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M.A. Rural Development Methodology Paper

This paper describes what it has taken for me to achieve graduation in UAF's Rural Development Master's Degree program, and how important it is to get an active graduate committee and to agree on a Graduate Study Plan (GSP) early on. This paper includes where I started my research, how I went about gathering information from various sources, and what information I ended up using in my final product. I am writing this paper as if I am speaking directly to you. A student may not ever read this, but if they do, I hope this paper will help in pursuit of obtaining a degree by learning from my experiences that I will share here.

I applied to this graduate program in the fall of 2009 after graduating with my Bachelor's degree in Rural Development with emphasis on Community Business & Economic Development in May of 2009. That was pretty quick! Maybe I should have taken a longer break in between because I did start not start taking courses in the fall of 2009, but began in the spring of 2010.

Instead of filling this paper with minute details of each class during my graduate work, I will briefly summarize the first two years then go into what I actually did to accomplish my final product. I am doing it this way because I feel that all the graduate classes I took up until the two final research courses were a waste of time because I was initially referred to three people for my graduate committee. I took the advice, but this turned out to be a horrible decision.

Each semester would basically go like this: I would pick a topic and fill out the GSP (with little or no direction from my committee chair) and by the end of the year my committee would decide that the topic I had worked on was not doable. I pitched four different ideas and all of them were eventually rejected after I had worked on them in my classes during the semester.

After continually being rejected concerning my ideas for my graduate work I compromised and took on an idea my graduate committee proposed. However, my heart was not in this so I had no passion for the research. Needless to say I was burnt out at this point and I wanted to quit more than finish. I felt stuck so I pushed forward and agreed on a date and time to take my comprehensive exams on the topic they chose, but when I contacted my committee chair months later to confirm the date and time I was asked to reschedule.

At this point I had enough. I filled out a Change of Graduate Committee form on December 27, 2012 and it was by far the most prosperous action I took during this journey. I had completed 27 credits out the 30 credit requirement and was down to taking my last two research courses when the three new people I asked to be part of my committee agreed. I am forever grateful!

The point I am making by explaining all of this (as briefly as possible) is that a good graduate committee is absolutely paramount to an enjoyable, less stressful journey of obtaining your degree. Yes, there will be problems, and I am not trying to put all of the blame on my first graduate committee. They are good people and I had a part in my struggles as well. We moved frequently and I took more than one leave of absence as life continued to happen while I worked on my education. Yet I firmly believe that if I had the new committee members from the beginning I could have worked on what my heart desired most in my first idea, and finished a great deal faster than the four years it has taken me to reach graduation. I can honestly say that without my new graduate committee I do not believe that I would be graduating now, because I would have quit under the old committee.

The first meeting with my new committee happened on January 10, 2013 where they proposed a new topic of research. Because I was at my wits end with ideas, I originally proposed a research project on the Pebble Mine thinking that it would be easy to gather information and finish. But one of my old committee members suggested the topic of the Livengood Mine and how that may affect Minto (my home village). We all liked this new idea, but since I had not done any research at all on this topic, I started the research at the end of my graduate study program. I hope you do not experience the same, but if you do, know that you are not alone. Other students have experienced similar difficulties as well.

Moving on with this new topic, I thought a project would be easier to complete (initially thought to be a 30-60 page long brochure that was later changed from being called a large brochure to a guidebook) than completing a thesis. This is faulty thinking. They are both equal in difficulty. However, I am not at all disappointed that I chose the project because I believe that this will help Minto more than giving them a graduate level thesis to read.

We discussed the three topic areas I would work on in more detail in the committee meetings to follow, but at this first 2 ½ hour meeting (my new committee really took their time with me!) they outlined the actions I needed to take immediately. Among other administrative actions I needed to prepare and submit a new GSP with a detailed outline on the Livengood project, in addition to a new preliminary reading list of where I would start my research.

Although I was in a hurry to just finish and graduate, my new committee reinforced the idea that it is important to take it slow and not get too set on my graduation date. I was told, “Stellar work takes time...my project will evolve and change...this is not a task, but a project out

of the ordinary that I am doing for the betterment of others (Graduate Committee Meeting, 2013).”

Less than a week later on January 16, 2013 my committee chair met with me again for two hours to go over the IRB process. He patiently walked me through the finite details that UAF requires when applying to the IRB. It was essential that I do this as quickly as possible because I could not go forward with my personal interviews without it. We met again many times as my chair worked on my behalf to make sure that everything was done correctly. I won't bore you with details of the IRB process here, I just want to emphasize that I was not left behind to figure this out on my own, but patiently helped by a person who was interested and committed to my success. All of this took months to complete, but it was done in time for me to ask questions from the one-page public survey I created and brought to Minto on September 7, 2013.

The survey was a success. I found out what Minto residents already knew and what they would like to know more about. I tailored my research to answer their concerns and by expanding their knowledge of the gold mining process. Many had already worked for International Tower Hill (ITH) at Livengood, others were interested, and a few shared the reasons why they would be prevented from working at the mine (i.e., age/health, transportation and lodging, family responsibilities).

Out of the twenty-three people I surveyed thirteen checked NO when asked, “Do you know what is currently going on at the mine and what their future mining will look like?” The ten that checked YES to this question varied in their knowledge as some wrote in: “Not feasible...very little knowledge...doing environmental review.”

I learned that the three biggest concerns about the mine opening were increase in traffic, escalation of alcohol in the village, and negative effects to the water and fish. All twenty-three people answered YES to the question, “Are you interested in learning more once I am done with my research through reading a brochure that I will create?” I expect a few were being kind and do not really care to sit down and read the brochure, but I am positive that they are all interested in hearing about the information provided in the guidebook from the ones who do read it.

Once the three topics that my research would focus on were decided the next step was preparing for the comprehensive exams. I could either do the 4 ½ hour exam and write three essays (5-15 pages) on questions they would ask that I would have to answer from memory or I could write three separate papers (15-30 pages) on each topic. I chose the latter, again thinking this would be easier. Like before, it was not easier. It was just a different method to accomplish the same requirement (and I do not regret taking this path either).

Three topics were covered: (1) History of Mining in the Minto Flats Watershed, (2) Social, Economic & Education Benefits of the Livengood Mine in Alaska, and (3) Environmental Concerns of the Livengood Mine in Alaska. All three comprehensive exams were submitted by September 30, 2013 and revised and resubmitted by December 2013. I initially prepared these papers so that I could do a little editing and put them all together for the guidebook. However, I missed the point. I was reminded that these are comprehensive exams, not just research material to submit, but to explain how I comprehended the information I found. I was reassured that editing of the exams is normal and to not give up. I edited for comprehensive measures, but was still allowed to use the research I had gathered in the first submittal for the final guidebook. None of that information gathering was a waste of time, just irrelevant for the exams.

I began my research the old fashion way. I went to the library—three libraries actually: the Loussac and UAA libraries in Anchorage, and the Rasmuson Library on the UAF campus in Fairbanks. Surprisingly I did not find as much as I expected at the Rasmuson. However, upon visiting the Rasmuson on three different occasions I found old newspaper articles on the laser film disks on my first attempt, had librarian assistance in creating new search values on May 24, 2013 on my second attempt, and gained a valuable resource with the inter-library loan department on my third.

My first visit to Rasmuson I acquired articles from the laser film disks about Livengood activities published within the last decade. Gwen Preston's *Livengood grows to 6.8M oz. gold for Tower Hill* and *New Livengood PEA Doubles Mine Life, Production* both published by The Northern Miner on February 16, 2009 and August 16, 2010 respectively talked of the growing pains ITH had since its purchase of the Livengood Mine in 2006. Between these timeframes Tim Bradner's *Gold Estimates at Livengood Mine Project Keeps Growing* was published in the Alaska Journal of Commerce on June 26, 2011. Mr. Bradner reported on the methods ITH was considering for extracting the gold. I used all three stories in Part I.

From my second visit I used information out of *The Valuation and Mining Feasibility of a Deep Gold Placer near Livengood, Alaska* by Thomas Albanese for some historical background of the Livengood area. I also used Samuel Shao-Sue Chang's, *Water Quality Studies of Placer Mining Operations on Livengood and Harrison Creeks* (1979) for Part III. Chang's studies were done on the water quality of the Livengood area. He concluded that the use of a settling pond system for mine wastewater treatment at the Livengood Mine would eliminate impacts of stream pollution to meet the requirements of the Water Pollution Control Act Amendment of 1972.

The final visit to the Rasmuson library was extremely helpful as I was referred to the inter-library loan department where the staff actually offered to do some of the research for me by trying to find helpful books on my topic. Although great in thought, it felt like cheating to me so I didn't use them for that, but I did ask about obtaining maps and they came through. The printed maps I had then were old, difficult to manipulate when scanning, and hard to read. For a time it seemed like the map-finding process was the hardest part of the research as I would devote hours to searching online for the right one. Yet I kept at it because I needed good visual maps. Google maps were not getting the results I wanted (although I used them until I found other options) and my committee continually encouraged me to find better visuals.

I finally came across the *USGS National Map Viewer* on August 11, 2013. After downloading the software I zoomed in on interior Alaska and searched for Livengood. Then I clicked on the Hydro-NHD button at the top of the map. This showed Livengood Creek and nearby rivers. I was amazed when I discovered I could manipulate the map to highlight the flow of water that drained from the Livengood Creek into the Tolovana River right through Minto Flats and directly past Minto. This was a map I was looking for! It showed that Minto can be affected by Livengood mining activities if the water is polluted.

In another effort to find a better quality roadmap that would show the locations of Fairbanks, Minto and Livengood (that was visible enough to see without too much detail clouding the image) I performed a basic search on Google for interior Alaska maps. Most of the search results were free tourism maps and of no better quality than the Google maps. I kept scrolling and finally found the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM) website. It was here I found a decent quality image depicting the Steese and Elliot Highways that clearly showed the locations of Fairbanks, Livengood and Minto.

At the UAA campus library I had no luck in finding anything useful, but at the Loussac Library I found mining-related books in the Alaska section. One of the first reference books I read and used for Part I was *Rock Poker to Pay Dirt* by Leslie Noyes. It was not only useful for the history it provided about the UAF Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines (now known as the UAF College of Engineering and Mines, and the UAF School of Natural Resource Management and Agricultural Sciences), but included other historic educational pursuits in mining in Alaska such as the BLM Mine Training Program.

Another print source that became important in my research was the Anchorage Daily News. On January 12, 2013 something told me to look in the paper. I scanned through and found on page A-8 the very short article, *Alaska Students Can Take Mining Course* that was reprinted from the Juneau Empire. From this article I searched the program online and printed off the Introduction to Mining Occupations and Operations syllabus for the spring 2013 semester. I contacted the instructor, Mike Bell, on August 15, 2013 and interviewed him over the phone. I explained my project and asked if I could use the information from our conversation for my final product. From this interview I provided details in Part II about the previous success of the program, the program's future goals, and contact information in the hopes that Minto will become interested in utilizing this course to help prepare their high school students for a mining job or career.

As a result of this interesting find, I checked the Anchorage Daily News frequently for more mining-related stories. I was not disappointed to find *Rio Tinto Urged to cut its Links to Pebble* published on the front page on December 21, 2013. I was requested by my committee to look for examples of partnerships in the mining industry. This article about the Pebble Mine's

delay in opening because of a partner pulling out was useful as a comparison of what can happen with ITH at the Livengood Mine if a mining investor (or partner) pulls out.

I increased my searches to the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner website. While reading the article, *Mining Camps Merge to Form the Town of Livengood* by Ray Bonnell I found reference to the book *Livengood: The Last Stampede* by Audrey Parker. Instead of quoting the article directly I used the inter-library loan program from Rasmuson and had the book at my local library within three weeks. It took longer than I expected to arrive, but it held a wealth of information about Livengood's gold mining history and the events that led up to constructing the Steese Highway.

I continued to search for other topics and used the story *Tribes Take on Alcohol & Find Some Success* by Tom Kizzia for the section in Part II about social impacts. This article communicated how Minto deals with their alcohol issues internally as a village rather than use the state courts. This was relevant because of the Minto residents' concern about increase in alcohol if the mine becomes operational. I wanted to expound on this issue in more detail, but needed concrete research rather than using my own personal experience and hearsay.

Other sources for Part II that I used were about public assistance incomes in the villages, barriers to finding and maintaining work, and what a job can mean for self-esteem. I used the U.S. Census Bureau for demographic information, the statistical information from *Evaluating the Challenges to Self-sufficiency Faced by TANF Clients in Alaska* by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Division of Public Assistance, and quoted psychotherapist Elizabeth Lombardo from the USA Today article, *At Work: Job, Self-Esteem Tied Tightly Together*, by Andrea Gannett.

There is a section in Part II concerning mining jobs and salaries. Although eventually successful in contacting an ITH employee (I tried on numerous occasions by phone and email for a year) I was not successful in gaining trust from Rick Solie, the ITH Communications and Government Relations Manager. He was extremely rude to me in our phone conversation on February 17, 2014, and although I obtained some useful insights to how ITH has been working with Minto (from ITH's perspective), after notifying my graduate committee of his reluctance to help we decided that sharing ITH's hiring policies and procedures in the guidebook was not a good idea. I was informed that I had no further requirement to continue my research with ITH directly and was instructed not to contact him again unless in it was in writing.

Instead I looked at how the Pogo and Fort Knox operate for examples of what ITH might do with their employment practices. I found job opportunities listed online for Fort Knox at the Kinross Gold Corporation website. I related the expectations and qualifications of a variety of different mining positions in Part II. I used the CareerMine website to compare out-of-state salaries for a geologist and environmental engineer with the Alaska Department of Labor's *May 2012 Wages in Alaska* report. This required me to perform basic math to calculate the annual estimated salary of some positions from the *Wages in Alaska* report as I assumed different work schedules since I do not know how Livengood will design their work schedule. I thought it would be sufficient to include a standard 40-hour a week, 52 weeks a year estimated annual salary alongside the Pogo work schedule of 11.5 hours per day for two weeks, then a week off, to total about 35 workweeks in the year.

The section Alaska Education Opportunities in Part II shows where to obtain college degrees and vocational opportunities in Alaska to be qualified for the jobs listed previously. After performing a simple online search for mining education in Alaska I went to each school's

website to learn what types of training are offered at each institution. I provided a brief summary about that training to include contact information. Because getting an education to allow me to help my people was so ingrained during my childhood from my father's teachings, I was most passionate about having this information right in the middle of the guidebook, and not as an appendix that would probably rarely be read.

It is my intent that it will be easier for Minto residents to become interested in opportunities if they know what the resources are. I then make it even easier for them to take the next step of contacting that agency by providing the contact information. Because I am aware that many people are not interested, willing, or capable of leaving their hometown to pursue a two-year or four-year college degree, I made a point to include vocational opportunities which take less time and may be more appealing.

I did the same thing with scholarships and student loans in the subsequent section (Paying for School) by providing financial assistance opportunities in brief detail with contact information. I stressed that each have different requirements and deadlines to apply, but that they could be combined to pay for all (or most) of education expenses. I believe this part is equally important as the Alaska Education Opportunities section because I know that a contributing factor of why there are not more students from the rural villages is because they do not know how they will pay for school. Navigating a university and college system is also a deterrent, but I didn't go into detail about that process in the guidebook. (However, I did perform a seminar about this in my undergraduate studies so if UAF is ever looking to hire a person to send to the villages to promote their colleges please refer me!)

All of the financial resources were found online with the exception of the Tanana Chiefs Conference's Council Newsletter article, *2012-2013 Higher Education/Adult Vocational Training Program Overview* that I receive in the mail as a subscriber. The same could be said for Doyon Limited newsletters, but I am now on the email subscription list and do not receive hard copies of the monthly newsletter anymore. Although the Seth-De-Ya-Ah Corporation scholarship will soon be online (and is known in Minto) I included their contact information in case the guidebook is read by a larger audience outside of Minto.

I think the most important resource I have used is the ITH website. When I first visited the website in January of 2013 I signed up for ITH's public announcements to be emailed to me as they happen. At times it seemed like I received too much irrelevant updates about the company that was crowding my inbox, but I checked every one for useful information and I was rewarded for my diligence. When the *Canadian National Instrument 43-101 Technical Report on the Livengood Gold Project Feasibility Study* was completed I knew to look for it on ITH's website. ITH recently announced their new CEO on December 23, 2013 in *International Tower Hill Announces Management Reorganization and Appoints Tom Irwin as Chief Executive Officer*. Had I not subscribed to this option I would probably be using outdated information about ITH in the guidebook. Because this tool helped me to keep updated on ITH's new developments I noted this subscription opportunity in the guidebook to assist Minto residents to stay informed of the changes at ITH and the mine as they happen.

Other very useful information I found on ITH's website is the continually updated corporate presentation. I have read no less than four corporate presentations in the last year. I used their timeline and updated it recently in the guidebook to show the current expectations of ITH actions in the next decade. However, equally important was the fine print located directly

underneath the timeline that states that although ITH expects this timeline to be followed, there is no guarantee under any condition that this will happen. I enlarged that fine print and quoted it in the guidebook because Minto needs to be aware of this. I also quoted the technical cautionary note regarding forward looking statements that ITH emphasizes on their website and put that in the guidebook as Appendix B. I have repeatedly tried to express that the guidebook is about the possibilities of what *may* happen at the Livengood Mine; not what *will* happen.

Having no immediate background in mining procedures I performed a lot of research about this process. For example, according to ITH's *August 2011 Summary Report on the Livengood Project*, "The project configuration assumes a large scale surface mining operation using drill-blast-load-haul mining techniques. Major material handling was assumed to be based on hydraulic excavators with 34 cubic meter buckets and 220 tonne capacity haul trucks." I had a general idea of what these statements meant, but how could I express this in terms that I would be able to understand enough to share with others? I initially searched google for "mine drill-blast-load-haul techniques" and came up with Wikipedia definitions that are not an acceptable resource for graduate work. But Wikipedia led me to other sites where I found pictures of the equipment used in open pit mine operations, and a picture of the Fort Knox open mine pit to use as an example of what the Livengood Mine may eventually look like. I also performed searches for cyanide leaching methods, tailing ponds, open mine pit operations, and much more.

Because my committee stressed using examples from what other Alaska gold mines have done, and are currently doing, I visited Donlin Gold, Fort Knox, and Pogo websites after visiting the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website, which has links to these mines. Most of what I found at each of these gold mining websites dealt with the permitting aspects of the mines. I used examples of what other mines have done, and are doing, in Part III.

The DNR's Office of Project Management and Permitting prepared *Permitting Large Mine Projects in Alaska* in 2012. This wealth of information led me to individually research many of the permits that will be required by ITH before construction commences. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) has the Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) Program, which is established to oversee the permitting issuance and monitoring of the water quality at the mine. The U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service provided details about the Social Impact Statement they conduct, which is similar to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The U.S. Corps of Engineers (Corps) has detailed information about the EIS process on their website and I included that in Part III.

ITH will be required to apply for a long list of permits. I included permit information, requirements, and agency processes for some, but there are so many permits that must be applied to that it would have convoluted the guidebook if I gave comprehensive statements on them all. Instead I listed the permits the ITH Feasibility Study reported they would have to apply for and put it in the guidebook as Appendix D and E for further reference.

I think the most important aspect of the permitting process is the open public comment period which will allow Minto residents to share their concerns and opinions about the Livengood Mine. However, in researching the permits individually I did not find concrete information that I felt I could use about when the public comment periods would be available. I tracked down Jack Dimarchi, the current Large Mine Project Coordinator for DNR, and he was extremely helpful in answering my questions in a telephone interview on February 18, 2014 about the public comment periods for state and federal permitting. I learned that the comment periods for state permits start late at the draft stage of the permit prior to issuance, whereas the

federal permitting agency (in this case the Corps) has their open comment period at the beginning so that they know what to focus on in the EIS. Mr. Dimarchi told me how long comment periods were opened for (usually 30 days), how they advertise the open public comment period in three publications (and an additional one online), and how many times they advertise these notices (twice during the open public comment period). Mr. Dimarchi even offered to come to Minto to do a presentation of the permit process in more detail. I put that statement in the guidebook with Mr. Dimarchi's contact information so that Minto may utilize this opportunity and obtain more details about ITH permitting at the Livengood Mine.

In summation, this has been a trying journey to obtain my Master's Degree in Rural Development from UAF. Would I do it again? At this time (although I still oftentimes think "NO!") I cannot honestly say. What will be the deciding factor for me will not become apparent until I get feedback from Minto residents about the guidebook and how helpful it was to them (if at all), and if I can obtain a prodigious career with this degree.

What I do know for an absolute certainty is that when I got a new graduate committee that was proactive, continually supportive, and interested in my project it made the difference between failure and success. At every step of the way my new graduate committee was cheering me on and supporting me through my doubts and hesitations. I wanted to quit more often than I wanted this degree by the time they came on board (which is sad really, but that was my experience) and there is no way I would be graduating without them!

Equally important is being surrounded by friends and family who listened to my doubts, hesitations and struggles and still supported me in finishing this degree. My very close friend, Karla Booth, reminded me that I am not just doing this for me. She told me that there were few

Alaska Natives who have graduate degrees and that I should finish it to show others it can be done. (I haven't looked up the statistics to obtain the facts of her statement, but she works at UAA in an Alaska Native cultural setting and is, in my opinion, qualified to make that statement) I hope it is true, because then that means I am helping others succeed in their educational goals, and that is very important to me.

All the research practice I shared in this paper was learned from years of attending college courses, yet I account the real reason to my success from the encouragement I have received from family, friends, and my graduate committee. If you are in a spot where you want to quit (come to find out this is common when working on a graduate degree) take a break, visit with a friend and share your concerns and doubts with others. If it is meant to be it will fall into place. If not, than I am sure you will be okay where you are at or with what you decide to do. Good luck with your endeavors, and if you should ever like to discuss my experience with me in person, I should be happy and willing to assist you.

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