I’m writing as University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) representative to the University of the Arctic (UArctic) Governing Council. As you may know, UArctic is a cooperative network of universities, colleges, and other organizations committed to higher education and research in the circumpolar North (see www.uarctic.org). Members share resources, facilities, and expertise in building post-secondary education programs that are relevant and accessible to northern students. Our overall goal is to contribute to building human capacities and resilience within northern communities through shared education and knowledge.

UArctic’s current focus is on development of circumpolar online courses on topics relevant to northern students, student and faculty mobility and exchanges within a broad network of northern institutions, circumpolar PhD research networks in environmental and social sciences, and applied field courses in the Arctic and sub-Arctic. UArctic promotes education that is circumpolar and interdisciplinary in nature, and that expands understanding between indigenous communities and the broader scientific community.

I am writing because I believe that UArctic can be a vital contributor to the goals of the US and circumpolar IPY programs. As IPY research initiatives move forward, I believe that northern peoples can be involved in meaningful ways in planning, implementing, and evaluating research. One way of accomplishing this is to draw upon UArctic’s emerging network of established universities and colleges in expanding educational opportunities and outreach. Some specific ideas might include:

1) Explore using the UArctic circumpolar network as a central vehicle for planning, coordinating, and implementing IPY Arctic education and outreach activities. UArctic’s 70 institutional members meet annually and are in regular contact through electronic and face-to-face networks. The next meeting of the UArctic Governing Council will take place in Fairbanks, Alaska from 16-19 May, 2004.

2) Drawing upon UArctic partner institutions in developing circumpolar online courses linked explicitly to IPY research priorities, projects, and findings. UArctic is already using innovative Internet-based delivery systems for expanding higher education opportunities for students; in spring 2004, some 50 students are enrolled in circumpolar courses taught by international faculty. A continuing array of such courses is planned for coming years.

IPY-related courses could include semester-length options as well as intensive online short-courses on focused topics such as climate change in the Arctic, dynamics of Arctic ecosystems, emerging transportation and communications infrastructure in the Arctic, and a ‘beginners guide’ to international Arctic research cooperation, including even the goals, aspirations, and rationale for the IPY itself.
3) Expanding established UArctic circumpolar PhD research networks in environmental and social sciences to build the next generation of scholars and researchers who have an understanding of trans-boundary issues in the Arctic, experience with international collaboration, and a personal network of circumpolar research colleagues.

4) Increasing circumpolar student and faculty mobility using UArctic’s north2north program, designed to expand opportunities for northern graduate and undergraduate students to study in any of UArctic’s 70+ participating institutions. In the US, the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States (ARCUS) already serves as the “national agency” in support of expanding this student and faculty mobility program.

UArctic and the IPY planning groups share a common goal in promoting advancement of scientific research in the Arctic. To realize IPY’s goals, it is important to build funding opportunities for education and outreach into research design and planning at the earliest possible stage. UArctic’s collaborative partnership offers a perfect vehicle for doing so, building as it does on existing institutional resources and networks and continually developing new technologies and pedagogies in sharing knowledge widely with northern residents. As UArctic’s executive director, Lars Kullerud, states “we [in UArctic] are ready to develop innovative courses and programs that reflect new research and knowledge through IPY, and to use UArctic as a tool for implementing these efforts quickly and efficiently in partnership with our member institutions.”

I would be pleased to discuss this idea further with you, as would Lars Kullerud, Director, University of the Arctic.

Contact information:

Richard A. Caulfield, PhD
Associate Dean and Professor
College of Rural Alaska
University of Alaska Fairbanks
ffrac@uaf.edu
+1 (907) 474-5573

Lars Kullerud, PhD
Director, University of the Arctic
www.uarctic.org
lars.kullerud@uarctic.org
+47 3703 5708, +47 9087 0099

cc: Provost Reichardt, UAF
W. Warnick, ARCUS
L. Kullerud, UArctic