



UAF news and information

Friday Focus: Connections matter

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Provost Anupma Prakash, front row, fourth from left, was in Bethel at the Kuskokwim Campus in January 2020. Photo courtesy of Anupma Prakash.

— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

Everyday connections matter — they matter far more than we recognize or appreciate. With each connection, we build a stronger community, and it is this community that lifts us all up.

Last week I traveled to Bethel. My purpose was to reach out and personally connect with faculty, staff, and students at our [Kuskokwim Campus](#). Well, nothing matches the experience of doing something for the first time. This was my first official visit to one of our rural community campuses: first trip to Bethel, first drive on a frozen river road, first invitation to participate in an immersive Yup'ik language class, and to see first-hand the rewards and challenges of meeting the educational needs of a diverse student body in remote rural Alaska.

My first exposure to the Kuskokwim Campus team was at a large potluck luncheon. As we settled down with our plates full of all sorts of delicacies, we each introduced ourselves by sharing a recent story. Incidentally, the day before I arrived, there was a power outage in the city that disrupted many

operations. Almost all stories, including mine, started with, “When the power went out, I ...” Very soon the stories got so mixed up and intertwined that no one remembered an individual story. All I remember is that everyone laughed, and we felt a common connection through this simple act.

Storytelling is an important part of Yup'ik culture, and I saw an extension of this in Diane McEachern's Rural Human Services class. The class brought together students and Alaska Native elders from neighboring villages and provided a safe environment to share experiences, learn, grow, and then serve as healers in their communities. Each participant shared their personal experience with me and in their way extended an opportunity for me to know and understand them at a deeper level. Stories of hardship, inner strength, life-changing moments, gratitude and encouragement left me deeply touched. There were moments of silence before I could find my own voice. There was a lot I wanted to share, but a lot was left unsaid.

What I want to say to my UAF family in Bethel is that what you are doing matters. You are changing lives. My life is richer because you are a part of it. For everything you do — quyana caknek.

Friday Focus is a column written by a different member of UAF's leadership team every week.

Associated tags