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UAS, Goldbelt Heritage launch Indigenous health and healing learning pathway

Agreement outlines plan for learning that reflects Indigenous Knowledge, values and approaches to wellness through the Integrative Behavioral Health program.

JUNEAU, Alaska – The University of Alaska Southeast and Goldbelt Heritage Foundation have signed a [memorandum of agreement](#) to develop coursework on Indigenous health and healing. The agreement outlines a plan to deliver culturally grounded, for-credit learning opportunities at UAS that reflect Indigenous Knowledge, values and approaches to wellness.

Elders, cultural specialists and Indigenous faculty will guide curriculum development and instruction. They will work with faculty from the behavioral health program to create place-based courses that can grow into additional academic pathways, including an occupational endorsement or certificate.

"This is a critical opportunity to center Indigenous Science Concepts in health and wellness, honoring relationality, place, and cultural responsibility," said Wendy K'ah Skáahluwaa Todd, Ph.D, a UAS term assistant professor of geoscience and member of the team building the pathway. "Moving beyond the limits of Western medicine, it offers a meaningful path toward the development of truly culturally appropriate care grounded in Indigenous values, knowledges, and lived realities."

Courses will be offered through the Integrative Behavioral Health program and will be open to any student who wants to learn more about Traditional knowledge systems, including dual-enrolled high school students. A primary aim of the agreement is to foster career opportunities for Alaska Native youth and provide additional training resources for all community members, grounded in Traditional Knowledge Systems and Indigenous Sciences.

"Goldbelt Heritage Foundation is committed to creating pathways for Alaska Native youth to enter healthcare professions while remaining grounded in Indigenous knowledge, language, and values," said Neilgáa Koogéi Taija Revels, executive director of Goldbelt Heritage Foundation.

"We are excited to partner with UAS and collaborate with their incredible staff, faculty, Elders, culture bearers, and community leaders to build learning experiences that strengthen culturally responsive care and support future generations of healthcare professionals," Revels said. "We are especially encouraged by opportunities to expand behavioral health education and explore the development of future credential programs that can help meet critical community needs while supporting students in culturally grounded career pathways."

In spring 2027, UAS will be offering new courses such as Haa K̓usteeyí Yéi K̓ugaxtusaneix, Our Way of Life will Heal People, which will explore Indigenous understandings of health and wellness as rooted in relationships with land, community, ancestors and spirit. A second course, Dámaan agán hl k̓íng, Take Good Care of Yourself, will examine Indigenous health and well-being through the lens of subsistence practices, language, storytelling, plant knowledge and cultural arts.

“This learning pathway is an invitation to broaden and deepen our understanding of health and healing,” said Sarah Niecko, DHSc, assistant professor of behavioral health and faculty lead for carrying out the agreement. “By lifting up Indigenous voices, traditions, sciences and ways of knowing, we hope to prepare healthcare providers, behavioral health professionals, educators and community leaders to serve Indigenous communities respectfully and effectively. It also enables students who are Alaska Native to learn more about their own knowledge system and how their culture is protective and heals.”