



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 11, 2025

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APU Strengthens Alaska Native Governance Through New Membership Model

APU's new governing model brings Tribes, Tribal organizations, and partners into shared leadership, advancing its self-determined Alaska Native University vision.

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA –After [first becoming a Tribally governed University in 2016](#) through a strategic membership structure with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), Alaska Pacific University (APU) is updating its governance structure to a three-tiered membership model that invites participants to provide guidance and support, continuing the University's Tribal governance approach. This new structure is designed for Tribes, Tribal organizations, and supporting organizations. APU is grateful for the meaningful partnership with ANTHC and fully supports their decision to focus priorities and resources on expanding statewide health services for Alaska Native and American Indian people. As part of this renewed focus, ANTHC will be transitioning away from its work in higher education.

APU's new membership model includes three tiers: Stewardship, Associate, and Allied Membership, each with corresponding leadership opportunities at APU based on the level of financial involvement. **By investing in APU, members will help the University advance its vision of becoming a [self-defined Alaska Native University](#), establishing a new model for Tribal higher education.**

Currently, two key higher education structures designed for Indigenous students exist: Native American–Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). Purposeful curriculum development and strong community engagement led to increased enrollment of Alaska Native students, earning APU the federal designation as a [NASNTI](#). Now APU stands apart by creating a third path — one that is Tribally governed (a distinction unique among NASNTIs) while remaining unrestricted from the constraints of federal oversight.

After thoughtful discussion with APU's Elders Council, the University chose to identify as an **Alaska Native University**, a term that more fully reflects the self-determination and leadership of Alaska Native peoples. This innovative model prioritizes self-determination, allowing the University to remain unobligated to shifting federal priorities and instability. As a result, APU can more fully uplift Indigenous knowledge, strengthen community partnerships, and ensure Indigenous leadership continues to guide the University's future.

APU's commitment is supported by a [50% graduation rate](#) for Alaska Native students, marking one of the highest graduation rates for Alaska Native students in the state [for three years running](#). This year, APU also ranked in [AISES's](#) Top 200 Colleges for Indigenous Students [for the second year in a row](#). Additionally, APU is not just a University for Indigenous students, but a place of learning for all students. This is exemplified in the University's overall graduation rate of [47%](#) — one of the highest in the state.

"This new membership model represents an important next step in APU's journey as a self-defined Alaska Native University," said Janelle Vanasse, President of APU. "It deepens our partnerships with Alaska's Tribes and supporting organizations, ensuring that Alaska Native leadership and knowledge continue to guide our governance and vision. These members are core to our Alaska Native University vision."

Alaska Native University Components:

- Tribally governed and Tribally-sanctioned;
- Indigenous-centered curriculum; and
- Programs are intentionally designed to address the unique needs of Alaska Native communities.

Alaska Pacific University's commitment to hands-on, purpose-driven education remains steadfast. APU is grounded in Alaska Native knowledge and community, *yet serves as an open and welcoming learning environment for students from all backgrounds*. The University's vision is to become a gathering place where Alaska Native knowledge leads, all students belong, and culture and innovation come together to cultivate courageous leaders for the next seven generations.

About the Three Tiers of Membership:

Stewardship Membership

Reserved for Tribes and Tribal organizations seeking to educate their workforce and constituency while formally recognizing APU as an Alaska Native University. This is the highest level of membership and includes an appointed seat on the Board of Trustees, along with an annual financial commitment.

Associate Membership

Designed for Tribes and Tribal organizations that wish to sanction APU as an Alaska Native University without a financial commitment. Associate Members may nominate a Trustee for an at-large seat on the APU Board of Trustees and receive priority consideration for open seats.

Allied Membership

Open to non-Tribal entities and individuals who wish to support the vision and mission of APU's emerging Alaska Native University model through annual financial contributions. Allied Members may also nominate a Trustee for an at-large seat on the APU Board of Trustees.

Membership Privileges

Members enjoy a range of benefits designed to strengthen partnerships and advance shared goals:

- Opportunity to participate in a shared-cost scholarship program for employees and constituents
- Discounts on facility use and other University services
- Priority access to facility rentals and housing for trainees and interns
- Participation in program and advisory committees
- A voice in shaping APU's future and helping determine priorities for program development

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Alaska Pacific University

Alaska Pacific University, located in Anchorage, provides a distinctive education that blends Western academics with Indigenous knowledge and values. As a fully accredited, four-year Alaska Native–serving and Tribally governed University, APU offers programs ranging from certificates to doctoral degrees, emphasizing hands-on, purpose-driven learning. APU honors and gives thanks to the Dena'ina People, the original stewards of the land where the University stands. Guided by Alaska Native knowledge and community, APU serves as a gathering place where all students belong and where culture and innovation come together to grow courageous leaders for the next seven generations. APU's graduation rate is 1.4 times the state average, with its Alaska Native graduation rate ranking among the state's highest for three years running, proof of the University's commitment to student success. Learn more at alaskapacific.edu.

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