PROPOSAL COVERSHEET

TITLE:
Creating Valuable Linkages between the University of Alaska Anchorage and Native Community Elders: Three Projects increasing Intergenerational Participatory Research between Alaska Native Elders and College Students.

CATEGORY
Creating Valuable Linkages between the University and the Community

LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE:  Intermediate

TIME FORMAT REQUESTED:  90-minutes

PRESENTERS
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**ABSTRACT**
Level of Experience: Intermediate

**Creating Valuable Linkages between the University of Alaska Anchorage and Native Community Elders: Three Projects increasing Intergenerational Participatory Research between Alaska Native Elders and College Students.**

The National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders was established on the University of Alaska Anchorage campus in the fall of 2003 for the purpose of listening to Native Elders concerning their desires in planning for long term health care. University staff spent > 200 days traveling and recording qualitative data from the five major Native population groups in Alaska. From this experience, several programs evolved to prepare students to respond to this new arena of cross-cultural research in the health and well-being of older Native adults.

This presentation will present information on three programs: 1) Community Research Methods Respectful of Native Elders Responds to Elder Needs and Spawn Student Involvement in Community Grant for Elder Services: Lessons Learned; 2) Rural Immersion as an Instructional Method in Training Students to Work within Alaska Native Communities; 3) Student Involvement in the Development of Processes to Analyze Qualitative Data collected in a Native tongue: The Students into Psychology Program.
This session should particularly benefits those who train students in field research methods or those working with minority populations using the participatory research model.

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PRESENTATION SUMMARY


Kanaglak (George P. Charles), Director, University of Alaska, National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders (NRC). Anchorage, Alaska.

Course assignments in two University of Alaska graduate courses taught by Dr. (Kanaqlak) George P. Charles as part of the Rural Development program required students to complete a health survey of Elders in their communities. Most of the courses in the Rural Development program are taught via teleconference thus, allowing young Native leaders to remain in their communities while completing a college degree. In gaining experience with Elder-sensitive research methods, students found that protocols with Alaska Tribal Elders differed from community to community. Methods, questions and survey topics were modified slightly based on the cultural heritage within each community, even though the tool had been used with other Native populations in the US and in Alaska. What started as an exercise in quantitative research provided the opportunity for Elders to express their concern and their desires for a community center in one community. Based on the qualitative data, collectively, the students assisted the community in writing a grant proposal to obtain a senior center. Only individuals embedded in these communities could guide the research process.
This case study is an excellent example of participatory research where researchers respond to community needs. The role of the researcher becomes that of facilitation of community defined problems. In this application, the participatory research model supports traditional values of Native communities, and supports cultural practices of youth listening to their Elders for guidance and instruction. Faculty must be mindful that in working in Native and in other minority communities, that the desires of the local community are primary and be flexible to respond to serendipitous opportunities.

2. Rural Immersion as an Instructional Method in Training Students to Work with Alaska Native Communities


During the summer of 2004, a group of six students trained with two Native faculty mentors at the invitation of University of Alaska Anchorage Master’s in Public Health Program. The purpose of this course was to ground young researchers’ aspirations in the pragmatics of collaborative, community-based research consistent with the National Science Foundation’s Principles of Conduct of Research in the Arctic. In Phase II students accompanied researchers to villages to observe first-hand the basics of participatory research with Alaska Native communities.

Beginning researchers in rural health often find their most daunting obstacles to be not a lack of questions, hypotheses, interests or ability, but rather the more pragmatic concerns of logistics in remote areas, and especially gaining the trust and respect of the communities in which invitations to do research, have been extended. Unfortunately, young investigators often remain unacquainted with these considerations until they do
something wrong. As a result, they come to frame the field research process as a succession of problems rather than a fluid and collaborative endeavor.

By increasing student’s skills in intercultural communication, and by placing students in collaborative relationships with actual rural residents and Native elders at early stages in their graduate training, the project aims to avoid common missteps and to soften the learning curve prior to the initiation of thesis level projects.

3. **Student Involvement in the Development of Processes to Analyze Qualitative Data collected in a Native tongue: The Students into Psychology Program.**

Graves K, University of Alaska Anchorage, Department of Psychology; Shavings L. University of Alaska, National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders (NRC). Anchorage, Alaska.

The National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders collected data during the spring and summer of 2004 in 17 Alaska communities by providing the opportunity to listen to Alaska Native elders voice their needs and requirements for culturally congruent health care. The communities selected to were geographically and culturally diverse. The elder participants in this project were primarily drawn from tribal organizations and senior centers.

Short translations into English proved to lack cultural fullness when compared to translation by students from the survey communities and who were fluent in the Native tongue. The project team evolved to involve students from the Alaska Native into Psychology Program (ANPsych) at the University of Alaska Anchorage who were of Alaska Native and American Indian heritage. The primary mission of ANPsych is to train Alaska Native and American Indian students from high school through advanced
psychology degrees, in order to address the debilitating shortage of behavioral health workforce in Alaska.

The student involvement grounded the work in a rich understanding of the worldview of the elders. Students assisted with the translation, coding and analysis of the data. Frequently, we overheard students talking with family and elders from their communities about the data, adding validation to the translations and to the interpretation. Cultural consultants from each of the major Alaska Native regions where data were collected provided another level of validation as they read and advised the team on broader nuances that emerged from the data.

The data from the various cultural regions was analyzed together and separately. The overview of all regions combined reflects the clear messages from all of the Alaska Native elders from across the state. The separate analysis of the Yupik, Alutiiq, Aleut, Inupiat, Athabascan and Southeastern (Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida) ethnic groups reflects the distinct variations among the cultural groups.

While this report will be used to empower Native communities to incorporate traditional and contemporary health practices into their health care systems, it also empowered students and provided recognition for language skills giving them “expert” status on campus, often a challenge in a university setting. This experience contributed to capacity building and capability of students involved in the ANPSY program. It contributed a better understanding as they bridge the dynamics of cultural differences.
Kanaqlak, George P. Charles, Ph.D.
Kanaqlak (George P. Charles) is a Yupiaq Eskimo from Southwestern Alaska, originally from Nelson Island. He received an Associates degree in electronics technology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, his BA in management from Alaska Pacific University and his Masters and Ph.D from the University of California Santa Barbara from the Department of Religious Studies with emphasis in Native American Religious Traditions. His dissertation title is Yuuyaraq (The Way of the Human Being): The Transmission of Religious & Cultural Knowledge by a Contemporary Yupiaq Family. He is also a Vietnam Veteran and is one of the founding members of the Alaska Native Veterans Association in Fairbanks, Alaska. Currently he is the Director of the National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders.

Jim LaBelle, BS
Jim LaBelle is of Inupiat heritage and traditions, and is an MA student in the Rural Development Program at UAF. He is also Adjunct Faculty at UAA in addition to his responsibilities at the National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders. Mr. LaBelle has experience in the management of several Alaska Native corporations as well as experience with the State of Alaska and the Alaska Federation of Natives Wellness Program. He co-facilitates the Conference on Elders meetings and is spearheading the Center’s efforts in helping communities deal with the Prevention of Mistreatment, Violence and Exploitation of Elders. He recently assisted in the coordination of the Healing Convocation for the Wrangell Institute boarding school experience. He is a recognized educator, and is well connected with many Alaska Native organizations.

Janell Smith, MS, RD
Ms. Smith is a Ph.D. Candidate in Dietetics and Nutrition from Florida International University. She has lived in Alaska for 10 years and has worked in a variety of Native communities through her positions with the State of Alaska WIC program and the University of Alaska Anchorage Institute for Circumpolar Health. She has expertise in her fields as well as strong ties to Alaska Native communities. She is an adjunct professor with the Masters in Public Health Program teaching courses in Circumpolar Health Issues and Field Methodology. Her dissertation work in the value of traditional foods to the well-being of Native Elders supports the mission of the National Resource Center for American Indians, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders.
Kathy Graves, Ph.D.

Dr. Graves is Sugbaq/Athabascan from Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula. Kathy has been working on the identification of Alaska Native Elder values, a project sponsored by federally funded National Resource Center for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian Elders. Her work has received a wide distribution and approval among the Alaska Native elder community. She is thorough and sensitive in her analysis, and clear and compelling in her presentations of her findings.

She is an Alaska Native woman, a skilled researcher, and she is held in high regard by the Alaska Native elder community. This gives her an opportunity to better understand the values that should guide the provision of services to Alaska Native elders.

Louise Shavings, BS

Ms. Shavings is Cup’ig from Nunivat Island, off the coast of southwestern Alaska. Louise Shavings is a Project Director and research assistant at the University of Alaska Anchorage’s National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders. Her specialty area has evolved in assisting researchers in the transcription and translation of Yupik and Cupik data into English, and then back-translating, disseminating and presenting community data to Native communities. Currently she is working on an NIH grant on Diabetes and Weight and translating the findings from English into Cupik. She received her associate’s degree in human services and a bachelor’s degree in social work from the University of Alaska Anchorage, and is currently pursuing her master’s degree in social work. Throughout her degree process, she has been involved in the treatment and prevention of substance abuse for seven years; five years as a substance abuse counselor and three years working as a field researcher for the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies. She has assisted in presentations on numerous culturally based treatment modalities for Alaska Natives and is a frequent speaker on Alaska Native cultures.