

MEMO TO: Paul Reichardt, Provost, University of Alaska Fairbanks

THROUGH: Bernice M. Joseph, Executive Dean, CRCD

FROM: Clara Johnson, Director, Interior Aleutians Campus

RE: Five-Year Review
Tribal Management Degree Program

DATE: August 16, 2006

Given the Tribal Management program's non-traditional student body, I will ask the TM faculty to examine the Fall start date to evaluate if a later date will be more acceptable. However, an important factor driving the Fall start date is financial aid, which dictates a more formal, semester-based approach. More and more, TM students are declaring themselves to be degree-seeking and applying for Pell grants and other scholarships.

The TM program has been exploring ways to streamline the core with several clearly defined emphasis areas that our partners have been slowly evolving. The program faculty will be making this next year a revised, more clearly laid out program.

In addition, IAC has other staff that assists faculty and coordinators with travel, course approvals, adjunct hires and registration processes. The support staff has discussed how to better assist the TM program with their logistic needs and I will encourage them to implement some of their ideas in the coming year.

Funding streams for TM are federally-driven and that is not likely to change. The Title III funding will decrease, but the utility management will bring in new revenues. We are discussing with other campuses in the College of Rural and Community Development to use the revenue IAC brings in and reallocates some existing funds to fund a permanent tenure-track position under Fund 1 in FY08.

Distance delivery TM courses will continue to be challenges until some solution to telecommunication disparities for rural Alaska are resolved. In the meanwhile we are being creative by creating new curriculum that is CD/DVD-based that will accompany TM courses. These supplements will enhance the audio courses. In addition, the tribal partners have been generous in funding student travel which helps with support of the students cohorts. It is IAC's goal of FY06-07 to seek additional grants to fund the TM program, particularly for student travel.

A TM capstone course that captures a survey of student employment goals and needs, employer needs and service learning component will be explored by TM faculty this coming year. It can be expected to be received and approved in the Spring 07 semester.

Tribal Management Program Review

Introduction:

Pursuant to the Provost's guidelines for Program Review, a faculty committee was formed to assess the Tribal Management Program. The committee reviewed the documents prepared by the program faculty and met with Kevin Illingworth, who acts as part of the committee and as head of the Tribal Management Program. Based upon this review, the committee produced this report. The report discusses the goals of the program and the challenges faced by the faculty in delivering it. It then highlights strengths and weaknesses of the program, and lists a few recommendations for minor changes.

Program Goals:

The goals of the Tribal Management Program are to provide quality academic education and technical and professional skills throughout the state that targets the employment needs of tribal governments and local governments. The program provides entry level skills for positions in the tribal governments, local governments, and other organizations. Courses are offered via distance delivery and in rural "on-site" locations along with a cohort of students from the region. This allows students to work towards their degree while maintaining their village life.

The 30 credit Certificate and the 60 credit Associate of Applied Science degree through the College of Rural Alaska are specifically designed for rural areas with components that are culturally relevant to tribal governments in Alaska. In developing the program, goals included the use of traditional ways of learning and utilizing the strengths of Native people and building upon those strengths.

Although there has been no formal assessment of community need as related to this program, there have been many organizations, such as Tanana Chiefs Conference, that have focused on community needs assessments of the rural areas. The need for building skills and expertise without taking people out of the villages has been an issue voiced by the villages at conferences and meetings throughout the state.

Tribal Management courses have successfully focused on the core values and strengths of the rural villages while providing competent and skilled employees for rural

and tribal governments and other organizations. Another goal of the Tribal Management Program is to allow the students to remain in their village and stay connected to family and culture. These goals are beginning to be met through the application of distance delivery and cohort sessions.

Program Challenges:

The Tribal Management program faces a number of challenges ranging from the day to day issues faced by the faculty in delivering instruction to the challenges students face in fitting coursework into their subsistence lifestyle. The following paragraphs discuss these challenges.

Challenges to Faculty

The major challenges to faculty in the Tribal Management Program include:

- Non-traditional student base
- Lack of support staff
- No tenure-track option available
- Issues around distance delivery (see “Challenges to Course Delivery” below.)

Non-traditional student base

It is not necessarily harder to teach non-traditional students (some show considerably better attention levels and have a better work ethic than young on-campus students) but it can be a challenge to make one set of program rules work for all the varied ways people can be non-traditional. These would include varying levels of preparation for college-level classes, over commitment by the busy people who want to study management and are presently professionally engaged in it, and the usual unpredictability of life for people with families and jobs. Professors have to be willing to teach as and when students can make use of their teaching, which sometimes requires a great deal of adaptation of what they know how to do in classrooms. Distance teaching of non-traditional students is not efficient. Therefore, instructors have to budget extra time to make it work.

Lack of support staff

The program has no support staff, which means that the instructors end up doing all the administrative work as well as their own instructional work. Since administrative problems can cause larger difficulties for students than even academic ones do, there are good reasons to chase down the difficulties and take care of them. This takes a large amount of time that could otherwise be devoted to instructional activities.

No tenure-track option available

The Tribal Management Program has the potential to become a really useful avenue for advancement for the talented people who move up through village administration. To do this, however, it will be necessary to solidify it as a program, which means creating tenure-track positions. With no tenure-track positions available, the program will not be able to keep people (they will always be tempted away by more established positions elsewhere) and will certainly not attract the best applicants. The innovative and challenging nature of the program will attract the interest of excellent candidates much more effectively if even one tenure-track position is made available.

Challenges to distance delivery

Instructors dealing with distance classes really have a very different set of challenges than those working only in classrooms, or even those working in classrooms with audio call-ins. Given the present situation, with phone service extremely uneven across the state, adaptation of classes for online delivery is not practical. This means that classes have to be thought of as non-visual, in an era when classroom classes are becoming increasingly multi-modal. Please see “Challenges to Course Delivery” below.

Challenges to Students

Two major challenges to students in the Tribal Management Program include the fall semester start date and the requirement to pay up front for classes.

The fall semester start date is particularly problematic for any students who are involved in subsistence activities, which are demanding in August. Because registration seems to take quite some time for rural students, they often end up being registered late and paying late, which can severely impact what they get out of a fall class. This contributes to a pattern of taking incompletes and eventually losing track of what the class was supposed to be about. This also becomes a challenge for faculty, who may

find it more difficult to evaluate progress by students who end up on the in-and-out plan. Obviously, this is a pattern that affects all programs aimed at rural students, not just the Tribal Management Program, and it would be advisable for the University to think about ways to ameliorate it. Could fall tuition wait until Dividend Day?

The requirement to pay up front for classes is related to the start date issue, because the late summer rush can compound the confusion of attempting to relate to Registration and the Cashier's office. Obviously, people on a budget have a harder time coming up with the lump sum required as tuition.

Challenges to Course Delivery

Audio Delivery (default distance delivery, not preferred)

Description: Students register for courses through their rural campus and the courses are open to students state-wide.

Advantages: Students can participate from any site that has good telephone service, and need not all be in one place. Because Tribal Management students are expected to be highly involved in the local affairs of their communities, this classic form of distance delivery would seem to be well suited to the program.

Challenges:

The second and perhaps equally important challenge to audio delivery is its tendency to isolate students, not bringing them into a cohort. Students working in isolation with only audio classes to bring them together do not get as much benefit from being in a class; it is not as easy to learn from the work of other students or to feel part of a group. Adaptations to this model have not really addressed this problem, which the Tribal Management Program has better approached by shifting delivery to an Onsite Intensive model.

Adaptations: Because of these connection problems, which affect computerized delivery even more than audio delivery, the Tribal Management Program has concentrated on offering courses through audio delivery in order to get the courses out to as many potential students as possible, even those unable to travel to an intensive course. Audio courses are recorded so that classes can be made up by students who have to travel or otherwise interrupt their participation.

What could help: The Tribal Management Program cannot solve all the problems with telephonic connection in rural Alaska. Anything that does resolve some of these problems will certainly help, however. The Program seems to be doing all it can to make a somewhat antiquated distance delivery system work.

On-site Intensive (presently preferred)

Description: These courses are delivered on-site in rural Alaska. The instructor travels out to the rural village and teaches the course in a usually 1-2 week intensive format. Students come back together for a few audio courses (how many depends on needs), where students present project, and give oral presentations on papers they wrote, as well as giving an opportunity to review class materials.

Advantages: This "cohort" method of delivery is preferred, as instructor and students try to build a group within a community (or closely related communities) that takes the course and works towards their degree together. We have found this cohort model to be very successful in providing support for the students has the progress through the program. This model was adapted from the successful RHS program.

Challenges and adaptations: The major adaptation the program has made to this method is to allow for audio follow-ups to the intensive courses. It is beneficial to students to bring them back together and re-focus after they have returned home and had some time for the course materials to sink in.

What could help: As with audio delivery, anything that improves telephonic connection will help with followup. The better the telephone access for distance students, the more innovations in delivery can be added. It would also seem desirable for students to have continued access to course materials. One suggestion (which would also feed the adaptation of courses to online delivery, when that becomes more feasible, and would be equally applicable to the audio delivery model) would be to have a written version of all the lectures, along with recordings of classes, made available on a CD at the time the student leaves the class. If these materials were created in HTML, uploading them to a website for online delivery would be a simpler process when that becomes a feasible method of delivery.

Note on Online Delivery:

Due primarily to limited telecommunications infrastructure throughout rural Alaska, the Tribal Management Program has been limited to primarily audio delivery with very little, mostly supplemental, computer delivery of materials. Even Blackboard has been unavailable, since during any given semester, less than half of the students have regular internet access (primarily only at dial-up speeds). This access varies greatly by region, as some Native Organizations have invested heavily in telecommunications technology, while through much of the state access is spotty at best, and available primarily through the k-12 school in the village (which does not always allow public access, and even when they do it is often restricted).

Compounding the basic connection difficulties mentioned above is the difficulty some rural students encounter in communicating with Registration and the Cashier's Office so that their internet access is not interrupted (Blackboard, for example, requires a UAF ID). These problems are the same ones that limit audio delivery, and would seem to affect not only Tribal Management, but all UA programs that attempt to reach students with reliable distance delivery.

It would seem advisable for those who have worked so hard to develop and teach the use of Blackboard and other computer-delivery systems to approach these infrastructure problems. It will be of little use to continue to make fancier and fancier interfaces, and to spend large amounts of time adapting classes for new modalities, if there is no way to make connections. This is not really a problem the Tribal Management Program should have to solve. Nor is the administrative issue, which also affects all distance students and could be approached institution-wide.

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The Tribal Management program, while young, has several strengths and a few weaknesses, most of which are illustrated in the preceding sections. A few specific strengths and weaknesses are presented in the following along with recommendations for resolving some of the weaknesses.

Strengths:

Meeting community need:

The program clearly meets a need in the rural community. As discussed above, the overall goal of the Tribal Management Program is to provide the education required for entry-level positions in tribal institutions, local governments, and other organizations in rural Alaska. While not formally documented, assessments by rural community organizations have demonstrated the need for building expertise in the villages. Meeting this need is a clear strength of the program.

The 30-credit certificate program and the 60-credit associates program were developed with a statewide team of advisors. This insured that the program is culturally relevant, and meets the specific needs of rural government employers.

Program courses directly address program goals:

Tribal Management courses have two areas of concentration, Tribal Management, and Utility Management. Tribal Management concentration courses cover three specific areas: Tribal Government (TM 101 and TM201), Tribal Finance (TM 105 and TM 205), and Tribal Courts (TM 110), with introductory and advanced courses. Utility Management concentration courses cover Organizational Management (TM 131), Operations Management (TM 132), Financial Management (TM 134), and Personnel Management (TM 136). The course descriptions show a practical approach with a focus on concepts and student experience. The courses appear to directly address the goals of the program.

Effort to overcome reliance on weak infrastructure:

As discussed in the section on challenges faced by the program, limitations of the telecommunications infrastructure throughout rural Alaska are significant. The willingness of the faculty to work to overcome these limitations is a strength.

Dedicated Faculty:

The faculty is clearly dedicated to the program's success. Kevin Illingworth shows a strong interest in the success of the program and the success of his students. He exemplifies the dedication necessary to deliver this program in difficult circumstances.

Weaknesses:

While the program has significant strengths, there are a few weaknesses that could be addressed by the University, or by the program.

No tenure-track faculty:

The program is grant funded, limiting it to term-funded faculty. As all of the funding for the program is derived from department of education grants, the University will not hire faculty in tenure track positions. Hence the positions within the program are term positions. Each year the faculty are hired at the beginning of the academic year and dismissed its end. This is a significant weakness as it gives no security to the faculty, and will lead to instability of the program.

Confusing degree requirements:

The program degree requirements are confusing and could be made more clear. The course requirements listed in the catalog require students to select courses from a variety of categories. As the description is written, it is not clear if the students are required to concentrate their courses in a single area, or if they are allowed some breadth in their choices. A minor modification to the catalog description would correct this weakness.

Limited Outcomes Assessment Plan:

The program's Outcomes Assessment Plan appears to consist of determining if students find employment, or continue with their education. This is rather limited and does not necessarily assess the success of the program in achieving its goals. Further, the assessment plan lacks a feedback mechanism for improvement of the program. There does not appear to be any trip-wire metrics in the assessment plan that would dictate actions if the program goals are not achieved.

Lack of support staff:

No support staff is associated with the program, which requires the faculty to perform all of the tasks associated with delivery of the classes. This is a clear weakness that could be addressed by the university. Funding a half time administrative position would significantly improve the program.

Recommendations –

The committee reviewing the Tribal Management Program unanimously recommends that the program be retained. We recommend only minor changes to address weaknesses we have identified.