



UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC

A Brief History of the University of the Arctic

The idea of an Arctic university...

The idea for an arctic university is certainly not unique. The thought has circulated through the minds of many Arctic residents and of those concerned with Arctic issues, and for good reason. Many have thought that a circumpolar university would provide unparalleled opportunities to share information about arctic and northern sustainability, meet the unique needs of students in the north, and to validate northern cultures, languages and learning systems. In the early 1990's ideas met opportunity and the idea was put into action.

Putting ideas into action

When a group of motivated individuals presented the concept of a circumpolar university to the Senior Arctic Officials in March of 1997, the result was very positive. The SAOs requested that a task force be created and produce a development plan for an arctic university to be presented at the Senior Arctic Officials meeting in Ottawa, Canada later that year. The resulting Development Plan addressed many central issues around an "arctic university" such as how it would meet the needs of northern students; build relationships between universities; strengthen existing international relations; and promote student and faculty mobility.

Under the chairmanship of Professor Bill Heal, the Task Force was also requested to bring the university concept to the greater circumpolar university community. After a presentation to the Circumpolar Universities Association (CUA) in Luleå, Sweden in 1997, the CUA took over the project and created the CUA Working Group on the University of the Arctic to pursue the university's development. CUA's involvement was instrumental as it improved the balance of involvement of foreign affairs, education and environment as well as establishing the connection to the University community. The Senior Arctic Officials requested this new working group to develop a feasibility study for a proposed "University of the Arctic."

Bringing UArctic to the circumpolar world

Throughout the following year, the CUA Working Group undertook an extensive consultation process in all eight arctic states. This process saw several milestones: a statement of support from the Standing Committee of Arctic Parliamentarians, a presentation at the Circumpolar Conference of Sustainable Development in Arctic in May in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada; and Resolution 98, a statement of support from the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). In September of 1998 the Feasibility Study Final Report, prepared by the CUA Working Group, was presented to the Ministers of the Arctic Council who subsequently announced their support for a proposed University of the Arctic.

In December 1998, the CUA Working Group was replaced by the first UArctic Interim Council at a meeting held in Fairbanks, Alaska. After two years of hard work, the UArctic Interim Council was replaced by the official Council of the University of the Arctic, November 2000 in Nuuk, Greenland.

Northern Commitments

The unique characteristics of the North pose many opportunities for innovative education. Cultural and biological diversity, geographic dispersion, and a history of inaccessible education all

make the North an interesting place in which to be involved in higher education. UArctic decided to focus first upon providing relevant curriculum, being accessible, and facilitating mobility in the north. The UArctic Interim Council initiated three projects which would support this core capacity for the University of the Arctic. These three projects came to be known as Core Programmatic Activities of the University of the Arctic and include: a Bachelor-level Curriculum for Circumpolar Studies (BCS), the Arctic Learning Environment (ALE) and the Circumpolar Mobility Program (CMP).

Bringing People Together

With financial support from the Government of Finland, the University of the Arctic Circumpolar Coordination Office (CCO) was founded in Rovaniemi, Finland in 1998. The CCO coordinates UArctic events, produces the Shared Voices newsletter and maintain a comprehensive website to keep people informed of UArctic developments and provide access to UArctic materials.

With the official launch of UArctic in June 2001, the Board of Governors and the Circle of Elders were announced, and the implementation of the Core Programmatic Activities began in earnest.