

ALASKA NATIVE BUSINESS STUDIES: AN EXAMPLE OF CURRICULAR CONTENT AND DESIGN FOR BUSINESS MINORITIES

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ABSTRACT

Business education for minorities is an issue throughout the United States. This paper addresses areas where higher education can help prepare Native and non-Native Alaskans to operate in not only Alaska's business environment, but also in the corporate world in general. The paper identifies areas where higher education for both Native Alaskans and Non-Native Alaskans may be enhanced for doing business in Alaska's unique environment. Native issues and perspectives identified as important for Alaskan business education may, in turn, be similarly important in business education for minorities in emerging economies in other regions of the country and the world [1].

ALASKA NATIVE VALUES

Native Alaskans include both Eskimos and Indians. While there are six major groupings of Native Alaskans and each has its own specific values and culture, there are some general values shared by all. These values often conflict with western business practices noted below [2].

Native Value	Western Culture and Business
Share what you have	Build personal wealth
Accept what life brings; pray for guidance	You control your own destiny
Have patience	Manage your time; respond quickly to opportunities
Live carefully, what you do will come back to you	Employment, locations, and relationships can be changed relatively easily
Take care of others	Emphasis on personal independence
Honor your elders	Families are often dispersed and disconnected
See connections, all things are related	Segments of life are often seen separately
Non-linear learning methods	Linear learning methods
Emphasis on humility and anonymity	Emphasis on personal achievement
Win once and let others play	Emphasis on ongoing success and recognition
Very forgiving of mistakes	Rewards success, less forgiving of mistakes
How much you care is valued over how much you know	How much you know is valued over how much you care

A business curriculum that provides insight into the various world views present in Alaska can help all parties involved in the state's economy. Proposed topics that can be included in an Alaskan business curriculum are presented below.

CURRICULUM TO ADDRESS THE ALASKAN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

A university business program can align the goals of native corporations and state needs with its curriculum in the following areas.

Organizational behavior. Organizational behavior courses can include comparisons of native values and world views with Western business practices. Promoting awareness of and respect for differences in perspectives that are common in Alaska can be part of the curriculum [3]. Developing strategies for how both natives and non-natives can improve communications and work on aligning goals and problem-solving techniques would be beneficial.

Marketing. Marketing courses can include a special focus on marketing native arts and crafts and seafood products. They can also include strategies for developing advertising and promotional campaigns for Native Alaskan consumers.

Entrepreneurship. Many minority business students intend to start their own business at some point in their lives. Providing information about the risks, rewards, and realities of owning a business may be included in a business curriculum. Course content can also include research techniques to find additional resources and support available to entrepreneurs.

Tax, accounting, and legal issues. Special accounting and legal considerations for native corporations may be addressed in the business curriculum, as well as business ethics.

CHALLENGES

In practical terms, there are challenges to developing and implementing a business curriculum that addresses minority perspectives and needs [3]. Three major areas that would need to be addressed are discussed below.

Students and Delivery Methods

Two major sources of students for classes that include minority business components can be identified, and several possible methods of delivery are described.

Degree-seeking students. Degree-seeking college students may be interested in learning specifics about the Alaskan business environment. Delivery methods for these students may take the following forms.

- A specialized minority education program within the business college may be offered. Under this structure, a set of classes devoted specifically to native and minority business issues can be developed and offered as a special track. A challenge to this approach would be the need to generate and maintain an adequate number of credit hours to support the costs of the program.
- Courses on native and minority business issues may be offered as electives within existing degree programs. This alternative would require fewer resources than a full program but still enhance the business curriculum.
- Alaska native issues may be embedded in existing business courses. While not providing extensive coverage of the material, it would expose students to relevant issues in the Alaskan business environment.

Members of the business community and general public. Seminars on minorities and Alaskan business topics may be developed and offered to members of the Alaskan business community or as continuing

education for business professionals. These seminars may be presented at times and dates that are convenient for the business community and may also be used to generate revenues to help cover the costs of minority business education programs.

Faculty

Generating faculty support for specialized minority business education issues can be challenging. Developing new courses requires considerable time and effort that can have a negative impact on performance in other areas of responsibility, e.g., research productivity. Faculty may be more willing to participate in the development of minority education programs if incentives such as the following are provided.

- *Start with relatively small time commitments.* Rather than trying to develop a full program, it may be better to start with offering special or elective courses that are team taught. For example, an elective course that covers organizational behavior, marketing and entrepreneurship can be team taught, with each faculty member responsible for a few weeks of the course. A similar course covering accounting, finance, legal and information technology issues may be developed as well. Faculty members may be more willing to get involved if the time commitment is relatively less than for a full course.
- *Provide release time from other responsibilities.* Formally recognizing the time and effort needed to develop a new minority business education curriculum would encourage faculty to get involved.
- *Compensate faculty for providing seminars to the business communities.* When faculty members are involved in revenue-generating seminars, ensure that they are compensated for their efforts.

Support

Providing resources to fund business minority education can be a challenge. When such courses are offered as part of a degree program, enough credit hours must be generated to cover costs. Native Alaskan students may find financial support for a college education through native corporations. The native corporations want to develop native skills and education and historically have been willing to provide tuition support to their shareholders. In addition, grant money may be available to support the development of minority business education programs and allow faculty get course releases. Sources of grant money may include federal money as well as support from native corporations.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper has been provided a first step towards developing a curriculum for Native Alaskans and those wanting to do business in Alaska and challenges to be addressed. Additional research needs to be conducted in the area of business education for Native Alaskans and other minorities. A needs assessment is required to survey the Alaska native corporations to identify particular curricular needs in terms of business and management education.

REFERENCES

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