Strengthening Diversity in the Alaska LEND Program:

Engaging Faculty from Rural Alaska

Virginia Miller, DrPH, MS, MPH and Karen Ward, EdD

AUCD

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is a national network of interdisciplinary centers advancing policy and practice for and with individuals with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and communities. LEND Programs are members of the AUCD network. The AUCD values diversity in all of its work and prioritizes increasing diversity at all levels within the University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and LEND networks.

The AUCD recently launched a Diversity and Inclusion toolkit to:
1. Enhance diversity, inclusion and cultural and linguistic competence;
2. Cultivate partnerships;
3. Respond to increasingly diverse communities across the country; and
4. Develop strategies for continuing efforts to better serve diverse populations.

The toolkit includes a workforce component that aims to:
1. Hire and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce of staff and faculty;
2. Develop and nurture partnerships with organizations representing or affiliated with diverse communities;
3. Establish mentorship programs to support professional development of staff, faculty and LEND fellows and
4. Recruit and retain a diverse fellow pool.

Diversity in AK LEND

While cultural and linguistic diversity is woven throughout the curriculum, the recruitment of faculty and fellows from underrepresented groups is essential to meet the Program priority. To address the challenge of broadening the Program diversity, a faculty member from a rural community was recruited to engage in all aspects of the Program.

This faculty member champions the following activities:
1. Infusing the rural and cultural context into discussions with fellows and faculty;
2. Leading the inclusion of cultural issues in faculty discussions and curriculum planning;
3. Ensuring the integration of cultural and linguistic competence into weekly seminars;
4. Developing and supporting strategies to improve recruit and retention of cultural diverse faculty and fellows.

Program Impact

Since the Alaska LEND began in 2011, 79 LEND fellows successfully completed the program.

Future Directions

To sustain the momentum of current efforts and to cultivate further robust partnerships with diverse communities, the LEND Program will continue to translate the AUCD Diversity and Inclusion toolkit objectives to an Alaskan context. Celebrating the successes of the faculty member’s efforts at all levels of the Program and sharing our progress with community partners will strengthen diversity in the future workforce serving Alaskan families.