



# Unapologetically Iñupiaq White Paper

## **Policy Statement**

Being “Unapologetically Iñupiaq” means that everyone is welcome, but when you elect to attend Ilisaġvik, or when you elect to work at Ilisaġvik—because we are electing to—students, staff and faculty are going to experience an Iñupiaq experience.

## **Inclusive of All**

“Unapologetically Iñupiaq” means exercising the sovereign inherent freedom to educate our community through and supported by our Iñupiaq worldview, values, knowledge and protocols.

It is Iñupiaq to be respectful to all people.

In asserting our stance as being “Unapologetically Iñupiaq,” we are not asserting that “saying yes” to our Iñupiaq culture, means “saying no,” to the ways of everyone else: It’s all additive. Being “Unapologetically Iñupiaq” does not prohibit non-Iñupiaq students, staff and faculty from being who they are when they go home. It’s all things at all times, with traditional ways and VEWF and Academics. We intend to help our students understand how to connect with students from all walks of life, especially in light of the incredible diversity on the North Slope, because respecting all people is an Iñupiaq way of being.

## **What Knowledge Counts, and Who Decides**

That being said, Ilisaġvik College is a tribal college, created by Iñupiaq people with Iñupiaq people, culture, language, values and traditions in mind. Iñupiaq culture is woven through our bylaws, is the center of our mission and vision statements, is sanctioned through the ICAS tribal government, and is the culture which gives Ilisaġvik College its tribal status.

It is an Iñupiaq place to ensure our people can support ourselves in having strong healthy lives, using the tools now available to us, as adaptive people. These tools now look like a college, or academic and workforce training.

Ilisaġvik is a protected space where adults can continue learning and preparing in accordance with Iñupiaq ways of knowing, with a knowledge that can be accessed by everyone, as knowledge is knowledge. Because it was created by Iñupiaq people does

not mean that it will not help inform or grow people from other groups. Our knowledge and ways of being, help make our communities and Alaska a better place.

We also assert that Iñupiaq worldview, values, knowledge and protocols are equal to all others. There are ample opportunities to learn other knowledge systems—it's in the air we breathe. We are stronger when we bring not only who we are into every space, but be who we are first and allow our institutions to grow around, and be supported by, our culture.

We also recognize that Iḷisaġvik is the only higher education institution within the North Slope Borough. Everyone is welcome to attend Iḷisaġvik; because our worldview is inherently inclusive, Iḷisaġvik is going to be inclusive of everyone. It is Iñupiaq to be respectful to all people. It is one of our guiding values. *Piqpakkutiqaġniq suli Qiksiksrautiqaġniq Utuqqanaanun Allanullu: Love and Respect for Our Elders and One Another*

### **Why the phrase “Unapologetically Iñupiaq?”**

Historically, the educational system imposed following the 1867 Alaska Treaty of Cession and the Organic Act of 1884 was a means to replace Alaska Native languages, cultures, history, traditions, and ways of knowing with the language, culture, history, traditions and ways of knowing of American colonizers. With this, doubt and uncertainty began weaving themselves throughout Alaska Native communities, questioning the validity of Native ways, and questioning if there was even a place for Native cultures into the future.

“Unapologetically Iñupiaq” is not related to Iñupiaq people not apologizing for individual actions; it is about no longer apologizing for our culture and ways of being. It is a strong embrace and a celebration of what it means to be Iñupiaq

We hope the phrase sparks conversation and critical thinking about the messages we can absorb about, in the words of Bentham Ohia, Maori, what knowledge counts, what counts as knowledge, and who decides. It has already proven to spark conversation in the way that “Proudly Iñupiaq,” or similar, may not.

Iḷisaġvik is and seeks to be a place where that knowledge can be grown, protected, and cultivated within the successive generations of Iñupiat people. It should always be a place where our community members feel like they can connect and share knowledge with our students, incorporating these essential pieces of knowledge to curriculum, as the College helps prepare graduates for the next stages of their lives.

*Outcomes:*

- Foster an organizational environment that perpetuates Iñupiaq culture, language, values, and traditions for staff, faculty and students.
- Continue to grow relationships with our Iñupiaq community by providing opportunities to connect with our students, staff and faculty (on-site or community events, guest speaker opportunities, student presentations, etc.)
- Policies, procedures and institutional guidelines will reflect and support our tribal educational imperative to educate through and supported by our Iñupiaq worldview, values, knowledge and protocols. Amendments will be and are supported to ensure we continually align with this vision.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

*Q: What does it mean to be Indigenous? Aren't there Indigenous people from other parts of the world working and attending Iḷisaġvik College as well? Why is that celebrated?*

A: All of our ancestors originated from somewhere, but Indigenous in this context is used to recognize the people who are Indigenous to the lands Iḷisaġvik College, and the surrounding North Slope area, is based upon.

*Q: Why are we a "tribal college" and not an "Iñupiaq college?"*

A: We use the tools available to us, such as the legal federal designation of tribal college to higher education institutions. This is a mechanism to support our Iñupiaq culture, and while through our federal designation, we are linked to the other tribal colleges which are all currently Native American, IC was created by Iñupiaq with Iñupiaq people in mind and will remain a distinctly "Iñupiaq college." Iḷisaġvik College is a proud member of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium.

*Q: We already see commitment to Iñupiaq language, values, culture and traditions in the mission statement of Iḷisaġvik College. Why do we need this new statement?*

A: This statement provides our institution with the permission to make amendments to our policies, procedures, protocols, curricula, and ways of being with the continued goal of providing a high-quality post-secondary education supported by and through an Iñupiaq worldview and values.