



The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is a 16-member commission working to boost access to higher education for students in the West and, as importantly, to ensure their success. Alaska has been a member of WICHE since 1955.

### Benefits to Alaska

- ▶ Thousands of students from Alaska have attended undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in other Western states through WICHE's Student Exchange Program, saving millions of dollars, thanks to reduced tuition rates. In just one of the programs, the Western Undergraduate Exchange, Alaska students and their families have saved more than \$220.8 million since 1988, when the program was founded.
- ▶ Alaska has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- ▶ Alaska has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

### Doing the Math:

#### Alaska's Return on Investment

- ▶ In 2017-18 Alaska, its institutions, and its students saved **\$12.4 million** through WICHE and spent \$149,000 for membership in the commission, yielding an **83-fold return on investment**.
- ▶ In the last five years, Alaska students' savings from WUE alone have added up to **\$53.4 million**, yielding a **76-fold return** on the state's investment in WICHE.

### WICHE Student Exchange & Related Programs

Alaska is active in all three WICHE **Student Exchange Programs**: the Western Undergraduate Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2017-18 Alaska's students and families saved **\$12.4 million**. Alaska saved money, too,

through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

**Western Undergraduate Exchange.** Alaska students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Alaska's borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2017-18, 1,239 students from Alaska were enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving more than \$11.6 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to \$9,300. In the last 10 years, students have saved more than **\$114.5 million**.

Alaska benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Alaska's institutions can choose how many out-of-state slots to offer and in which areas, allowing them to make the best use of their resources by accepting students in underenrolled programs. There's a workforce benefit for the state, too, as students often stay in Alaska after graduating. In 2017-18 Alaska received 465 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Alaska has sent 1,257 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in a host of critical fields, including dentistry, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, and podiatry. Historically, some 59 percent of PSEP students return to Alaska to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Alaska's post-graduates also enroll in graduate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to 435 high-quality programs at 60 institutions in all WICHE states. WRGP programs run the gamut, but emerging social, environmental, resource-management, and healthcare fields are particular strengths, as are innovative interdisciplinary programs. In 2017-18 Alaska sent 33 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 10.

**Interstate Passport** is a program that facilitates block transfer of lower-division general education based on learning outcomes and proficiency criteria. It includes learning outcomes for nine knowledge and skill areas developed by faculty at institutions in multiple states as well as an academic progress tracking system for Passport transfer students designed by registrars and institutional researchers. The goal of the Interstate Passport is to eliminate transfer students' unnecessary repetition of learning previously achieved.

## WICHE's Added Value

Alaska gains added value from WICHE's programs in policy, workforce development, technology, mental health, and other areas.

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Alaska has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision making at the state level.

WICHE's 9th edition of *Knocking at the College Door* high school graduate projections, released in December 2016 (and updated in September 2017 with additional data), describes how the nation and many states have entered a decade of stabilization in the number of high school graduates through about 2025—with substantial contraction in the number of White high school graduates and rapid increases of non-White populations—before entering a period of fewer high school graduates related to a recent “baby bust.” The WICHE region will generally track the national trend, but less so based on trends with White youth and more due to a projected 20 percent increase of Hispanic high school graduates through 2024 and then decrease by about the same amount between 2025 and 2032.

There is an abundance of information on [knocking.wiche.edu](http://knocking.wiche.edu), including projections of high school graduates for Alaska and a state profile, which indicates that:

- ▶ Alaska is projected to produce 7,900 high school graduates per year, on average, between school years 2012 and 2032. The year in which the high school graduating class is projected to increase to its next high number is 2025-26 – only about 1.4% more graduates than 2012.

**Figure 1. Alaska Savings through WICHE Programs in 2017**

WUE	\$11,589,362
PSEP	\$297,267
WRGP	\$518,232
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,404,861</b>

“Being from Alaska, I’ve been around boats and the water my whole life. I looked into Cal Maritime for maritime studies, and didn’t think my family could afford it until we found out about the WUE scholarship. It was the deciding factor in making my education at Cal Maritime possible. Thanks to WUE, I’ll get to fulfill my dream of working on the water anywhere in the world.”

– Sanford, Alaska resident,  
California Maritime Academy, Maritime Studies

- ▶ Non-White public high school graduates in Alaska will increase from 40% to 45% of public high school graduates, while White graduates decrease from 60% to 55%.

**Regional Academic Leadership Initiatives.** The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Alaska Southeast, and the University of Alaska System are members of the **Western Academic Leadership Forum** (the Forum). Their official representatives are the chief academic leaders of the four-year institutions and their related system and state agencies, who address regional higher education issues, and engage in resource-sharing. The **Western Alliance for Community College Academic Leaders** (the Alliance) brings academic leaders of community colleges and technical schools and systems together with state governing and coordinating boards associated with two-year institutions to exchange ideas, share resources, and collaborate on regional initiatives. The University of Alaska Fairbanks; University of Alaska Fairbanks – Bristol Bay Campus, Chukchi Campus, Interior-Aleutians Campus, Kuskokwim Campus, and Northwest Campus; University of Alaska Fairbanks Community and Technical College are members.

**Technology.** Alaska has been active in the **WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET)**, the leader in the practice, policy, and advocacy of technology-enhanced learning in higher education. WCET is widely recognized as one of the most informative, reliable, and forward-thinking organizations regarding the role of technology and innovation in higher education. Our growing membership includes more than 350 institutions, state and system-wide higher education agencies, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations in nearly all U.S. states and many Canadian provinces. WCET members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and exemplars of successful learning technology innovation in practice. Key WCET activities include an annual meeting, leadership summits, national webcasts, and email list-based discussions among members. Major topics of interest to the WCET membership include student success, faculty success, managing e-learning, emerging technologies, and evolving policy issues. University

of Alaska Geography Program and the University of Alaska Southeast's Stories of Culture and Place won the WCET Outstanding Work (WOW) award in 2008, which recognizes effective and innovative uses of technology to address specific needs in higher education.

**Mental Health.** WICHE's Mental Health Program has maintained a high level of engagement with Alaska for most of its 60 years of service to the West. Our earliest efforts spanned the transition from territory to statehood, and included deploying an itinerant clinical team each summer from the late 1950s through the 1960s. This team traveled across Alaska providing both mental health and special education-related evaluations to assist in service planning. WICHE led the development of the pioneering [Alaska Psychology Internship Consortium](#). This project allows University of Alaska psychology doctoral students to complete their training within the state at training sites that focus on rural and indigenous people. The program is accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA).

During 2017 WICHE contracted with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to review the existing Behavioral Health Aide curriculum and associated Knowledge and Skills Checklist competency assessment, as well as to compare the assessment to the Alaska Core Competencies for Direct Care Workers and associated curricula/evaluations. WICHE helped develop the [Alaskan Core Competencies](#) as part of a multiyear project that focused on improving the skills of direct-care workers, along with a standardized curriculum and tools to assess worker skills. WICHE staff has also led several evaluation studies in Alaska, including systems-level and individual program evaluations utilizing multi-method approaches to provide information to funders on the viability of program structure and progress toward goals. For example, WICHE provides technical assistance and consultation to the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API).

**State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)** is a voluntary, nationwide initiative of states that makes distance education courses more accessible to students across

state lines and makes it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. The effort initially was funded by \$3.2 million in grants from Lumina Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and is now supported by fees paid by institutions. The initiative is administered by the country's four regional higher education compacts: the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) – and overseen by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). States and institutions that choose to participate agree to operate under common standards and procedures, providing a more uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states, and better resolution of student complaints. Alaska was among the first WICHE states to become a member of W-SARA in this reciprocal relationship.

**Other Initiatives.** The **Master Property Program (MPP)** helps institutions reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) and expanded to the WICHE region in 2004, the MPP includes more than 160 campuses with total insured values of over \$93.4 billion. WICHE is also partnering with MHEC to offer **MHECare**, a new health program providing vetted, competitively priced medical benefits for students. Underwritten by UnitedHealthcare StudentResources, MHECare offers a variety of plans. In a third collaboration with MHEC, WICHE extends the benefits of **MHECtech** to colleges and universities in the West, enabling them to purchase off competitively bid purchasing agreements to reduce costs on a range of hardware and software products and services.

## Alaska & WICHE's Leadership

The **WICHE Commission**, with three commissioners from each member, molds the organization's mission and set its priorities. Alaska's commissioners are Susan A. Anderson, president/CEO, CIRI Foundation, Anchorage; Stephanie Butler, executive director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Juneau; and James Johnsen, president, University of Alaska System, Fairbanks.



"I wouldn't have come this far without WICHE's PSEP program. Health professional education in Alaska seems limited without our own medical, dental, and pharmacy schools. However, WICHE's PSEP gave me an opportunity to pursue my dream to become a dentist. It not only increased my chances of getting accepted to my top dental schools, but it also lightened the financial burden which can drag a student down over four years of dental school. WICHE is a great motivation to do well in school, and to practice in my home state after graduation."

– Alice, Alaska resident, Class of 2020,  
A.T. Still University,  
Arizona School of Dentistry & Oral Health



Susan Anderson



Stephanie Butler



James Johnsen

WICHE also seeks assistance and advice from policymakers, educators, administrators, and legislators. WICHE's [Legislative Advisory Committee \(LAC\)](#), composed of legislator-members from each state—including Alaska Rep. Harriet Drummond and Sen. Gary Stevens—has been crucial in this regard. It works to keep the commission's Executive Committee and staff current on significant legislative issues related to higher education, provides input on WICHE initiatives, and advises staff on a host of issues. WICHE staff also serve the LAC by informing members about emerging policy issues in the West.

## WICHE Commission & Staff

The [WICHE Commission](#) includes three gubernatorial selected representatives from each member: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Members work collaboratively to provide educational access and excellence for all citizens.

WICHE and its staff are headquartered in Boulder, Colo., and operate out of the State Higher Education Policy Center, which WICHE owns with the State Higher Education Executive Officers association and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Staff leadership includes:

**David Longanecker**, president

**Michael Abbiatti**, vice president for educational technologies and executive director, WCET

**John Lopez**, special assistant to the president and chief administrative officer, and director, W-SARA

**Demarée Michelau**, vice president, policy analysis and research

**Jere Mock**, vice president, programs and services

**Dennis Mohatt**, vice president, behavioral health

**Jeremy Simon**, director of strategic communications

## How can I find out more about WICHE?

Visit our website at [wiche.edu](http://wiche.edu) or contact 303.541.0200.

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