

Year Two For Alutiiq Studies Offers New Course, More Online

Thursday, 22 August 2013

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Yesterday KMXT told you about a new program starting at Kodiak College, but an older one will be returning this fall as well. The Alutiiq Studies Program is entering its second year with the college and has three classes still open to interested students. April Laktonen Counciller is an assistant professor of Alutiiq studies and said two will be completely distance learning and one will be classroom delivered.

"The Alutiiq 101, which we taught once before, this semester we're offering it for the first time 100 percent distance. So all of the students are going to be calling in or signing in on the Blackboard website and they'll complete two independent class modules per week. So there's not a regular class meeting time, the students can complete their class whenever they want — in the middle of the night, 6 a.m., everyone has different schedules and I think that's going to be a really good way for students who want to learn the language but either don't live here physically in Kodiak or have jobs or other schedule issues that might not allow them to participate in a regular class."

Counciller said learning a language is hard, especially if you're not doing it in person. She said the class will really try to ease the learning process by utilizing available technologies like VoiceThread.

"Which is an online video and audio discussion board. So you can post a question and the students can respond with little video segments of their own feelings about that reading or personal introductions with the language. So we're excited about the growing technologies that are supporting language acquisition online."

She said the college will also be offering an Alutiiq orthography class for students who are already fairly familiar with the language. In addition to that, she said this will be the first semester the program will include an Alutiiq cultural orientation class.

"So that one's going to be really exciting because we're going to be going from the very basics of archaeology and prehistory of Alutiiq, all the way up to the modern cultural revitalization movement, some of the critical issues we're facing in the Alutiiq community, it's gonna be kind of a shotgun approach. Which is kind of the way through Native knowledge systems we learn through real life and so we wanted this class to be very holistic and not compartmentalize the knowledge available to us. So we'll be talking about arts and plantlore, and modern issues, the corporations, government structures, communication issues and Native education."

Counciller said the interest, especially in Alutiiq language, has been pretty high, but the program will definitely need more students if it hopes to remain with the college.

“One of the issues that we face is because, since Kodiak is a relatively small community, if this program is going to be sustainable after the grant ends, we need to get high numbers, in especially the Alutiiq 101 class, so that the next semester in Alutiiq 102 we have enough to continue that program on. So we’ll get students to go through the whole series of classes and complete programs, and that will be the measure of sustainability as to whether or not the University of Alaska wants to keep this program after the grant is over.”

She said so far they are doing pretty good, and distance learning has helped expand student enrollment throughout the state, country and world. The grant for the program, which is through the Department of Education, is set to expire in 2016.