



COLLEGE OF FISHERIES AND OCEAN SCIENCES

University of Alaska Fairbanks

P.O. Box 757220, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7220

New fisheries and marine sciences program focuses on Indigenous knowledge

Published by the [CFOS Newsroom](#) on Aug. 31, 2020. A shorter version of the article was published by [UAF News](#).

By Alice Bailey

A new graduate traineeship program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks will broaden and diversify graduate education in fisheries and marine sciences through greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples and knowledge.

The program is called “Tamamta,” which means “all of us” in the Sugpiaq and Yup’ik languages of the Indigenous peoples of Alaska’s southcentral coast.

The National Science Foundation is providing \$3 million in funding to Tamamta through its National Research Trainee (NRT) Program, which is designed to encourage innovation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduate education training. Funding is also being provided by NSF’s Navigating the New Arctic initiative. The traineeship will be part of the UAF College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences and is the first NRT in Alaska.

“Tamamta addresses a huge problem in Alaska—the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems,” said Courtney Carothers, a professor at CFOS, who is the principal investigator on the project.

“It is our goal to elevate Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies to their rightful places as intact systems that can be offered alongside Western marine science and fisheries,” said Jessica Black, a co-investigator and assistant professor at the UAF College of Rural and Community Development, who is Gwich’in. “In this manner, we are not only honoring what Indigenous students bring into the classroom but also actively decolonizing the way postsecondary education is offered.”

Even though roughly 20 percent of the state's population identifies as Alaska Native, less than 3 percent of current students in CFOS are Indigenous. The Tamamta program will begin to address the problem of exclusion by increasing enrollment and retention of Indigenous students in CFOS.

The Tamamta program will fund four or five cohorts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous CFOS graduate students over the next five years.

"I am so excited to be a part of a future graduate cohort with the Tamamta project as an Anishinaabekwe (Ojibwe woman)," said Janessa Esquible-Hussion, a current CFOS Ph.D. student who is also a Partners Program biologist for the Orutsararmiut Native Council in Bethel. "Together, we can address the many challenges facing our fisheries, lands and people."

Nearly 80 percent of CFOS fisheries graduates go on to work in state, federal and tribal resource management, and 60 percent remain in Alaska, so Tamamta students are likely to be part of the next generation of scientists and managers in the state.

The Orutsararmiut Native Council, First Alaskans Institute, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are all examples of partner organizations where Tamamta students have opportunities to receive on-the-job training or do research.

Tamamta program activities and training available to students, faculty, staff and agency partners include new team-taught interdisciplinary courses, an elder-in-residence program, a visiting Indigenous scholars program, cultural immersion experiences, professional development and cultural competency skill-building, hosted dialogues, and art installations.

Tamamta was built by a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary group of faculty from CFOS, the College of Rural and Community Development, the College of Natural Science and Mathematics, and the Center for One Health Research.

Faculty involved in Tamamta are working on several related projects at UAF, such as NSF's Navigating the New Arctic planning grant Atautchikkun Ilitchisukluta (Coming Together to Learn) and Indigenizing Salmon Science and Management.

Tamamta also aligns with UAF's strategic goals of solidifying global leadership in Alaska Native and Indigenous programs and improving Indigenous student enrollment and inclusion.

For more information, contact Courtney Carothers, clcarothers@alaska.edu.



Shannon Hardy, left, and Jessica Black cut Łuk Choo (Chinook salmon) on the Yukon River. Black helped develop the new Tamamta graduate traineeship program at CFOS. Photo by Michael Hardy.