge” in the Lower Tanana Athabascan language. UAF catalog explains how the traditional Athabascan land ended up becoming a university campus.

³⁸ Beth Leonard et al., eds., *Transforming the University: Alaska Native Studies in the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Two Harbors Press, 2014), 3.

³⁹ Leonard et al., 6.

In 1994, the late Chief Peter John of Minto said Athabascan people long ago would gather on Troth Yeddha' to talk and advise one another. When they learned this place would be used for a university, he said, they decided that the school would carry on a traditional use of this hill — a place for thinking and working together.⁴⁰

Therefore, on the Fourth of July in 1915, Wickersham laid the cornerstone on Troth Yeddha', not a vacant land.

The different roles of college education, which this chapter examined, are intricately tied with the history of Alaska Native peoples' recovery from the colonial experiences. Before 1971, college education produced several qualified Alaska Native leaders who were familiar with Western society and cultures, and they made the land claims settlement possible. After ANCSA passed in 1971, college education became the way for Alaska Native peoples to learn knowledge and skills required to manage their lands and resources properly in the monetary society. The university's response to their educational needs was improper and inadequate, which discouraged the Bush Caucus from spending time on Alaska Native higher education issues. In the 21st century, the number of Alaska Native college students has been increasing, and Alaska Native peoples have been gaining an influential power in academia and making positive changes to Alaska Native communities from within universities. The recognition of Troth Yeddha' and Alaska Native Studies Conference in 2013 well represent that Alaska Native peoples have reclaimed their ownership of not only the land of Fairbanks campus site but also academic research and higher education.

⁴⁰ University of Alaska Fairbanks, "Troth Yeddha'," University of Alaska Fairbanks Catalog 2019-2020, 2018, <https://catalog.uaf.edu/overview/campuses/troth-yeddha/>.

Chapter 3 Research on Alaska Native Higher Education

3.1 Purposes and Focus of Literature Review

Alaska Native higher education has been researched as early as the 1950s, and there has been an increase in the number and variety of academic studies in this topic over time. This chapter examines the previous academic studies in the field of Alaska Native higher education. The purposes of this literature review are to broaden the understanding of Alaska Native higher education from a research standpoint, as well as to examine the significance and limitations of the previous studies. The literature review specifically focuses on research about Alaska Native higher education and excludes research about “American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN)” higher education. Below is an explanation as to why the focus is set so narrowly.

In the early 19th century, all the Indigenous peoples in the American territory were called Indians. When Alaska became a part of the country, Indigenous peoples in Alaska were also called Indians or Natives. However, the geopolitical term “Alaska Native” was coined by Western people in the late 1960s for policymakers to refer to diverse Indigenous peoples in Alaska all at once.⁴¹ This grouping was an oversimplification of geographical and cultural diversity at first. However, the importance of political coalitions has given this term a positive connotation of ethnic pride, making it widely accepted among Indigenous peoples in Alaska.⁴²

After the U.S. Office of Management and Budget officially introduced the ethnic category “AI/AN” in 1975 to refer to all the Indigenous people of North America for the purpose of the national census, this categorization became widely used in politics, by the public, and in

⁴¹ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004, 1–2.

⁴² Jennings, 2.

academia.⁴³ On one hand, the category of AI/AN has been helpful for political and academic coalitions of Indigenous peoples in Alaska and in the Lower 48. On the other hand, this category lumps American Indians in the Lower 48 states and Alaska Native peoples together, who are culturally, geographically, politically, and historically distinct from each other. In other words, this political categorization oversimplifies the significant differences between American Indians and Alaska Native peoples (and among Indigenous peoples in general).

As Maria Reyes pointed out, most major studies on minority college education lumped Alaska Native students with American Indians if there was any reference to Alaska Native at all.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the majority of AI/AN research actually include few Alaska-related citations and few Alaska Native participants. Based on this trend, I decided to exclude studies on AI/AN higher education in the following literature review and focus on studies specifically about Alaska Native higher education. This does not mean that AI/AN higher education research is useless in examining Alaska Native higher education. On the contrary, the results from AI/AN higher education research often correspond to those of Alaska Native higher education research.⁴⁵ However, there are too many studies on AI/AN higher education to review. Therefore, reviewing only Alaska Native higher education research was the best way for me to accomplish the purposes of the literature review.

Academic studies specifically on Alaska Native higher education have been conducted by the state of Alaska, university professors/researchers/staff, Alaska Native corporations, and

⁴³ Office of Management and Budget, "DIRECTIVE NO. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting," May 12, 1977.

⁴⁴ Maria Elena Reyes, "What Does It Take? Successful Alaska Native Students at the University of Alaska Fairbanks," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 2, no. 2 (2000): 141–59, <https://doi.org/10.2190/WBYQ-GU13-59UP-KUBX>.

⁴⁵ Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy et al., *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-Determination*, vol. 37, ASHE Higher Education Report 5 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

graduate students. Most of the studies were conducted by Alaska-based researchers, and the majority of studies from recent years were conducted by Alaska Native scholars. Below, the previous studies on Alaska Native higher education are categorized into three types by the difference of topics: educational policy analysis, academic success research, and psychological research.

3.2 Educational Policy Analysis

While researchers have actively engaged in Alaska Native educational policy research at the pre-college level, few academic studies have been done on educational policies for Alaska Native higher education. The first among this small category of literature is Jacquot Louis's doctoral dissertation from the University of Oregon written in 1973.⁴⁶ This interdisciplinary descriptive study first examined the higher education policies of both the governments, Alaskan universities, and other private entities between 1960 and 1972. Then, the study described Alaska Native college students' typical profile and operations of special institutional services such as SOS, Alaska Student Higher Education Services, and Center for Northern Education in 1970s. Instead of having a clear conclusion, the author included ten recommendations and eighteen suggestions for education in Alaska. Notably, he recommended that more educational studies should be done on Alaska Native higher education and suggested that more opportunities, programs, funding, and support should be created for Alaska Native students.

The next research on Alaska Native higher education policy came decades later and in the form of Michael Jennings' doctoral dissertation at the University of British Columbia in 1994,

⁴⁶ Louis Jacquot, "Alaska Natives and Alaska Higher Education 1960-1972: A Descriptive Study" (Doctoral dissertation, Eugene, University of Oregon, 1973).

which was later published as a book with additional information in 2004.⁴⁷ This study told a comprehensive history of Alaska Native higher education from the 1960s and 1980s, focusing on Alaska Native leaders and the UA system. This study revealed UA's inability and unwillingness to meet the needs of Alaska Native peoples on both urban and rural campuses after the passage of ANCSA in 1971. The interviews with 16 Alaska Native political leaders and educators provided inside perspectives and supported this argument. Jennings used a concept of Indian trade to explain the relationship between UA and Alaska Native peoples. He contended that the very existence of the university depended on its ability to utilize Alaska Native land, resources, and people, which was exemplified by UA's involvement in militaristic experiments on Alaska Native lands and funding secured by utilizing its status as a "Native-serving institution". UA had been taking responsibility for Alaska Native higher education not genuinely but merely in exchange for these benefits, which he thought would explain its discriminatory and reluctant attitude.

Outside of UA, Beverly *Patkotak* Grinage's master's thesis is the first academic study on the history of Iḷisaġvik College in Utqiāġvik, which is the only accredited tribal college in Alaska.⁴⁸ Illustrated by interviews with seven key persons, this thesis explained the historical development of higher education institutions such as Iñupiat University of the Arctic, North Slope Higher Education Center, Arctic Sivunmun Iḷisaġvik College, Mayor's Workforce Development Program, and Iḷisaġvik College. Grinage argued that the establishment of the tribal college was accomplished in Iñupiaq people's pursuit of self-determination on politics and education. As the second president of Iḷisaġvik College, she also described how the school applies Iñupiaq values to

⁴⁷ Jennings, *One University, Two Universes*, 2004; Michael Jennings, "One University, Two Universes: The Emergence of Alaska Native Political Leadership and the Provision of Higher Education, 1972-85" (Doctoral dissertation, British Columbia, Canada, University of British Columbia, 1994).

⁴⁸ Beverly Patkotak Grinage, "Inupiat Self-Determination through Higher Education" (Master's thesis, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2008).

all aspects of educational policies and its student support strategies.

Two recent studies focused on the Alaska Native peoples silenced in the higher education system. Jessica Perea, an Athabascan professor at the University of California Davis, pointed out the scarcity of Alaska Native scholars within Alaskan universities.⁴⁹ Her research adopted LeAnne Howe's dialogic methodology called a tribalogy, which challenges the historic and contemporary erasures of Indigenous voices and presence.⁵⁰ By making a list of Alaska Natives who received doctoral degrees, she claimed Alaska Native presence and agency in academia. Similarly, Olga Skinner, a Yup'ik scholar working for RSS and studying in the Indigenous Studies PhD program, and Beth Leonard, an Athabascan professor at UAA, criticized the limited Alaska Native control on higher education despite faculty and student activism.⁵¹ They specifically criticized that only two Alaska Native persons had been hired for UAF executive-level positions and that only one Alaska Native had been hired for UA statewide executive-level positions.⁵² This study keenly investigated the contradiction between limited Native governance in UA system and UA's mission statement about serving diverse people of the north.

These studies generally pointed to the challenge that most of Alaskan universities have never had sufficient educational policies for their Alaska Native students. The studies specifically called into question UA's institutional ability to respond to Alaska Natives' needs and requests. It is clearly contrasted with the Iñupiaq College, which incorporated Iñupiaq values and became an

⁴⁹ Jessica Perea, "A Tribalogy of Alaska Native Presence in Academia," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 3 (January 1, 2013): 3–28, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.37.3.0374807408725666>.

⁵⁰ LeAnne Howe, "Tribalogy: The Power of Native Stories," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, September 1, 1999, 117–26.

⁵¹ Skinner and Leonard, "Re-Examining Institutional Discourses and Governance in Higher Education."

⁵² Bernice Joseph (Koyukon Athabascan) was appointed executive dean of the College of Rural Alaska (CRA) at UAF in 2001, and then to the newly created position, vice chancellor for Rural, Community, and Alaska Native Education at UAF in 2006. Evon Peter (Gwich'in) succeeded this vice chancellor post in 2014. Elaine Ramos (Tlingit) was appointed to the vice president of Rural Educational Affairs (REA) position within the statewide UA system.

impetus to Inupiat self-determination. As suggested by Louis, more studies and discussions on Alaska Native higher education policies are needed, since any comprehensive studies on Alaska Native higher education policy have not been conducted over the past two decades.

3.3 Academic Success Research

Statistics generally show lower academic performance and retention rate of Alaska Native college students compared to other ethnic groups both on the urban campuses of the UA system and all over the state.⁵³ Below is a list of nine studies that use qualitative data along with quantitative data to elucidate why Alaska Native college students have low attrition and graduation rate.

The research on Alaska Native college students' academic success began as early as the 1950s. A research team led by Charles Ray, a professor of education at UA, conducted extensive research on education for Alaska Natives and published a three-hundred-page report in 1959.⁵⁴ One entire chapter of the report was dedicated to higher education. This study analyzed the record of 77 Alaska Native students who had attended UA before the 1957-58 academic year. Of this number, only 10 had graduated, 44 had dropped out, and 23 were still enrolled at the time of this study. Through the analysis with more detailed information, they found that quite a few of the 77 students struggled with English and math, that majority of the 44 dropped-out students could not get an average grade point of C or higher and left the school in their freshman year, and that "full-

⁵³ Kleinfeld, Travis, and Hubbard, *Native College Success in the Seventies*; G. Williamson McDiarmid and Alexandra Hill, "Alignment of Alaska's Educational Programs from Pre-School through Graduate Study: A First Look," Working Paper (Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, January 2010), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/4293>; University of Alaska Anchorage, "UAA Performance Report 2017" (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage, 2017), https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/_documents/PERFORMANCE_17.pdf.

⁵⁴ Charles Ray, "Post-High School Education for Alaskan Native Youths," in *A Program of Education for Alaskan Natives: A Research Report* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska, 1959), 184–206.

blooded” students were less likely to get a satisfactory grade point and graduate. Based on these results, this study concluded that better academic preparation in pre-college level and social adjustment to college life would improve their academic performance and graduation rate.

Institute of Social, Economic, and Government Research at UA, which was later renamed as Institute of Social and Economic Research in 1977, conducted similar quantitative research. Defining academic success as earning more than 7.5 credits per semester with a 2.0 grade point or higher, they published three research reports in 1974, 1978, and 1982. In the first study, they collected data from UAF, Alaska Methodist University, and Sheldon Jackson College during three sample academic years, 1963-64, 1968-69, and 1971-72.⁵⁵ They found the overall increase of Alaska Natives’ college enrollment (15%→25%) and academic success rates (31%→41%) during this period. Specifically, the number of three-quarters or full-blooded students born and raised in Native villages and students with low high school grades and ACT scores had increased. Also, surprisingly, the success rate of students with low ACT scores was significantly improved. They suggest these improvements were because of programs like COPAN, Upward Bound, Talent Search, and developmental courses offered by SOS. In the second study, they conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 Alaska Native and 42 non-Native students who entered UAF in the 1974-75 academic year, in conjunction with the interviews with SOS staff and professors and the analysis of student records.⁵⁶ They found the correlation of academic success with AST score and social cohesiveness of dormitories for both Alaska Native and non-Native. In the comparison with non-Native students, they found Alaska Native students’ significantly lower ACT score, similar extent of clarity of career goal, more negative view on friendliness of the campus, more sensitivity

⁵⁵ Karen Kohout and Judith Kleinfeld, “Alaska Natives in Higher Education” (Fairbanks: Institute of Social, Economic, and Government Research, University of Alaska, 1974).

⁵⁶ Judith Kleinfeld, “Alaska Native Students and College Success” (Fairbanks: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, 1978).

to prejudice against Alaska Natives on campus, and tendency to keep friends from home and make less new friends in college of Alaska Native students. This study proposed to establish programs to help rural Alaska Native students' adjustment to campus social environment. In the third study, they gathered information about academic success and drop-out rate of Alaska Native freshmen at UAF during the 1970s.⁵⁷ They found that the portion of academically successful Alaska Native freshmen peaked in the early 1970s (about 40% compared to about 25% in 1960s) and leveled off in the late 1970s, despite the exponential increase in the number of students with low ACT scores. They also found a slight decline in the drop-out rate (from 87% in 1963 to 75% in 1975). They speculated that this improvement was accomplished by the university's special program such as SOS and the Cross-Cultural Education Development Program. High ACT English score, good high school GPA, and early declaration of major predicted Alaska Native students' academic success without dropping out. Collectively, these studies delineated the situations around Alaska Native students' academic success in the 1960s and 1970s.

In her doctoral dissertation at the University of British Columbia, Carol Barnhardt, then an instructor at UAF, examined what factors contributed to the success of 50 Alaska Native teacher education students who graduated from UAF between 1989 and 1993.⁵⁸ Through interviews, reviews of student records, and participant observation, this study identified the following contribution factors: a teaching and learning environment responsive to the interests and needs of culturally diverse students, student support services respectful of the interests and needs of culturally diverse students, strong family and community support, supportive prior school and life experiences, and exceptional individual efforts. In the end, she presented recommendations for the

⁵⁷ Kleinfeld, Travis, and Hubbard, *Native College Success in the Seventies*.

⁵⁸ Carol Barnhardt, "Life on the Other Side : Alaska Native Teacher Education Students and the University of Alaska Fairbanks" (Doctoral dissertation, British Columbia, Canada, University of British Columbia, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0055446>.

university, faculty, student, and community, most of which concerned culturally responsive teaching practices and special program development.

Similarly, Maria Reyes examined Alaska Native students' academic performance through interviews with Alaska Native students at the upper-division and graduate levels at the UAF.⁵⁹ She identified poor academic preparation at the high school level, traumatic experiences in K-12 education, negative financial situations, inadequate child care, lack of affordable housing, difficulty in speaking up in classes, and discrimination at the university as negative factors for their academic performance. She also found that family support, financial support (e.g., getting scholarships from tribal corporations, having steady employment) and institutional support (e.g., delivering developmental courses, help from university staff and faculty) helped the Alaska Native students. The interviewees emphasized "hard work" and "persistence" were the keys for their academic success.

Research-based consulting firm McDowell Group conducted interviews with Alaska Native educational and cultural experts, random telephone surveys with 1000 Alaska Native peoples, and focus groups of Alaska Native high schoolers, parents, and Elders for the First Alaskans Foundation.⁶⁰ Throughout extensive examinations about the whole education system, they emphasized the problem of college preparation and the importance of community support for Alaska Native college students.

As the university serving the largest number of Alaska Native students, UAA conducted an institutional self-study on this issue and interviewed Alaska Native UAA graduates about their college experiences.⁶¹ The researchers identified financial situation, balance with work, uses of

⁵⁹ Reyes, "What Does It Take?"

⁶⁰ McDowell Group, "Alaska Native Education Study: A Statewide Study of Alaska Native Values and Opinions Regarding Education in Alaska" (Juneau: McDowell Group, 2001), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED466342>.

⁶¹ Diane Erickson and Diane Hirshberg, "Alaska Native Graduates of UAA: What Can They Tell Us?,"

alcohol and drugs, lack of role models in their communities, high academic standards (or high level of competency in the Western knowledge system) required in the university, feelings of dislocation, difficult admission and enrollment procedures, lack of financial aid from the university, and inadequate information from university advisors as Alaska Native UAA alumni's challenges. They also revealed that family support, help from instructors and advisors, and participation in campus activities were the keys for the interviewees to succeed academically. What all the interviewees answered in common was that "never give up" was very important to overcome the challenges and get degrees.

Finally, Alberta Jones recently published her dissertation about postsecondary educational experiences of Alaska Native peoples with a PhD/EdD degree.⁶² The main goal of her research was to identify factors supporting and hindering their academic success in the doctoral level. She received survey responses from 59 Alaska Native PhDs and later interviewed 10 of the respondents. The identified factors contributing their academic success include the academic networks, professor support, advisor support, family support, Alaska Native/American Indian specific academic and social support, peer support, social support with media and technology, financial support, study environment, and mentor support. The identified challenges include barriers related to geographical differences, family responsibilities, financial circumstances, personal issues, significant life events, cultural adjustment, personal illness, racism, and medical family emergencies.

Taken together, these nine quantitative and mixed-method studies identified a broad range of negative and positive factors for Alaska Native students' academic performance. It is evident

Report (Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, 2008), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/4497>.

⁶² Jones, "Alaska Native Scholars."

from these studies that there is not a single entity responsible for their academic performance and that family, community, K-12 schools, universities, governments, and students themselves all need to work together.

Although academic success is an important indicator of education, it can also be regarded as a colonized view. Framing Alaska Native students' college lives only with academic success is a research idea that stands on Western ideology and perspectives. This particular framework makes it difficult to understand the big picture of their college lives from their perspectives and essential problems behind their poor academic achievement. As Scollon pointed out, "By framing the problem as a problem of 'retention' the institution (UAF) was incapable of perceiving the issue from the point of view of the affected population, Alaska Native students".⁶³

The four studies conducted by Carol Bernhardt, Maria Reyes, UAA, and Alberta Jones included interviews with Alaska Native college students or graduates about academic achievement. These interviews successfully drew out various factors of Alaska Native students' college experience.⁶⁴ However, it is noteworthy that participants in these studies were all academically successful Alaska Native college students (i.e., graduates, graduate students, upper-level students). Thus, it is still unclear whether undergraduate students who are not necessarily academically successful have similar college experiences to these academically successful participants.

⁶³ Ron Scollon, *Human Knowledge and the Institution's Knowledge. Communication in Patterns and Retention in a Public University, Final Report (October 1, 1980 - December 31, 1981)*, 1981, 3, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED213338>.

⁶⁴ Jones, "Alaska Native Scholars"; Diane Erickson and Diane Hirshberg, "Alaska Native Graduates of UAA: What Can They Tell Us?," Report (Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, March 2008), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/4497>; Maria Elena Reyes, "What Does It Take? Successful Alaska Native Students at the University of Alaska Fairbanks," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 2, no. 2 (August 1, 2000): 141–59, <https://doi.org/10.2190/WBYQ-GU13-59UP-KUBX>; Carol Barnhardt, "Life on the Other Side : Alaska Native Teacher Education Students and the University of Alaska Fairbanks" (University of British Columbia, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0055446>.

3.4 Psychological Research

Another approach to examine their college lives is psychological research. It has been an interest of behavioral researchers that Alaska Native peoples, especially youths, have a high rate of having mental illnesses, although there are no statistics available specifically about Alaska Native college students' mental health.⁶⁵ The efforts to improve mental health problems of Alaska Native college students have been underway, and it was repeatedly reported that culturally grounded intervention is preferred by and effective for Alaska Native peoples.⁶⁶ For example, participating in talking circles and discussing past trauma helped them to unload their mental burdens and heal from trauma.⁶⁷ For the purpose of checking in their mental health, culturally appropriate psychological scales were developed.⁶⁸ Below two qualitative studies that examine the factors affecting Alaska Native college students' mental health are described.

Researchers at UAF conducted six focus groups with 26 Alaska Native students at UAF to co-develop a conceptual model and a measure of quality of life (QOL) for Alaska Native college students.⁶⁹ The students identified eight QOL domains (values, culture and traditions, spirituality,

⁶⁵ James Allen, Marya Levintova, and Gerald V. Mohatt, "Suicide and Alcohol Related Disorders in the U.S. Arctic: Boosting Research to Address a Primary Determinant of Health Disparities," *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* 70, no. 5 (2011): 472–87, <https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v70i5.17847>.

⁶⁶ Tracy J. Stewart et al., "Preferences for Mental Health Treatment Options among Alaska Native College Students," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 20, no. 3 (2013): 59–78, <https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.2003.2013.59>.

⁶⁷ Tina Marie Woods, "A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Student Support Groups for College Life Adjustment with Alaska Native Students" (Doctoral dissertation, Anchorage and Fairbanks, University of Alaska Anchorage and University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2013), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/8301>; Harold Napoleon, *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1991), <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Publications/Books/Yuuyaraq.pdf>; Christopher R. DeCou et al., "The Benefits of Discussing Suicide with Alaska Native College Students: Qualitative Analysis of In-Depth Interviews," *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 19, no. 1 (January 2013): 67–75, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030566>.

⁶⁸ James Allen et al., "A Protective Factors Model for Alcohol Abuse and Suicide Prevention among Alaska Native Youth," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 54, no. 0 (September 2014): 125–39, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9661-3>; Daniel B. Curns, "A Validity Study of the Reasons for Life Scale with Emerging Adult College Students" (Doctoral dissertation, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2014), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/4818>.

⁶⁹ Dinghy Kristine B. Sharma et al., "'What Makes Life Good?' Developing a Culturally Grounded Quality of Life Measure for Alaska Native College Students," *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* 72, no. 1 (2013):

relationships, basic needs, health, learning, and leisure). Then, the students themselves made a QOL tree model, which was rooted in and stemming from both Alaska Native and Western worldviews. Drawing on the domains, the researchers made a new QOL measure that reflected their actual college life. This research showed that the diverse factors from both Alaska Native and Western cultures comprise their QOL as college students.

In a different study, Simmons, then a master's student at UAF, used the College Students Reasons for Living Inventory with college students at UAF to research on their reasons for living as protective factors against suicide.⁷⁰ Despite their higher suicide rate, Alaska Native college students scored significantly higher than Euro-American ones on the scale, which indicates Alaska Native students have more reasons for living. Looking at subscales, Alaska Native students scored significantly higher on not only the Responsibility to Family & Friends (RFF) and The Fear of Social Disapproval (FSD) subscales but also the College and Future Related Concerns (CFRC) subscale. This suggests Alaska Native students view the benefits of college attendance and hope for the future after college as reasons for living, in addition to collective connection to their friends, family, and community. A similar result was obtained by DeCou, Skewes, and Lopez. They found that Alaska Native college students on an urban campus saw traditional living and cultural ways as protective factors against suicide.⁷¹

Although this type of psychological research originates from medical care, these two quantitative studies illustrated various aspects of mental health of Alaska Native college students. As to the research paradigm, unlike discriminatory psychological research on Indigenous peoples

21180, <https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v72i0.21180>.

⁷⁰ Teisha Marie Simmons, "Differences in Reasons for Living between Alaska Native and Euro-American College Students" (Master's thesis, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2003), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/6900>.

⁷¹ Christopher R. DeCou, Monica C. Skewes, and Ellen D. S. López, "Traditional Living and Cultural Ways as Protective Factors against Suicide: Perceptions of Alaska Native University Students," *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* 72, no. 1 (2013): 20968, <https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v72i0.20968>.

in the past, many of the studies mentioned in the section acknowledge the importance of Alaska Native college students' agency and active involvement in research rather than see them just as being susceptible to mental health problems.⁷² One weak point of these studies is that none of these studies could directly examine their transition to college life, which seems a most challenging time for them in their college life.

3.5 Summary of the Literature Review

The educational policy analyses criticized some of the inflexible policies towards Alaska Native college students and provided recommendations and suggestions for future policies. The academic success and psychological research have collectively illustrated the important factors in Alaska Native college students' college life: academic, financial, psychological, geographical, and cultural factors; factors encountered from their childhood through presecondary and postsecondary education; and factors in hometown and on college campuses. These results help better understand Alaska Native higher education.

On the other hand, I identified a few limitations of each type of research. For educational policy analysis, there have been no comprehensive reports in the past two decades. The previous studies with an academic success approach underscore the needs for decolonized research frameworks and interviews with diverse Alaska Native college students including undergraduate students who are not necessarily academically successful in college yet. The previous studies with a psychological approach did not directly examine their transition to college life, which seems to be a most challenging time for them in their college life.

⁷² DeCou et al., "The Benefits of Discussing Suicide with Alaska Native College Students"; Sharma et al., "What Makes Life Good?"; Stewart et al., "Preference for Mental Health Treatment"; Woods, "A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Student Support Groups."

The common limitation in all three types of previous studies is the researcher/researched power relation. In the studies conducted with Alaska Native college students, the researchers gave the students specific themes (e.g., academic success, trauma) and specific structures (e.g., semi-structured interview, questionnaire, psychological inventory), with a few exceptions.⁷³ This might have prevented the participants from freely talking about their college experiences. It also represents the unequal power relation between the researchers and the researched in terms of knowledge construction.⁷⁴ It seems more natural to listen to Alaska Native college students in order to research Alaska Native higher education. Therefore, Alaska Native college students' agency in research should be encouraged and supported.

⁷³ Sharma et al., "What Makes Life Good?" This study used "student as a co-researcher" framework.

⁷⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

Chapter 4 Alaska Native College Student Voices

Chapter 3 and 4 looked into the past and present of Alaska Native higher education and delineate Alaska Native higher education from historical and research standpoints. This chapter describes the research project I conducted to further look into the experiences of the current Alaska Native college students and to discuss possible ways to improve higher education for future generations of Alaska Native peoples. I named this project *Alaska Native College Student Voices Project*. This project is my original contribution to the field of Alaska Native higher education. Below, I present my motivation for the project, aims and research questions, methodology, method, student voices, and discussion.

4.1 Needs for Hearing Their Voices

Chapter 3 explored the previous studies about Alaska Native higher education and identified their limitations. The two limitations that I found to be the most problematic were recruiting only academically successful students for interviews to identify factors affecting their academic performance and allowing Alaska Native college students little agency in research. I believe that all students' voices should be heard regardless of their academic performance, and that students' agency in research should be encouraged and supported. Listening to students' stories not only provides researchers with insight on education but also strengthens students' inner power. However, there are currently few opportunities for Alaska Native college students to talk about their thoughts on higher education. That is why hearing their voices is needed.

4.2 Aims and Research Questions

Below are the aims and research questions of the project. The aims are what should be accomplished as a result of this project, while the research questions are specific things that need to be understood to achieve the aims.

Aims

- To highlight Alaska Native college students' perspectives by amplifying their voices
- To gain insight to improve higher education for Alaska Native college students

Questions

- What do Alaska Native college students think about their college experiences?
- What are the important factors of their college experiences?

4.3 Methodology

Before talking about the project design, I will explain the methodological frameworks for this project, that is, the fundamental principles that determine the design of the project. This project adopted three different frameworks: student voice, decolonizing methodologies, and collective case study.

4.3.1 Student Voice

The concept of student voice lies at the center of this project.⁷⁵ Although definitions of the term vary in different contexts, student voice usually means that students speak their minds, are heard by others, and participate in decisions-making for educational policies and practices.⁷⁶ The

⁷⁵ In some regions such as the United Kingdom, the term “pupil voice” is commonly used. Since this research deals with the educational issue in the United States, “student voice” is used in this thesis.

⁷⁶ Alison Cook-Sather, “Sound, Presence, and Power: ‘Student Voice’ in Educational Research and Reform” 36, no. 4 (2006): 361–64.

movement to reposition students in educational research and reform began in K-12 school contexts around 1989, when the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified.⁷⁷ The most important underlying premise of student voice work in this early era was the right of students to speak for themselves and be heard by adults. After student voice was misused and misinterpreted by some inattentive researchers and inconsiderate policy makers, however, student agency became another important underlying premise to ensure meaningful transformation of education and empowerment of students.⁷⁸ Since then, it has been regarded as important that students have an active role in educational research and reform (e.g., student as a co-researcher, student as a researcher) and that equal and respectful methods are selected to liberate the power relationship between students and adults (e.g., equal dialogue between students and adults). Most college students are 18 years old or older and considered to be an adult. Nevertheless, because their status is still that of a student and the relationship between college students and university staff is not completely equal, the same principles of student voice in K-12 schools apply to the context of postsecondary education.⁷⁹

Historically, Alaska Native college students have had few opportunities to voice their thoughts on education and get involved in decisions of educational policies and practices. They have been underrepresented in educational research as well, as most of previous studies were research *on* Alaska Native college students rather than *with* or *by* them.⁸⁰ Therefore, this project

⁷⁷ Alison Cook-Sather, "The Trajectory of Student Voice in Educational Research," *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 49, no. 2 (2014): 131–48.

⁷⁸ Michael Fielding, "Transformative Approaches to Student Voice: Theoretical Underpinnings, Recalcitrant Realities," *British Educational Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (April 2004): 295–311, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192042000195236>.

⁷⁹ Jane Seale, "Doing Student Voice Work in Higher Education: An Exploration of the Value of Participatory Methods," *British Educational Research Journal* 36, no. 6 (December 2010): 995–1015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903342038>.

⁸⁰ Fielding, "Transformative Approaches to Student Voice"; Seale, "Doing Student Voice Work in Higher Education."

applies student voice premises in Alaska's higher education context and regard Alaska Native college students as co-researchers. By doing so, this project aims to strengthen their inner power and transform the education system that they are in.

4.3.2 Decolonizing Methodologies

This project attempts to conform to decolonizing methodologies as much as possible.⁸¹ In her book titled *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith explains how and why traditional research methodologies are inappropriate for research about Indigenous peoples. Not only did European imperial practices devastate Indigenous peoples at that time of colonization, but also its negative influences on them have been entrenched until today. Research is one of the fields in which Western ethnocentric and positivist attitude has ignored, disrespected, and hurt Indigenous peoples in the post-colonial era. Rather than acknowledge relative ontological and epistemological differences and understand the negative influences of colonization, Western research methods in such fields as anthropology and history tended to deal with Indigenous peoples as primitive and inferior objects. Therefore, Smith argues that research methodologies should become free from these dangers and incorporate Indigenous peoples' views. To borrow Smith's words, research methodologies should be *decolonized*.

While I am not an Alaska Native person, I am aware of colonial and postcolonial influences on Alaska Native peoples and the potential pains that research could cause to them. Throughout the project, I tried to rethink my own cultural and class biases, reflect on my interaction with Alaska Native college students, and respect their voices and values.⁸²

⁸¹ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

⁸² University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board, "Research with Indigenous Peoples," University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.uaf.edu/irb/indigenous/>.

4.3.3 Collective Case Study

Debates over quantitative versus qualitative methods in the 20th century posed a question of whether or not qualitative research can generate valid theories. To overcome this limitation, some social scientists have incorporated traditional scientific practices such as predetermined sample size, random sampling, and objective observation into qualitative research. However, they ignore the fact that the small number of participants and difficulty of assuring objectivity makes it unable for qualitative research to generalize empirical statements about one situation to other situations. Dr. Small, a social scientist, proposed that *qualitative research with a small sample size* should rather be regarded as *a set of multiple case studies* than as *a statistically inferior study*.⁸³ While abandoning theory generation, this new logic values unique characteristics of each case and provides insight into a target issue. This methodology is called a collective case study framework or a multiple-case study framework.

In practice, collective case study research consists of two phases. First, qualitative data from each sample is analyzed as a single unique case. Second, the results from each case are compared with others, which collectively gives insight into a target issue. In contrast to the constant comparative data analysis used in grounded theories, this framework prohibits extracting a theme directly from raw data of multiple samples. Therefore, in a collective case study, researchers are encouraged to not only find similarities of the cases but also explore the uniqueness of each case that could add new information or perspectives to the current understanding of the issue. In this way, this framework enables researchers to refine their holistic understanding of the issue without generalizing the results of multiple cases.

⁸³ Mario Luis Small, “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research,” *Ethnography* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 24–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108099586>.

Alaska Native groups have relatively similar cultural beliefs, subsistence styles as hunter-gatherers, and colonial experiences. However, they are distinctly different from one another in terms of social structure, language, and living environment. The regional differences were ignored when American federal agencies lumped the Indigenous groups within Alaska into one category, Alaska Natives. Therefore, it is neither appropriate nor correct to analyze some Alaska Native college students' narrative data and generalize the results to the entire population. Moreover, focusing on the unique characteristics of each participant is more important in this exploratory project than trying to generalize the results. For these reasons, I selected the collective case study framework for the project.

Therefore, this research mixes these three methodological frameworks. The description above is very abstract and academic, but how these frameworks inform the project design is explained in the last section of this chapter. Below, the project design is described in detail.

4.4 Recruitment and Participants

For this project, I recruited four participants who satisfied all the following criteria.

- be 18 years of age or older
- identify themselves as an Alaska Native
- be a college student (including non-degree seeking students)

The student recruitment process started in January of 2019 and continued until May of 2019. Student recruitment was advertised by flyers hung on the UAA and UAF campuses, through emails delivered through university mailing lists, by a website link shared with students, and by word of mouth. In all the means above, the outline of this project, the criteria for participation,

benefit and compensation, and my contact information were briefly described. Regardless of their academic standing, all Alaska Native college students who satisfied the criteria were encouraged to participate in this project. A \$15 gift card was provided to undergraduate students who completed interviews, in order to encourage them to participate in the project and to show my appreciation to them for taking the time out of their busy schedule. Willing students applied for it by filling out a downloadable submission form and emailing it to me. The first page of this submission form was the informed consent document, which explained the project and the rights of participants comprehensively and asked for their signature. Approval for this research was obtained from the UAF Institutional Review Board in advance of the student recruitment.

As a result of the recruitment process, three Alaska Native college students participated in the project. The demographic information of the students is summarized in the following table.

Pseudonym	Oscar	Elizabeth	Flora
Ethnicity	Yup'ik	Yup'ik	Athabascan/Mexican
Age	Mid 20's	Early 20's	Mid 20's
Home	A community in West Alaska	A community in Southwest Alaska	Anchorage
University currently attending	A university in Fairbanks	A university in Anchorage	A university in Anchorage
Class standing	Junior	PhD	Master's
Major	Math and Yup'ik language	Clinical-community psychology	Mechanical engineering

Table 1 The demographic information of project participants

4.5 Method

The main part of this project consisted of four distinct steps. In the first step, participants were asked to create something with which they expressed their thoughts on higher education. This creation could be multimodal and multilingual. In other words, they could express their ideas in the ways in which they are comfortable. For example, they could write an essay or poem, draw a picture, take photos, record their voice, or make a video. Also, they could use both their Alaska Native language and English. There was no limitation of length or file size either. Only one rule about this creation was that their thoughts on higher education should reflect their own experiences as a college student rather than just discuss general educational issues and theories.

In the second step, they submitted their creation to me via email. If their creation was not in an electronic format (e.g., a drawing), they took several photos of it and attached the photos to the email. Along with their creation, they filled out a submission form and attached it to the email. This form asked them to provide their personal information (name, email address, age, ethnic identity, university affiliation, major, academic standing, part-time/full-time) and information about their creation (title of the creation, used languages, and a brief explanation of their creation in English). If the creation included other languages than English, they were asked to provide English translation.

In the third step, participants and I had a one-to-one interview either in person or online. This meeting was thirty minutes to two hours long. Based on their submission, I created a set of questions to ask each participant in the interview. Although the exact wording of the questions was different from participant to participant, I asked all of them about their personal background, K-12 educational experience, college life, and their creation itself, in order to better understand their college experiences and thoughts on higher education. Then, at the end of the interview, all

participants were asked the following two questions: How do you think college education can be improved for Alaska Native students? Is there anything you want to tell the university staff about college education? I tried to make the interviews casual and informal so that participants could feel comfortable. I could not conduct an interview with one of the four participants due to a time constraint.

In the fourth step, a complementary summary report about each participant's experiences and thoughts on higher education was generated. Shortly after the interview, I wrote a draft of the complementary summary report about each participant's submission. Then, they were asked to review and edit this report so that it truly reflected their thoughts and perspectives. In this process, participants' ideas were respected and prioritized, while I just helped making those ideas more easily understood among a wide range of readers including members of other cultural groups, university scholars, and administrators. I also asked additional questions to participants via email when I thought it necessary for writing the draft up.

The results are presented in the Voice section. For the result of each participant, their creation appears first without any edits or modification, followed by the complementary summary report that explains their experiences and thoughts on higher education.⁸⁴ In order to protect their identities, pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis, and photos were converted to bitmap files and edited significantly.

For further analysis, I first identified emerging themes for each participant's results through coding the data and reducing labels. Then, the emerging themes were compared among all the three participants. This analytical process was not for theory generation but for finding from these

⁸⁴ Flore did not submit any creation in advance of the interview. Instead, she and I had a two-hour-long conversation about her college life and thoughts on higher education. Therefore, in the case of Flora, excerpts from the interview transcription are presented in the Voice section.

three cases insight into Alaska Native higher education. The insight from their voices are discussed in the Discussion section.

To sum up the project design, history of colonization and past undesirable research practices determined the three methodological frameworks for the project: student voice, decolonizing methodology, and collective case study. The details of how these methodologies informed the method is summarized in the table below.

	Student voice	Decolonizing methodology	Collective case study
Word of mouth recruitment		X	X
Multimodal and multilingual creation	X	X	
Informal dialogue with participants	X	X	
Writing up the result with participants	X	X	
Representing student voices without any edits	X	X	
Analyzing each case and comparing afterwards	X		X
No generalization based on positivism		X	X

Table 2. Three methodologies informing the method

4.6 Voices

4.6.1 Elitnauryaraq – Pursuing Education⁸⁵

Mikqaanemnek naaqut’liuryunqelartua, maurluqa-llu anglillgutkellruamku Yugtun qalarquraraqłuta qaneryararput cali pirqakłuku. Kingunemni elitnaulallemnek ayagłua ukuk elicuumirturaraqłukek. Elitnaurvigpagni-llu elitnaungerraanemnek tangerrłuku qaillun elluarucigkek.

Since I was a little, I loved mathematics, and because I grew up speaking Yup’ik with my grandmother, I also thought our language was important. I wanted to study them since going to school at home. And since I started attending college, I saw how they were important.

Kinguneqenrilngumni elitnauqerraallemni allaqitellruunga nunacuarnetellrunrilama Mamterillrungraan. Nunarpagni arcaqerłua allaqitqapigtellruunga. Allanaqengraan elitnauvsiararkaucirput taringengellruaqa ayainanemni. Amłleret Yuut taugaam Kass’artarni anglillrunrilameng cakviuryugtut nunarpagtaqameng. Taumek Yugtun elitnauryulrianga ikayurnaluki watnaarkaulriit. Kass’ani-llu uitaaqamta Yuucirput cakaarpek’naku pingnaqengramta piqainaunrilan. Taugaam elitnauvsialleq ikayuutnguciqngan atungnaqerkaugarput.

When I first went to college, I went through culture shock even in Bethel because I was not in the village. I was especially shocked when I went to the city. As I went, I understood that we must pursue higher education. However, because many Yupiit did not grow up in a Western setting, a lot of them struggle when they go to bigger cities. That’s why I want to teach in Yup’ik to help those who do this. When we are in Western cities, it is not easy even though we try not to forsake our Yup’ik roots. However, we must get more education because it will help us.

Oscar is a Yup’ik junior college student who majors in mathematics and Yup’ik language.

He grew up in a small coastal village located in western Alaska. In his childhood, his grandmother

⁸⁵ Oscar submitted an essay written in Yup’ik along with its English translation.

taught him the Yup'ik cultural values and ancestral ways of life. They always talked with each other in Yup'ik language, and it helped him to understand that there is a strong connection between the language and the culture. From kindergarten up until the third grade, all of his classes, except English, were taught in Yup'ik. He says Yup'ik language is a part of who he is.

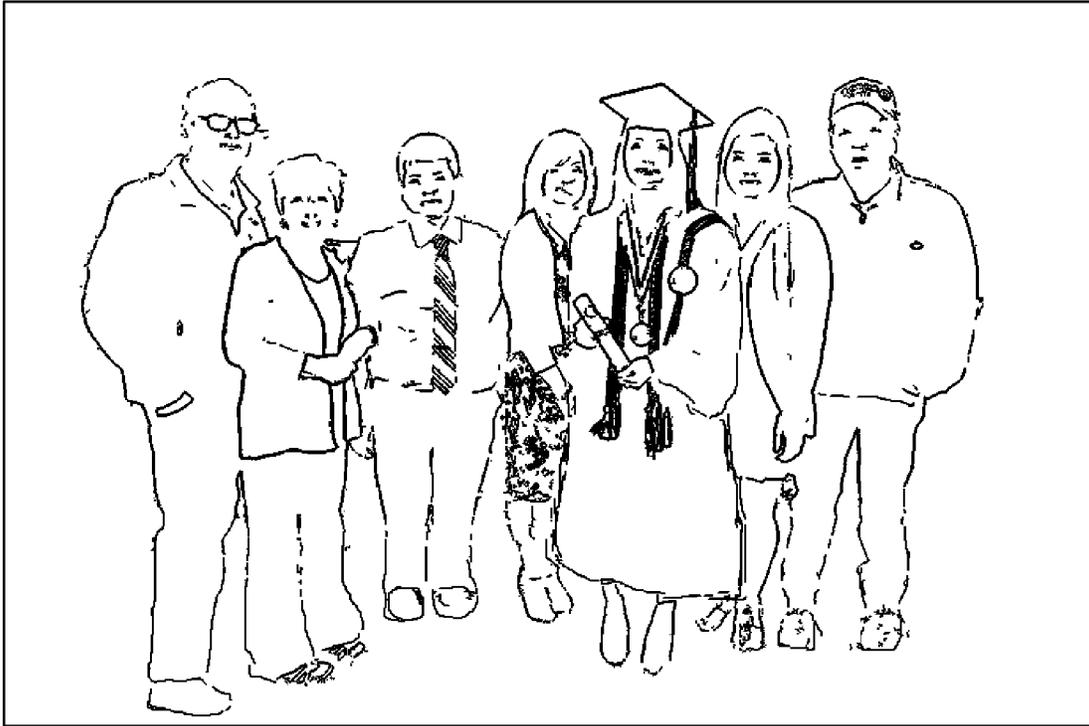
His passion for Yup'ik language, as well as his enthusiasm for mathematics, motivated Oscar to go to college. At first, he took college courses in Bethel, which is the regional hub in western Alaska. There, he experienced culture shock. Even though Bethel has a large Yup'ik population, the urban environment and the large number of strangers living in the town were very foreign to him. Two years later, he transferred to a university in Fairbanks. In this much larger city, he went through the same kind of culture shock, but with a greater intensity. Despite the culture shock, he has shown an excellent academic performance while keeping his cultural roots.

He recognizes that education is important for Alaska Native peoples to broaden their worldview, be qualified for jobs, and help their community back at home. On the other hand, he knows how difficult it is for them to persist in school. To support Alaska Native students who deal with culture shock and navigate the Western education system, he hopes to teach Yup'ik language courses or Yup'ik immersion classes after graduating from the university. This essay, written in Yup'ik, expresses the conflict between two cultures and his dream of helping Alaska Native students in a powerful way.

Oscar has two suggestions regarding how to improve higher education for Alaska Native students. First, he suggests that there should be English language courses tailored towards Alaska Native students. Since his primary language is Yup'ik, his mind thinks in Yup'ik and he sometimes has troubles with English. So, fine-tuning English would help a lot of Alaska Native students through their coursework. Second, creating a community on campus is a good way to make Alaska

Native college students feel at home and less lonely. What he missed the most when he left his home village was a community of people. Currently, his university provides such a community on campus, and he hopes this kind of support will continue.

4.6.2 Community & Keeping My Heart at Home⁸⁶



⁸⁶ Elizabeth submitted two family pictures along with an essay. To protect the identity of her family and herself, the pictures were converted to bitmap files and edited significantly afterwards.

The first attached photo is one of my family down in Durango, Colorado, when they came to celebrate my bachelor degree graduation. The second attached photo is one of me and my two grandmothers at my little sister's high school graduation. These photos represent the importance of family support and connection throughout my education. When times get hard, I constantly remind myself that it is not only me that I am receiving an education for - it is my family, my community, my people. These photos represent that connection and purpose well.

My thoughts on college are... mixed. I value knowledge and learning, but find that oftentimes Western education is lacking substance, texture, and meaningfulness. I remember there was once a time that my greatest pride was in my intellectual ability as a student. Now, I find myself struggling between the push to finish my graduate degree and the pull of home, my family, and being in the place I love with the people I love. Throughout my educational career I have had the wholehearted support of my family and community, which is a huge part of why I was able to finish at all. Being away from home is heartbreaking, lonely, and incredibly difficult. I oftentimes long to just be in the middle of the tundra somewhere, smelling the berries and tundra tea leaves and the salty air, feeling the sun on my face and wind in my hair to keep the mosquitoes away.

It has been really important to find a sense of community in my place of education - people like me who are far from home and here for similar reasons. We want to make a difference in our community. We have learned the skills necessary to navigate a colonized space successfully and obtain the knowledge needed to be deemed "qualified" in western society. It is a strange skill to have - I oftentimes feel that my connection to my own Yup'ik culture has to be put second to my western education, which is a devastating feeling. It is difficult finding a balance, and knowing that my heart belongs to home even if I am on a part of my journey that does not allow me to be home. I struggle. Western education and industrialized spaces such as universities are not made to be comfortable and accessible to Native peoples - the vast majority of them set us up for failure unless we can find a way to conform to the structured pen-and-paper tasks that are asked of us. The retention rate for Native peoples is low not because we lack intelligence, resilience, or determination - it is low because these spaces are designed for our failure. And thus, every day is a fight. An internal battle with the desire to make something of ourselves for our community and people, and the desire to go home and actually be within a space we can thrive. It is also an external battle with the expectations of western society and navigating this competitive, rigid, rushed space.

Elizabeth is a Yup'ik PhD student who majors in clinical-community psychology. She grew up in a hub fishing community in southwest Alaska. Surrounded by a small circle of family and friends, she had a safe and comfortable childhood. In high school, her senior project involved planning a career path. Although she did not have a clear idea for the future, she knew that she

wanted to help people and that she liked psychology. That is how she decided to study psychology in college. She attended a university in Colorado with the help of a Native American tuition waiver. After getting a bachelor's degree from the university, she came back to Alaska and started her PhD program at a university in Anchorage.

Through the essay, Elizabeth points out that the way universities are designed hinders Alaska Native students' success in higher education. In universities, students have to know how to write papers, get things done on time, and be very organized. Satisfying these Western expectations is difficult for many Alaska Native students who have not grown up being taught these specific ways. Although she has handled this challenge very well, many of her Alaska Native peers struggle with it. In addition, she recognizes that being away from home makes Alaska Native students' college life harder. Because her program requires so much time and energy, she feels that she has to put her family and culture on the back burner. When she can, she makes time to speak Yup'ik language, practice Yup'ik dance, and spend time with Alaska Native peoples in Anchorage. These things remind her of home and make her heart happy. However, there is no way she can connect fully with her home and culture while receiving college education in Anchorage. Despite these institutional problems and emotional difficulties, she keeps learning in college, not only for herself, but also her family, her community, and her people.

When she was asked about how to improve higher education for Alaska Native students, her first answer was for universities to have an accessible and welcoming community on campus. In her first year of college, she did not know how to find her people and how to ask for support. She suggests it would be helpful for universities to create a community where Alaska Native students can gather and get necessary support. Another thing she mentioned is general guidance on how to be successful in college. She proposes that universities and high schools teach an

“Introduction to College” course to Alaska Native students who are unfamiliar with Western educational expectations. At the end of the interview, she also expressed her concern about the recent state budget-cut plan. She is afraid that, during the discussion of cutting programs, the revenue generating programs like those in the STEM fields will be preferred over the programs for Alaska Native college students. She emphasizes the importance of these Alaska Native programs, saying “Don’t cut the programs, because they are important, they are so important.”

4.6.3 Thanks & Keep Up the Good Work⁸⁷

Flora is a master's student who majors in mechanical engineering. She was born and raised in Anchorage. Her mother is Athabascan and her father is Mexican. In her childhood, she did not have as many opportunities to learn about Athabascan culture as she hoped. To explain why, she shared her grandmother's story.

It's kind of sad, I really feel like I would be more in tune with a lot of my culture. If it weren't for how my grandma was treated growing up. She was completely fluent in Athabascan. And she went to a boarding school, because their parents had both passed away when she was young. So, she was orphaned. When she was probably around the age of ten, she went to this boarding school, where they would physically discipline her if she spoke Athabascan or if she talked about her culture. Her culture was extremely discouraged. Basically, they really discouraged her from using the language. They slapped her. So, when she grew up, she never taught my mom any of the language. She would use one or two words here and there, but she didn't really teach her anything about Athabascan culture.

Consequently, her mother could not teach much of the Athabascan language or culture to her. Nevertheless, as she grew up, she often participated in cultural activities arranged by her Native corporation and other Native organizations.

In elementary school, she had positive educational experiences. A school-wide reading program and hands-on math/science classes drew her into the joy of learning. When she was in third grade, she had a conversation with her mother, which ended up motivating her to pursue college education.

I don't really remember this, but she (her mother) was talking to me about college for some reason and I think it was because I asked her about someone being a doctor, but I was confused, because they weren't in a hospital or something. And, I was like "What they mean they are a doctor?" My mom said something like "Oh, when you go to college at a

⁸⁷ Flora and I had a two-hour-long conversation about her college experiences and thoughts on higher education in a coffee shop in Anchorage. Talking was the most comfortable way for her to share her story.

certain level, that's your title is doctor." I thought "That's gonna be me! I'm gonna have that title." So, I've just always known from when I was little even, I was going to college.

Her high school turned out to be a great environment for her to further think about her academic career in collaboration with her peers and with the help of school staff.

I loved high school. A lot of great memories from high school. That's really where I feel like I gained more independence, and I was able to do more with friends and made a really good friend group and bonded over all going to, aiming to go to college together. So actually me, along with some of my friends made a club about college readiness, College and Career Bound Club. We had a really good relationship with the college and career advisor at school.

As for high school classes, she was not very interested in geometry and algebra II at first. After taking precalculus, however, she came to love math.

I remember not being a huge fan. I just didn't really get the whole idea of proofs and a lot of these geometry things, which is so weird now, because I really like geometry now. But it was like something was clicked once I got to precalculus. After I took precalculus, I loved math. I also really liked biology. For the longest time, I wanted to go into biology or something medical-related. So, I really loved my biology classes over there.

Although math and biology were her favorite subjects in high school, she did not know what specifically she would major in college. It was not until taking several college-level courses that she found her true passion. Her high school had an Alaska Native advisor who was hired through a tribal corporation. The advisor recommended her to apply for a program geared towards Alaska Native high school students interested in taking accelerated college-level science and engineering courses. She initially hesitated to participate in this program, because she was too nervous to take calculus I.

I was very nervous about it. So, I was kinda scared that I wasn't gonna be able to do it. I thought that I was gonna fail that class. So, I talked to my precalculus teacher, and I remember being like "Do you think this is doable? Do you think that I can do calculus in six weeks best? It's a very short time, for a really difficult subject and I'm not sure I can do it." I remember my precalculus teacher specifically being like "No, I totally believe that you gonna do super well in that class, and there is nothing to worry about." As I said, precalculus has really got me back into math. For a while, I was not into math. He (her precalculus teacher) encouraged me to go through the program and try my best. He said he was right about me. And he wrote my letter of recommendation.

With the teacher's encouragement, she participated in a summer acceleration camp in her junior year. Through the camp, she took not only calculus, but also the introduction to engineering class, which fascinated her.

As soon as I took the class, I was like "I love this stuff. This is for me." I loved everything about that class. Just the idea of engineers being involved in everything, like designing buildings, designing coffee cups, designing everything. It's really cool that everything around you has been influenced probably in some way by an engineer. It was really exciting for me. Then, in that class, it was very fun and challenging, but in a really good way, the way that I was excited to go to. I was excited about the challenge.

As a result, she decided to major in mechanical engineering at a university in Anchorage. She enrolled in an engineering program specifically for Alaska Native college students at the university, and received a scholarship from the program along with merit-based state scholarships. For her, it was not difficult to transition from high school to college classrooms.

Class-wise, I didn't really feel like there was that much of the transition because I had already gotten used to college classes from [the summer acceleration camp]. So, I feel like that really helped with my transition into college classes, and how they work, and the difference of expectations and course load. I feel like I didn't have a hard time transitioning into the course work.

The coursework got harder when she started taking more specialized engineering courses in her sophomore year. However, study groups with Alaska Native peers in the engineering program helped her stay on track.

I had a good group of friends that I studied with. They really helped a lot. [The engineering program] really drives home this idea of recitations and looking for people in your class to do study groups. So, I feel like that really built a good study habit for me. And becoming friends with people in my class or taking classes with my friends to make sure that I had someone to study with.

There was one personal challenge outside the coursework. She moved out of her home to a college dorm during her freshman year, and she had to learn how to live a healthy life as an independent adult.

For college, I lived in a dorm. That was one of the things I loved about college was gaining more independence. When you turn 18, you are an adult. But, you are not really an adult, and still very dependent on your parents. College is where I really gained more independence and where it felt like very strong, like more friendships by living in the dorms. The one thing I really don't like about living in the dorms is not being able to make my own food. I ate super unhealthily, because, you know, junk food was always available. It was a lot of leaning that I had to do, like learn how to make healthy choices, exercise, self-care, healthy eating, that kind of thing.

As a whole, there were few academic and personal challenges that hindered the completion of her undergraduate studies. When she graduated with a bachelor's degree, she received praise from her Alaska Native community.

My Native corporation publishes a list of everybody who graduates from high school and everybody who graduates from college. And, at their big meeting every year, they'll

announce, “These are people who graduated!” So, everyone knows you graduated from college. So, I’ll meet people from [an Alaska Native community near Anchorage] who I’m not super familiar with, but they are like “Oh!” Once they find out who I am, they are like “Oh, you graduated from college! I’m so proud of you! You are doing so awesome!” They’re very happy. They brag about you. Some of my distant relatives brag about me, you know.

Then, she went on to a master’s program in mechanical engineering at the same university in order to prepare herself for future employment as well as to get a feel for her ultimate dream of getting a PhD. When she was halfway through the master’s program, she got a full-time job as an engineer at a private company which she previously interned for the five previous consecutive summers. She is now working as an engineer while finishing her master’s degree.

I really like taking all of these classes and learning about these different topics. It’s been really neat because now that I have been working in my job for two years, I feel like I have a better background of engineering, working in the industry. And, I can tie that back to my classes better. And it helps me learn it more in depth. Because I’m able to connect it to what I’m working on.

Although she has been successful in seeking her academic and professional career thus far, it was not so easy for her to navigate the higher education system as a minority student. She pointed out one negative aspect of education that she had to tolerate.

I’m really a positive person, and I tend to remember positive things. But there have been negatives. But on the positive side, there are a lot of resources for Alaska Native students out there. So, it felt very easy for me to pursue higher education, because there were all these people and resources that I could reach out to, that could help me. So, I had no issues getting help when I needed help. But on the flip side of that, people would think that I didn’t have to earn anything. People think that things were even handed to me, like good grades or job opportunities.

As an example, she shared one negative experience regarding other people's false perception of her achievements in the workplace.

When I was an intern, they (her company) were going to be announcing soon who they are gonna offer jobs to. I was very, very nervous. I was like "Oh my gosh. Are they gonna offer me a job? I don't know if they are gonna offer me a job." I was very freaked out about the whole thing. And, there was a lot of anticipation there. And, the comments from the people, that would be like, "Oh don't worry about it." I was like "What do you mean don't worry about it? Is there something they are telling me or have I already been hired?" They are like, "No, I haven't heard you've already been hired. But you are a woman. You are Alaska Native. There is no way they are not gonna hire you." I think they were trying to be nice and be like "Oh, you got this." But for me it was very negative, because it was like "Are you saying the only reason I'm here is because I'm a woman and they need to meet this quotas or because I'm Alaska Native and they need so many Alaska Native people, or Mexican people because I'm also Mexican?" And, they are like, would stumble, "Oh, uh, that was not what I meant. We are just saying you are probably gonna get it." Well you say that, but you are not saying it's based on merit. So, I feel like I have to work extra hard to really show people that I am supposed to be where I am, and not that things weren't just handed to me. I guess that's the negative aspect of when you hear about all these resources that are out there is the perception that things are just handed to you because you're a woman, because you are Alaska Native or Mexican, or minority just in general.

Despite some negative experiences, her general thoughts on college education are overall very positive. She is happy that she went to college, and she encourages everyone who wants to get college education to try it.

I'm definitely, basically all "for college education" if that makes sense. For me, anyone thinking about getting college education, I definitely encourage them. And, I really think anyone can do it, you know. The thing is very intimidating going to college. And, it's not for everybody, right? A lot of people don't really think about trade schools or skilled labor work, like electricians or crane operator... heavy equipment operating and stuff. All are really cool, very important job and actually pay really well. So, college isn't, I would say, for everybody. But, anybody, I think, could go to college and be successful as long as they don't try to rush things, you know. I feel like a lot of people overload themselves and don't give themselves time to really absorb the material, end up getting too high of a workload and just kinda quitting because the thing is too hard. But, it's not a race, you know. I would do it sometimes. And, I'm definitely really happy that I went to college. I kind of think about, when I'm feeling sad about something or getting worked up about something, I'm

like “You know what, I am a college-educated woman.” No one can take that away from me, you know. It’s a great sense of accomplishment.

After graduating from the master’s program, she is going to work as a full-time engineer for a while. Eventually, she wants to pursue a PhD degree and teach in either at the college or high school level. She feels that teaching is a very rewarding job, and she dreams to become a teacher/professor and help students, just as her teachers/professors helped her. During the interview, she shared a heartwarming story about her high school teacher.

I wrote him [her pre-calculus teacher in high school] an email actually, two years ago. And I was like “Hey, I just wanted to say thanks for encouraging me to do [the engineering program] and encouraging me to go through the calculus I. It really was nervous that I wasn’t gonna be able to do it, and I really remember that conversation where you encouraged me to go ahead and take the college class. I just wanted to say thanks. I thought you are a really great teacher.” He responded back to my email and he said “Oh my goodness, you almost made me cry. I’m gonna hang this up on the wall.” Because I feel like high school teachers, they won’t find out what happened to people until they run into them in a grocery store ten years later or something. So, I emailed a couple of teachers and just said thank you.

When asked if she had anything she wanted to tell universities, she mentioned the importance of universities to Alaska and expressed her gratitude towards professors.

Just that universities are definitely really important to Alaska. And, keep doing a great job. And, I guess just thanks, because I feel like the staff is not always appreciated like they should be. I did a teaching assistant role once, and that gave me a whole new perspective on what it means to teach and what all is involved in teaching, and that’s a lot more work than I’ve realized. Especially, it takes a lot to be a good professor, and I feel like the university has a lot of really good professors from what I’ve seen. So, it’s just thanks.

4.7 Discussion

The previous section highlighted the three Alaska Native students' perspectives on Alaska Native higher education. These students are a Yup'ik junior student (math and Yup'ik language major), a Yup'ik PhD student (clinical-community psychology major), and an Athabascan master's student (mechanical engineering major). In this discussion section, I attempt to find in their voices the important factors of their college experiences, in order to get insight to improve higher education for Alaska Native college students. First, emerging themes were distilled from each student's voice. This individual examination was then followed by the comparison of all the three voices. As stated in the methodology section, the main purpose of the analysis is not to generalize the results but to find unique characteristics of these voices.

Oscar wrote an essay titled "Elitnauryaraq – Pursuing Education" in Yup'ik, his mother tongue. The themes emerged from his essay and interview are: (1) his aspiration to study math and Yup'ik in school in his childhood, (2) culture shock and struggles in Western settings in regard to the number of strangers, cultural roots, and English, (3) benefits of receiving more education for Yup'ik people, (4) desire to help Yup'ik students who pursue education, and (5) the need for a Native community on campus.

Elizabeth submitted two family photos and an essay titled "Community & Keeping My Heart at Home". The themes emerged from her photos, essay, and interview are: (1) the importance of family support and connection in education, (2) receiving college education for her family, community, and people, (3) Western education designed for Alaska Native peoples' failure, (4) colonized space and Western expectation, (5) struggles between college and home, (6) an accessible and welcoming community on campus, and (7) concerns about the governor's budget cut plan.

Flora had a 2-hour chat with me over coffee. The themes emerged from this conversation are: (1) her family's colonial experience, (2) positive leaning experience in K-12 schools, (3) aspiration for a terminal degree, (4) a good community of Native people to study with, (5) taking college-level courses as a high school student, (6) career guidance from teachers and an advisor, (7) learning independence through dorm life, (8) the benefit of working while studying, (9) prejudice against Alaska Native peoples and minority in general, and (10) gratitude for teachers and professors.

There are two things that all three students talked about. First, they all had a good community of Indigenous students on campus, who supported them academically and mentally. As Elizabeth said in the interview, "It's like a little piece of home away from home." Although this fact has been known to Alaska Native college students and university staff at SOS, RSS, and NSS, few of the previous academic studies explicitly pointed out that having an Indigenous community on campus improves both Alaska Native students' well-being and academic performance.⁸⁸ Second, all three students said that one of the reasons why they pursue higher education is to give back to someone who had supported them through their life. For Oscar and Elizabeth, it is their family and community that they want to help with what they have learned in college. Flora said that she wants to help students as her teachers and professors have helped her. This suggests that they all had a strong purpose to attend college and get a degree, which coincided with the result from the quantitative psychological research on Alaska Native college students' reasons for living.⁸⁹

Although all three of them talked about the two things in common, due to the collective case study design, I do not intend to generalize these statements. However, not generalizing them

⁸⁸ Jones, "Alaska Native Scholars." This study mentions the importance of Indigenous campus community.

⁸⁹ Simmons, "Differences in Reasons for Living."

does not mean that they are not important. Each student's voice should be respected, and the fact that three students talked about the two things in common demonstrates the importance of them. Therefore, universities can use their voices as a starting point to consider policies such as building a campus Indigenous community or providing courses/programs related to their community life (e.g., rural development, education, community psychology, Indigenous studies, Alaska Native language).

In contrast to the two common factors, each student had unique experiences and perspectives on Alaska Native higher education. Oscar is a language advocate, and he proposed that universities provide Alaska Native students with “fine-tuning English” classes to support their academic achievement. At the same time, he wants to teach Yup’ik language courses or Yup’ik immersion classes in the future to help his people keep the Yup’ik roots while navigating the Western education system. To date, universities have primarily focused on Alaska Native college students’ low English proficiency and offered developmental English courses. However, as Oscar said, providing Alaska Native language classes helps them feel at home and improves their cultural well-being. Therefore, universities should consider the importance of Alaska Native language courses to Alaska Native college students when determining the course offerings.

Elizabeth used the words “internal and external battles” to explain her struggles as a college student. Her internal battle represents thriving in the university to help her people while wanting to go back to her comfortable community. Her external battle is about trying to meet the Western expectations while keeping her culture alive. She is aware that there is no way she can connect fully with her home and culture while receiving college education in Anchorage. However, as the title of the essay suggests, she has been trying to keep her heart at home regardless of where she lives. By articulating emotions in an organized way, she suggests a new possible way for

researchers to examine Alaska Native college students' well-being, that is, place identity. Place identity is a sub-structure of self-identity consisting of cognitions about the physical worlds.⁹⁰ People develop their place identity as they live in a place and get attached to its natural environment, people, culture, and all other tangible/intangible aspects.⁹¹ Then, Alaska Native college students' relocation from their home village to an urban campus is likely to cause their place identity crisis, like in Elizabeth's example. Therefore, university counselors might be able to utilize the interventions developed for place identity crisis to Alaska Native college students as well.

Flora talked about people's prejudice against Alaska Native college students. Some people around her assume that Alaska Native college students do not have to earn anything because they think a lot of things like good grades and job opportunities are handed to them. Opposing this statement, she said that Alaska Native students have to work as hard as other students, even with the resources available specifically for them. It is a well-known, previously documented misunderstanding to think that Alaska Native people get benefits such as health care and scholarships from Native corporations or governments for free.⁹² In fact, this is all due to the history of colonization and the land claims settlement. Her experience about the discriminatory attitude in her workplace shows that this stereotype is still prevalent and that there needs to be

⁹⁰ Harold M. Proshansky, Abbe K. Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff, "Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3, no. 1 (1983): 57–83, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(83\)80021-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(83)80021-8).

⁹¹ Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford, "Defining Place Attachment: A Tripartite Organizing Framework," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30, no. 1 (2010): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2009.09.006>.

⁹² Libby Roderick, *Do Alaska Native People Get Free Medical Care?: And Other Frequently Asked Questions about Alaska Native Issues and Cultures* (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University, 2008), 73–84; Perry Gilmore, David M. Smith, and Apacuar Larry Kairaiuak, "Resisting Diversity: An Alaskan Case of Institutional Struggle," in *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance*, by Michelle Fine et al., Second Edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 272–83; Caitlin N. Montague-Winebarger, "'That's A Hard Question': Undergraduate Students Talk About Culture" (Doctoral dissertation, 2012), <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu:443/handle/11122/9131>.

learning opportunities for non-Native people in Alaska to learn about the state's colonial history.

This is an exploratory project, and there is no clear conclusion or generated theories for these three cases. However, the similarities and differences of the three students' voices illustrated the various aspects of the current Alaska Native higher education, which can be used as a starting point for a discussion on how to improve higher education for future generations of Alaska Native peoples.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In order to look into the past and present of Alaska Native higher education and discuss possible ways to improve higher education for future generations of Alaska Native peoples, this thesis investigated Alaska Native higher education through three different approaches; historical examination, literature review, and participatory research.

This thesis first critically examined the history of Alaska Native higher education. The history shows that higher education has played three different roles in the Alaska Native rights movement: nurturing Native political leaders towards the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (1891-1971), teaching Alaska Native peoples how to manage their land and resources (1971-1990), and developing Native academic leadership from within universities (1991-2013). It was confirmed that the current problem of Alaska Native college students' academic struggles is caused not by their academic incapability but by the Western education imposed inevitably upon Alaska Native peoples. The several previous generations of Alaska Native peoples' adaptation and resilience made it possible for them to reclaim the ownership of academic research and higher education in the 21st century.

The literature review confirmed the universities' inadequate and discriminatory responses to Alaska Native peoples' educational needs/wants after the 1960s, and identified a wide range of factors affecting Alaska Native college students' academic achievement and well-being. The two limitations of the previous studies that seemed to be the most problematic were recruiting only academically successful students for interviews to identify factors affecting their academic performance and allowing Alaska Native college students little agency in research. These limitations were the motives for me to start the Alaska Native College Student Voices Project. The

aims of the project were to highlight Alaska Native college students' perspectives by amplifying their voices and to gain insight to improve higher education for Alaska Native college students. The project was carefully designed around the concepts of student voices, decolonizing methodologies, and collective case study framework. Three Alaska Native college students participated in the project and recounted their college experiences and thoughts on higher education. The two factors that all three of the students mentioned are the benefit of having an Indigenous community on campus, and giving back as a reason for them to pursue postsecondary education. Each student also had a unique perspective that the other students did not have, which included the importance of Alaska Native language courses for Alaska Native college students' cultural well-being, place identity crisis caused by the relocation from a home village to an urban campus, and the prejudice against the services that Alaska Native college students receive. These perspectives can be used as a starting point for a discussion on how to improve higher education for future generations of Alaska Native peoples.

These three approaches are not independent from each other; situating the student voices in the historical and research contexts helps bridge the past and present of Alaska Native higher education with its future. From an historical standpoint, the three participants in the project are under significantly different situations than the previous generations, and going to college is a more natural option for them than for their parents and grandparents. Nevertheless, they all still recognize the long-standing negative effect of colonial experiences. Oscar and Elizabeth both talked about their culture shock and struggles in the Western higher education system, while Flora pointed out non-Native people's prejudice against Alaska Native college students. Fortunately, many support programs are available for Alaska Native college students today, and all three students have utilized one or more of the programs to overcome the challenges. However,

Elizabeth is now concerned that these programs might be eliminated due to the state budget cut plan proposed by Alaska's governor in 2019. This university budget crisis is similar to that of 1986, which resulted in centralizing community colleges and taking away educational autonomy from rural Alaska Native residents. The history of Alaska Native peoples' experiences in higher education and voices of the three Alaska Native college students remind universities that they should not repeat the same mistakes. Cutting these programs would be devastating to Alaska Native college students, and universities are strongly encouraged to keep these programs to support their Alaska Native students and staff thriving in unfamiliar physical and cultural environments. From a research standpoint, Alaska Native college students have often been considered as an academically struggling population with poor mental health conditions. As a result, they have had few opportunities to play an active role in educational research and voice their thoughts on the education they receive. If Alaskan universities truly want to remain Native-serving educational institutions, they need to reconsider the current Alaska Native higher education policies, listen to what Alaska Native peoples say, and update the education policies accordingly. The Alaska Native College Student Voices Project, despite its small sample size, was the first attempt to reposition Alaska Native college students in educational research and promote their active involvement in the educational policy-making process.

There are four major limitations in this thesis. First, the history of Alaska Native education in Chapter 2 is far from comprehensive. There are numerous things I did not mention in the chapter, including other Alaskan universities and colleges than UA (e.g., Sheldon Jackson College, Alaska Methodist University, Iḷisaḡvik College) and university-based programs geared towards Alaska Native college students (e.g., Rural Alaska Honors Institute, Alaska Native Human Resource Development Program, Cross-Cultural Education Development, Center for Northern Education,

Alaska Native Knowledge Network). Second, the literature review does not include any studies on AI/AN higher education, which are likely to be useful in examining Alaska Native higher education. Third, the literature review also does not include any program evaluation work. The majority of programs supporting Alaska Native college students have created evaluation reports, some of which include important data and information about Alaska Native higher education. Fourth, the number of participants in the Alaska Native College Student Voices Project was small. Even though generalization was not a purpose of this project, it is more desirable to listen to a large number of Alaska Native college students' voices. I am especially curious to know the opinions and college experiences of undergraduate students, students majoring in different disciplines, and students from other ethnic groups than Yup'ik and Athabascan. These limitations should be addressed by future research work.

Below is a brief reflection on what I have learned and felt through the student voice project. First of all, I am very happy that three Alaska Native college students were willing to talk with me about their college experiences and thoughts on higher education. In the interviews and emails, I could feel that they were taking this opportunity seriously and that they wanted to make higher education better for all current and prospective Alaska Native college students. I had never met most of the students before the interviews, and I was afraid that they would not be able to talk openly with me. However, all the students talked with me very openly, and I am grateful for their honesty.

Through the interviews, all three students told me the story of their life from childhood to the present times. As a researcher, I found it very helpful to know their life story to better understand their thoughts on college education. The majority of the qualitative studies on Alaska Native higher education either extracted just one or two good sentences from interview transcripts

or created a bullet list of findings with researchers' words. I realized that, while deidentifying data is important, omitting too much background information makes participants' narratives voiceless. Telling a life story as it is makes the account more vivid, emotional, and convincing. This is an unexpected wonderful lesson I learned from the Alaska Native College Student Voices Project.

Alaska Native academic leaders successfully reclaimed the ownership of Troth Yeddha' as well as academic research and college education. However, Alaska Native higher education policies still need to be improved to mitigate Alaska Native people's struggles in higher education. As the very persons experiencing the long-standing effect of colonization in higher education, Alaska Native college students have a strong power to transform education. I hope that more Alaska Native college students will tell their life story, and that there will be more safe places and opportunities for them to be able to voice their thoughts on higher education.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Institutional Board Review Exempt Letter



(907) 474-7800
(907) 474-5444 fax
uaf-irb@alaska.edu
www.uaf.edu/irb

Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

September 4, 2018

To: Charles Topkok
Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [1304259-1] Alaska Native First-Year Students at the University of Alaska Fairbanks:
Their Voices about College Life

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Title: Alaska Native First-Year Students at the University of Alaska
Fairbanks: Their Voices about College Life

Received: August 21, 2018

Exemption Category: 2

Effective Date: September 4, 2018

This action is included on the October 3, 2018 IRB Agenda.

Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.

America's Arctic University

UAF is an AA/EEO employer and educational institution and prohibits illegal discrimination against any individual:
www.alaska.edu/titleIX/compliance/nondiscrimination.

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer



The goal of this project is to improve college education for Alaska Native students. To achieve this goal, this project gathers Alaska Native students' thoughts on college education and present them to university officials and other audiences.

Who can participate?

Any Alaska Native college student aged 18 years old or older is welcomed to participate.

What are the benefits to you?

Your voice will contribute to improvement of higher education. If you are an undergraduate student, you will receive a **\$15 gift card** upon completion!

What will you do?

1. Submit your thoughts on college education in any format and in any language via email.
2. Take part in a one-hour-long interview and talk about your submission and college experiences.
3. Review a summary report about your submission written by the project team.

This summary report will be presented to audiences later, but don't worry, your name will not be shared.

If you are interested, please scan QRL code or type URL, and get the submission form!



Any questions? Feel free to ask Taiyo Itoh at titoh@alaska.edu.

<https://goo.gl/PS6DM6>

This project has been approved by UAF Institutional Review Board. The principal investigator of this project is Dr. Sean Asiqliq Topkok. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, talk to the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 or uaf-irb@alaska.edu.



Appendix C: Combined Submission and Informed Consent Form

Instruction for Project Participants

Alaska Native College Student Voices about College Education

1. Read and Sign on Informed Consent Form on Page 2

Please read the Informed Consent Form on page 2. This form will explain the details of the project and your rights as a project participant. If you understand the information and decide to take part in the project, please choose the “Agree” option and sign your name on the form.

2. Express Your Thoughts on College Education

Please create something with which you express your thoughts on college education. You may use any format and any language. For example, you can write an essay or poem, draw a picture, take photos, record your voice, or make a video. Also, you can use both your Alaska Native language and English. There is no limitation of length or file size either. Your thoughts on college education should reflect your own experiences as a college student rather than just discuss general educational issues and theories.

3. Fill out the Submission Form on Page 3

Please provide your information and describe your work in the Submission Form on page 3. If you need more space to describe your work, please use page 4.

4. Submit Your Work and This Document via Email

Please submit your work along with this four-page document to Taiyo Itoh at titoh@alaska.edu via email. If your work is not in an electronic format (for instance, a drawing), please take several photos of it and attach the photos to the email. I will respond to you within 3 days.

5. Interview

We will schedule a one-hour-long interview. In the interview, I will ask you about your submission and college experiences to better understand your thoughts. This interview will be done either in person or online.

6. Review

Shortly after the interview, I will write a summary report about your submission. I would like you to review and edit this report so that it truly reflects your thoughts and perspective. This report will be presented to university officials and other audiences later. If you are an undergraduate student, you will get a \$15 gift card after the review!

Informed Consent Form
Alaska Native College Student Voices about College Education

IRB #1304259
Date Approved: 09/04/18

My name is Taiyo Itoh and I am a master's student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. I am conducting a project about Alaska Native students' college experiences. You are being asked to take part in this project because you are an Alaska Native college student who is 18 years old or older. Please read this form carefully.

What does this project ask you to do?

The goal of this project is to hear Alaska Native college students' voices and improve college education for Alaska Native students. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to share your thoughts on college education with me via email first. To express your thoughts, you may use any format (for example, essay, drawing, photo, audio, and video) and any language. Next, we will schedule a one-hour-long interview either in person or online, where I will ask you about your submission and college experiences to better understand your thoughts. Shortly after the interview, I will write a summary report about your submission, which will be presented to university officials and other audiences later. You will be asked to review and edit the report so that it truly reflects your thoughts and perspective.

Are there any risks and benefits for you?

I do not foresee any risks if you choose to participate in the project. As to confidentiality, your identity will be protected. I will properly dispose of any paperwork and securely store all project records, and any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone other than the project team. Your name will not be used in any reports, presentations, and publications.

While this project has no direct benefit to you, your voice will empower current and future Alaska Native college students and contribute to improvement of higher education for Alaska Native peoples. If you are an undergraduate student, you will get a \$15 gift card as a compensation after the review of the summary report.

Is the participation voluntary?

Yes, your decision to take part in the project is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the project. If you decide to take part in the project, you can stop at any time or change your mind and ask to be removed from the project. There are no foreseen consequences from not participating in the project.

Do you have any questions?

I encourage you to ask questions and take the opportunity to discuss the project before making a decision on whether or not to participate. If you have questions at this point, feel free to ask Taiyo Itoh at 907-388-0501 or titoh@alaska.edu. If you have questions later, you may contact Taiyo Itoh, or Sean Asiqluq Topkok at 907-474-5537 or cstopkok@alaska.edu.

The UAF Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a group that examines research projects involving people. This review is done to protect the rights and welfare of people involved the research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area) or uaf-irb@alaska.edu.

Select your choice below and sign your name. Your choice of "Agree" and your signature indicate that you have read and understood the above information, that you have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and your rights, that you are 18 years old or older, and that you agree to participate in the project.

Agree

Disagree

Signature of Participant

Date

Submission Form
Alaska Native College Student Voices about College Education

1. Your Information

Name (First, Last)	Email Address	Age									
<p>Ethnic Identity: You may choose more than one option. If you don't see your ethnic identity or if you want to further specify your ethnic identity, please choose "Other" and write your answer there.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;"><input type="checkbox"/> Aleut</td> <td style="width: 33%;"><input type="checkbox"/> Tlingit</td> <td style="width: 34%;"><input type="checkbox"/> Inupiaq</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Alutiiq</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Tsimshian</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Yup'ik</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Athabascan</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Haida</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</td> </tr> </table>			<input type="checkbox"/> Aleut	<input type="checkbox"/> Tlingit	<input type="checkbox"/> Inupiaq	<input type="checkbox"/> Alutiiq	<input type="checkbox"/> Tsimshian	<input type="checkbox"/> Yup'ik	<input type="checkbox"/> Athabascan	<input type="checkbox"/> Haida	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
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Major	Academic Standing -- Please Select One --	Part/Full Time <input type="checkbox"/> Part Time <input type="checkbox"/> Full Time									

2. Your Work

Title							
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<p>Description of Your Work: Please describe your work. What is your work about? How are your thoughts on college education expressed in it? If you used languages other than English, please provide English translation here.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%; margin-top: 5px;"></div>							

If you need more space to describe your work, please use this page.