

## **Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development (DANSRD)**

### **SLOA Report: 2012**

#### **Introduction:**

During the 2011/12 academic year, DANSRD has reviewed and updated its SLOA plan for all three of its programs, the Alaska Native Studies BA, the Rural Development BA and the Rural Development MA. Some objectives such as developing and strengthening technical writing skills are emphasized across all three programs while others are more specific. This report will first address general objectives and then provide a detailed breakdown for each program.

#### **Department Profile:**

DANSRD delivers all of its courses by distance as well as in the classroom so the program faces some unique challenges. Often students are located in remote Alaska villages far from the road system, where they have limited access to technology and/or the training to use it. While technology access is slowly improving, it is a long way from catching up to the kinds of services that students resident on college campuses across the country have come to expect. To best serve our distance students, DANSRD delivers course materials primarily via audio conference and uses the Blackboard system as a back-up to provide course reading materials, student discussion forums, structured e-mail correspondence and online grading. One or two undergraduate courses include the use of "E-live," and the department offers two asynchronous online RD courses via the Blackboard. In response to a 2011 survey of students on technology preferences, we are planning to increase asynchronous course offerings by adding two more courses (one each for RD and ANS) during AY 2013/14.

DANSRD also offers face-to-face seminars where students spend a week together for intensive all-day instruction and have the opportunity to meet each other as well as faculty, and listen to expert guests lecture in person. Some of these seminars involve travel to other countries, providing students with learning opportunities they could not otherwise access. Recent destinations have included Copenhagen, Denmark for the U.N. COP 15 meetings in 2009, and Yukon Territory in 2012. A travel seminar in partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland is tentatively planned for AY 2012/13. These seminars allow students to use leadership skills and provide faculty with a "hands on" opportunity to evaluate individual student progress in areas such as cross-cultural communication and the application of logistical skills useful in international contexts.

#### **General Learning Objectives:**

Faculty concerns over student writing skills identified during AY 2010/11 were responded to in several ways. As part of the regular face-to-face meetings that take place in DANSRD several experts were invited to address faculty and assist them with ideas for improving writing outcomes. Instructors made changes to syllabi, warning students ahead of time of what kind of writing quality was expected and advising them of the grading penalties for sub-standard submissions. As faculty implemented these

ideas during the fall 2011 and spring 2012 semesters they observed marked improvement in student writing. All faculty noted that by the end of the spring 2012 semester student writing had improved across the board for all but a small minority of students and that they were now able to concentrate on grading for content and ideas rather than just simple writing mechanics.

To better measure student progress we are now developing portfolios for each student that include entry and exit writing samples, dates of course completion with grade, impressionistic histories of the student to be completed by faculty each semester and information on awards and service activities. These portfolios will help us to better track student progress by providing a bird's eye view of each student and alert us to any problems a student may be experiencing.

As part of our investigation of student learning outcomes we supervised research projects by two senior undergraduates in the RD program into the effectiveness of the program itself and the courses that students take as part of the RD core and concentration requirements. These 2012 reports, based on interviews and surveys of other RD program participants and referred to throughout as the **Baim** and **Cannon** reports, provided us with a wealth of information about the RD BA program which we could not have obtained from IAS surveys. They are currently being used as we review and update the RD BA program concentration areas and course syllabi to help us better provide students with the leadership skills they need in rural Alaska today.

### **Alaska Native Studies (ANS) Baccalaureate Degree**

The ANS BA degree program is a relatively new addition to DANSRD with course offerings available through the department since fall of 2010. Enrollment is growing but our first graduates are not expected until the end of the fall 2012 semester so we could not survey this group in time for this report. As part of our student outcomes assessment we are in the process of building portfolios for these students that we will be able to consult in order to review progress.

DANSRD's first task for ANS was the complete update of the program catalog description. Core requirements were strengthened and old concentration areas were replaced with ones that better reflect what we expect our students to achieve. These new concentration areas provide a focus that was previously lacking, and will facilitate improved measurement of learning outcomes as students adopt the new course of study. The new program description features in the AY2012/13 catalog edition.

### **Rural Development (RD) Baccalaureate Degree**

Recent graduates from the RD BA program were electronically surveyed during the summer of 2012 to obtain answers to questions concerning program satisfaction, employment status after graduation, intent to pursue higher education and how they felt the program had benefited them. One hundred and thirty four students were emailed questionnaires and eight completed surveys were returned. While this 6% response rate is disappointing we are using the information we received, nonetheless. This survey

indicated six out of eight respondents living in urban locations and six employed fulltime with annual wages over \$50,000. Three of the highest earners indicated active involvement in subsistence activities as well as wage earning employment. Forty-three percent felt adequately prepared for their job, forty-three percent liked their job but felt they needed additional skills or training and one respondent indicated job satisfaction but would have preferred the job to be in a different community.

Responses to questions about the program itself indicated overall program satisfaction with meeting students from other regions and countries, attendance at seminars, small class size, access to courses from home and access to faculty mentorship rating highest in terms of positive response. When asked to rate the usefulness of RD courses in terms of preparation for employment or further education the RD 475 Rural Development Senior Project (75%) and RD 450 Managing Rural Projects and Programs (75%) topped the list, followed by RD 352 Rural Business Planning and Proposal Development (50%) and RD 325 Community Development Strategies (50%).

Again, the very low response rate of 6% should be noted, and we are adjusting our SLOA plan in response to this. In the future the survey will be administered during April when students and graduates are less likely to be involved in annual subsistence activities, and we will add telephonic interviewing to the electronic process.

A final open ended question about improvements drew the following comments which are now being considered in our future program planning:

*"It would be nice to make it applicable to more Land degrees offered in the lower 48. For example, Land and Energy Management. There are professional organizations like the AAPL that it would have been great to interact with in college."*

*"Possibly do more projects with village tribal and corporate entities."*

*"More online or teleconferences, such as in Anthropology and management classes."*

*"Financial Help-- I did not know how to pursue it."*

*"Work with employers to see how they would like to see us as graduates in the workforce and have a job for us in mind."* (Note- this concern is addressed through our RD 400 internship class. However this comment suggests that course purposes should be more effectively communicated to students)

**Student Conducted Evaluations.** To fulfill RD 475 senior project requirements, two advanced students, Virginia Baim and Brianna Cannon, evaluated different aspects of the RD BA program. Baim focused on outcomes including the long range impacts of RD graduates in their communities, and Cannon validated the scope, sequence, and course content of the RD program core. The Baim and Cannon reports are attached for review and each one provides different viewpoints as to the success of a program in which measurable outcomes can be elusive and sometimes may not be obvious until years after the students have graduated. The words of Dorothy M. Larson, for example, quoted from the Baim report sum up student success in a manner that no survey can provide:

***“Dorothy M. Larson – BA 1995, MA 2007, retired as Vice President of the Alaska Federation of Natives and currently serving on the Bristol Bay Native Association Board of Directors. Dorothy was born and raised in Dillingham. Her father is a Filipino and her mother is an Inupiat who spoke Siberian Inupiaq, Yupik and English. Dorothy graduated from the Dillingham Territorial School in 1957 as the salutatorian of her class of seven.***

***Why did you choose the RD program?** I was not very focused. I took a lot of classes and got my AA while I was in Dillingham. At first, I wanted to be a teacher but changed my mind early in life. I started working for AFN on educational programs and I’d get letters from the National Science Foundation referring to me as “Doctor” Larson. It motivated me to go back to school and finish my BA. My daughter was going for her master’s about that time and when I heard the UAF was thinking about creating a master’s RD program I told them I’d be the first to sign up. And I did. It took me 38 years from High School to Master’s. The RD program filled a void in rural education needs that were very different from the more typical western subjects and style of education. The RD program makes sense for us.*

***What difference did the RD program make in your life?** RD helped me focus. I always had a global perspective and was a motivated activist. I went to a seminar on circumpolar issues and to Sweden, Amsterdam, Scotland, and Denmark. It was a real eye opener. The RD program gave me the tools I needed to do what I wanted to do. Helped me see and approach things differently.*

***What was the best thing you got out of the RD program?** Focus, learning the meaning of advocacy and activism. Ability to get my point across and to make compelling presentations. The seminars were the best – spending a whole week together, sharing and learning from each other. Some of my best friends today are the people I met at those seminars. The small cadre of instructors who had a personal relationship with their students. Taught me communication skills– how to see beyond the obvious, to think astutely and ask the right questions. I am able to get organizations moving.*

***What would make the RD program better?** Maybe it’s time to do a more complete evaluation. They have been around for a long time and have made a tremendous difference in rural Alaska. I’d also like to see classes and seminars around more current issues like energy consumption, global warming and transportation issues.”*

Ms. Larson’s final comment is perfectly timed as DANSRD is currently in the process such an evaluation. Her suggestions for seminars are also being taken into full account.

### **Rural Development (RD) Master’s Degree**

Recent graduates from the RD MA program were surveyed during the same period as the RD undergraduates using a similar format. Forty-nine students were emailed questionnaires and eight completed surveys (16%) were returned. Selected results follow: fifty percent of respondents were found living in rural locations and fifty percent in urban communities. Six respondents were employed fulltime; two indicated part-time employment with one also indicating seasonal work. Seventy-five percent liked their jobs and felt adequately prepared, twenty-five percent indicated job satisfaction but also a need for additional skills or training. One respondent felt skills and education were not being

utilized, and two noted their wages were too low. One also noted a desire, but no time, to continue his or her education. Three respondents were earning over \$75,000 per annum, three were in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range, one was earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 and one fell into the \$15,000 to \$25,000 category. Five respondents including the top four earners indicated active participation in subsistence activities in addition to full time employment.

When asked about program satisfaction, seven respondents placed access to courses from home via audio conference, attending seminars, and meeting students from other regions and countries at the top of their list. Six respondents noted the usefulness of the curriculum to their jobs and its relevance to their lives and communities and five indicated the value of their relationships with faculty. Also rated as important were the small class sizes and faculty competence. Two additional comments were noted; the endorsement of Native pride and the studying of topics the student would not otherwise have had the opportunity to learn about.

The RD courses that received the highest ratings were the RD F600 Circumpolar Indigenous Leadership Symposium (75%), RD F625 Community Development Strategies: Principles and Practices (75%) and RD F670 The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act: Pre-1971 to present (75%). RD F651 Management Strategies for Rural Development followed with 62.5%. RD F601 Political Economy of the Circumpolar North came next with 50% followed by RD F612 Traditional Ecological Knowledge, RD F698 Project/Thesis, and RD F612 Traditional Ecological Knowledge each with 37.5%. When asked how often they used what they had learned in the RD program at work five respondents indicated they used it all the time and two used it several times a week. One respondent indicated that he/she used it “hardly ever.”

A final open ended question about improvements drew the following comments which are now being considered in our future program planning:

“Keep the format of live audio-conference, with interaction from the instructor and other students. On line courses are not as good.”

“There was very little guidance from my advisor in the process of writing the thesis.”

“(Offer) more management classes by audio-conference.”

“Develop a PhD rural Development Program.”

Response to this survey was low at 16%, although not as low as the BA graduates’ responses. We are adjusting our SLOA plan for this program to mandate surveying of students during April of each fiscal year.

Most RD MA program applicants already have jobs or a significant history of employment when they enter the program, so their learning success often must be measured “second hand” ... in other words how well the student has done in the program may be easier to measure through the success of the organization they manage than through review of a portfolio or a look at their grades although of course

we do use both of those. Here is what the NANA Regional Corporation of which Marie Kasanjaluk Greene is now President and CEO has to say about this 2011 RD MA graduate:

*“Marie Kasanjaluk Greene is an Iñupiaq from the Native Village of Deering, Alaska. She brings a wealth of cultural insight along with many years of senior level leadership experience to her role as president and chief executive officer of NANA Regional Corporation (NRC).*

*Greene works to cultivate the corporation’s cultural and economic resources, collaborating with other regional organizations to improve the quality of life for NANA shareholders. Greene works closely with the NANA board of directors and NANA region communities, serving on the boards of several regional and statewide organizations including: OTZ Telephone Cooperative; the Advisory Committee for Wells Fargo Bank; and the Alaska Federation of Natives. She is co-chair of the Northwest Arctic Workforce Development and Higher Education Consortium and the Northwest Arctic Leadership Team (NWALT). Greene is an appointed member of the five-member Alaska Redistricting Board, responsible for reapportioning the state house and senate districts following the 2010 U.S. Census. She holds a master’s degree in Rural Development.”*

In case readers of this report think we chose the best and ignored the rest, Ms. Greene is the rule rather than the exception among our MA graduates. A review of 2010 and 2011 graduates for DANSRD’s Annual Unit Plan 2012 found sixteen out of eighteen graduates in professional positions, one pursuing a PhD and one on extended Peace Corps service. We feel this record tells more about the learning outcomes of our students than any amount of numerical data and survey results can convey.

