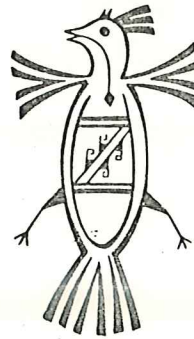


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Increasing the College Success of Alaska Natives

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THE IMPORTANCE of increasing the college success of Indian and Eskimo students has led to the creation of many types of special higher education programs at different colleges.¹ In 1969, the University of Alaska at Fairbanks established a Special Services Program which provided counseling and student assistance services for Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut students. In 1970, this program was expanded to include special transitional college courses such as developmental reading. An especially promising curriculum innovation was teaching Special Services English courses in combination with another college subject such as biology. Special Services instructors attended the other courses with students and taught fundamental skills such as distinguishing between main points and detail in a lecture. By 1971, such special courses at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks were well-developed.

The major purpose of this study² is to examine any changes in the college success of Alaska Native students at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks which may have resulted from this Special Services Program. Did the college success of Alaska Native students increase during the years the Special Services Program was established and became well-developed?

A secondary purpose of this study is to examine the rates of college success at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks of rural Alaska Native students from different types of high school environments. The question of the most desirable type of high school program for rural Native students has been much debated. These students presently attend white majority high schools (through a boarding program); Native majority high schools (through a boarding program or living at home), and public and parochial boarding schools. According to one theory, white majority schools have the greatest educational benefits for Native children because a positive "social context" effect occurs. The educational climate of the school is oriented toward the higher achieving majority and the minority group child is influenced by the high academic standards of his teachers and classmates.

According to an opposing theory, Native majority schools have greater educational advantages for Native children because a "big frog in a little pond" effect occurs. A minority group child in a school where other students have lower achievement levels will rank higher relative to his class and develop a self-concept of himself as a higher achiever.³

Boarding schools are "total institutions" and, as such, have great potential power for influencing students either in positive or negative directions. Observation of public boarding schools in Alaska suggests that predominantly negative socialization occurs in these schools due to lack of meaningful personal contact with adults in the dormitory and learning of attitudes and values primarily from equally confused peers. Observation of parochial boarding schools in Alaska suggests that predominantly positive socialization occurs through the parochial school's emphasis on character development and on creating a community with personal relationships between students and staff. Since parochial boarding schools can be selective where public boarding schools cannot, parochial boarding schools tend to admit students who share the school's value orientations and thus mobilize peer group support for the school's goals.

On the basis of these opposing theories and ethnographic study, we predicted that parochial boarding school students would have the highest rate of college success at the University of Alaska and public boarding school students the lowest. No prior predictions were made concerning differential success of students from Native majority and white majority high schools.

Methods

The college students studies included all Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut students (one quarter or more Native blood) who enrolled for the first time in an academic program at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks from 1968 to 1972. Information was collected on high school, birthplace, American College Testing program (ACT) scores, Special Services, courses taken, college credits, and college grade point average.

A student was designated a "success" in college if he earned a 2.00 (passing) or better grade point average while averaging 7.5 or more credits completed (less than half the number needed to advance in class standing) during his first enrollment or by the spring of 1972, when data collection concluded. Students who dropped out in good standing would be counted as successful by this criterion. Such a measure of success was more desirable than simple dropout because many college students take a semester off but later return to college.

Results and Discussion

The college success at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks of Native students with low ACT scores significantly increased from 1968-69 (prior to Special Services Program) through the years when program services were made available ($x^2 = 8.07$, $df = 3$, $p < .05$). Significant increases in college success also occurred for Native students with medium ACT scores ($x^2 = 4.97$, $df = 3$, $p < .05$). The rate of success of Native students with high ACT scores, however, remained at almost the same level, 50%, over the four years.

It is possible that this increase in college success is due to factors other than the Special Services Program. However, a comparison of the rates of college success in 1971-72 of Native students who took advantage of Special Services courses compared with those who did not provides support for the inference that the increased success was due at least in part to the special courses. The rate of success of Native college students who took three or more credits in special courses in addition to credits in the regular college program, was 54 percent (25/41), while the rate of success of those with no credits in these courses was 25 percent ($x^2 = 7.27$, $df = 1$, $p < .005$). These courses made the most difference for students with low ACT scores where 8 percent (1/12) succeeded if they did not take these courses and 59 percent (10/17) succeeded with special courses ($x^2 = 6.24$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$).

The college success of rural Native students at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks was strongly related to the type of high school attended ($x^2 = 14.18$, $df = 3$, $p < .005$). Students from parochial boarding schools were significantly more successful than students from public boarding schools ($x^2 = 12.75$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), students from public Native majority schools ($x^2 = 3.13$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), and rural students from public white majority schools ($x^2 = 2.93$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Public boarding school students were the least successful. They succeeded significantly less than students from public Native majority schools ($x^2 = 4.09$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and less than rural students from public white majority schools, although the difference did not reach statistical significance. There was no significant difference in the rate of college success of rural students from public Native majority and public white majority high schools.

The greater college success of rural Native students from certain types of high schools at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks was not due to differences in levels of academic preparation. There were no significant differences in the ACT scores at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks of rural Native students from any of the four

TABLE 1

**First Enrollment Success Rates* for Alaska Native Students
Enrolled for First Time in Higher Education at
University of Alaska, Fairbanks: by ACT Group**

ACT GROUP	1968-69		1969-70		1970-71		1971-72	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
High (21+)	5/10	50%	3/8	38%	5/10	50%	6/12	50%
Medium (11-20)	10/41	24%	8/40	20%	24/67	36%	21/56	38%
Low (0-10)	0/7	0%	1/14	7%	1/7	14%	11/29	38%
All students	15/61	25%	15/73	21%	31/89	35%	40/105	38%

*Success was determined by achievement of a college G.P.A. of 2.00 or better while averaging 7.5 or more completed credits per session completed during first enrollment.

TABLE 2

**First Enrollment Success Rates for Alaska Native Students
Enrolled at the University of Alaska by Type of
High School and ACT Scores**

School Type	Low ACT		Medium ACT		High ACT		Total	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Public Native Majority	3/21	14%	21/58	36%	4/9	44%	28/88	32%
Public White Majority (no dormitory)								
Rural Background	2/7	29%	6/25	24%	2/4	50%	10/36	28%
Urban Background	1/6	17%	16/37	43%	9/16	56%	26/59	44%
Public Boarding School	0/9	0%	9/44	20%	0/5	0%	9/58	16%
Private Boarding School	7/12	58%	15/37	41%	4/5	80%	26/54	48%

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types of high schools. While we have only ethnographic information on this issue, it is possible that the greater college success of parochial boarding school students is due to such characteristics as a sense of direction and persistence, qualities which these schools are attempting to enhance in students. Public boarding school students may succeed more frequently in a different type of college environment than the large, impersonal University of Alaska at Fairbanks. Public boarding school students succeed as frequently at Alaska's two small private colleges as graduates from other types of high schools.⁴ This result raises the possibility that the socialization occurring in public boarding schools makes graduates more in need of a more personal, supportive college environment.

Conclusion

The college success of Alaska Natives at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks has markedly increased for Natives with low and medium levels of academic preparation due in large part to the Special Services Program with its emphasis on transitional courses. While this increase in initial success is encouraging, it is important to follow the progress of these students in later college years and determine if the courses have indeed succeeded in preparing students for later college work, when special courses are no longer available.

The substantial college success of rural Native students from parochial as opposed to public boarding schools, even when their levels of academic preparation are similar, raises the possibility that the character development emphasis of parochial boarding schools is of great educational importance. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the success of the parochial boarding schools in Alaska is due entirely to selection of more motivated rural students. However, our ethnographic studies suggest that this is not entirely the case and that public schools can learn much from the educational goals and climate of fine parochial boarding schools.

References

- ¹R. O. Clark, "Higher Education Programs for American Indians," *Journal of American Indian Education*, 1972, 12, 16-19.
- ²The present study is based on a more comprehensive review of changes in entrance and success of Alaska Natives in Alaska Higher Education. See K. Kohout and J. Kleinfeld, *Alaska Natives in Alaska Higher Education*, Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, 1974 (forthcoming).
- ³More detailed expositions of both theories may be found in *Ibid.*, and in C. Jencks, *Inequality*. New York: Basic Books, 1972.
- ⁴See Kohout and Kleinfeld, *op. cit.*

