Ilisimatusarfik is a new research and educational institution in Nuuk, Greenland. It was established in accordance with a law passed by the Greenlandic Parliament in 1981, and it was started in 1983. Full activity with instruction first began in February, 1984.

Plans for Ilisimatusarfik in fact began already in 1974, when The Greenlandic Provincial Council proposed the establishment of Inuit Institute, which would carry out research and education at the university level in Greenland itself.

The real reason for this decision was probably the fact that the Ministry for Greenland, which had its own policy regarding oil and mineral resources, at the same time also had the responsibility — which it carried out quite industriously — of providing information. That situation — in which no alternative source of expertise was available — led to a certain insecurity, and the desire to be capable of evaluating the information provided by the Ministry for Greenland.

The preparations took some time, and an appointed working group prepared a proposal in 1980-81. As a result, the Greenlandic Parliament was able to discuss and pass the law regarding Ilisimatusarfik in the Fall of 1981. In the meantime, Greenland had achieved Home Rule, and it was the Home Rule authorities which established and now finance the newly-created Ilisimatusarfik.

Ilisimatusarfik’s responsibilities were designed to cover research and education in Greenland’s cultural heritage in one institution. One might wonder why the aim was not first of all an institute whose work was of a more practical nature. But the political evaluation that was in the forefront during the establishment of Home Rule was that cultural strength would certainly also turn out to give practical results.

Ilisimatusarfik as an Educational Institution

For this purpose, five people were engaged: in addition to the director, who is a trained Eskimologist, there are two linguistic Eskimologists, and two others for the cultural and social science education.

The period of instruction is calculated to last two years, with a level to be maintained as that of the first two years of instruction at Danish universities. For these reasons, certain admission standards were set. These requirements are similar to the admission standards for universities — that is, either completed »gymnasium« (1) study or its equivalent, known as »HF«, — »Højere forberedelseseksamen« (»advanced preparatory examination«) in Greenland and Denmark. Entering students must have had an average grade of at least 7,5 out of 13, which is about average, or C-level achievement. Alternatively, entering students may hold a diploma from the teacher training college. In addition, it is also required that one can speak and write both Greenlandic and Danish, and that one can read English sufficiently well to benefit from it.

The school’s actual capacity is calculated to be 10 students, who are accepted every other year. Finally, it is possible to grant dispensation, designed especially for people who are employed in cultural institutions, and who would like to improve their knowledge of the cultural heritage.
As far as actual instructions is concerned, we started with 11 students, nine of whom are female. Four had teacher’s diplomas, one is a part-time student employed by The Greenland Museum, and the rest came with »HF« diplomas. Only two of the latter entered Ilisimatusarfik directly after completing the »HF« requirements. During the past three semesters, one student has abandoned the course in favour of another education, and another has left for personal reasons.

Setting the minimum average grade at 7,5 could be said to have been based on an arbitrarily chosen level. But it turned out to have a certain relevance, since a couple of students whose grades were on the lower edge of that requirement have in fact had difficulty keeping up with the work.

A theological education was also established at the same time as Ilisimatusarfik. A part of the theological students’ training takes place at Ilisimatusarfik, and we have four theology students who take classes together with Ilisimatusarfik’s own students.

Completing the course at Ilisimatusarfik does not automatically qualify the students in any specific field, except for jobs with the Greenlandic cultural institutions, where one could obtain a position with independent decision-making capacities.

Ilisimatusarfik as a Research Institution

The Greenlandic Language Board was set up in 1982 by enactment. According to the law, the Language Board is to use Ilisimatusarfik as its secretariat. The Language Board is to ensure the preparation of a new Greenlandic dictionary, and that project is of course run by Ilisimatusarfik. It is a double job, since Ilisimatusarfik is in the first place preparing a Greenlandic word bank, from which the dictionary is edited. In addition, Ilisimatusarfik is also preparing a Language Board File. The dictionary project, which is to present a larger and more up-to-date work than previous dictionaries, has reached the stage of data-entering. Actual editing of the dictionary is expected by the end of the year.

Also working toward this end are several of the Language Board’s subcommittees, also based at Ilisimatusarfik — The Personal Name Committee, the Place Name Committee, as well as several terminology groups.

The possibility of recording resource utilization in Greenland has been worked on for some time. After quite some deliberation, it was decided to start data collection in Scorebysund. Although some ethnologic data collection has been done as part of »resource registration« and »dialect collection«, the Scorebysund plans are new in that the material from there is to be used for standardized data collection in all of Greenland. But since there are plans for oil exploration in the Scorebysund area, a »zero point study« is also planned. This study is to provide a basis for comparison with the changes which are expected, and which can be drastic for such a small and isolated community as Scorebysund. The study on resource utilization in the area should also be supplemented with archaeological research, since the present community has only lived in the region since 1925.

Last year, Ilisimatusarfik also carried out a new project, a study of the bases upon which voters made their decisions during a Greenlandic parliamentary election in June, 1984. At the same time, the study served as a trial for research carried out by mail, a technique which offers distinct possibilities in Greenland, with its great distance and high transportation prices. The first results, regarding the respondees’ opinion of the need for alcohol restrictions, came out in March of this year. Questionnaires were sent to slightly over 2100 persons, and 64 per cent of these randomly chosen voters responded. Several similar reports, in both Danish and Greenlandic, are expec-