

WICHE ICE ... *from a Provost's Perspective*

Thomas Miller has been the vice provost for academic affairs at the University of Alaska Anchorage since 2002. Prior to becoming an administrator, he taught in the Aviation Technology program and then in the School of Engineering. During his career at the university the school has grown into a comprehensive university serving more than 20,000 students.

The growth has resulted in many new academic programs striving to meet the needs of a very diverse community. Through online learning, UAA has been able to extend its reach even further. Today it serves many students across the state, delivering courses and programs to urban centers, small communities and rural villages.

Like most institutions, the academic demands of the population it serves exceed the institution's resources. Miller says "UAA simply cannot offer all the courses and programs that are desired or needed with the kind of quality to satisfy everyone. The needs exceed our system's capacity. This is where ICE comes in.

"Through ICE we can provide our students access to courses and programs which UAA does not offer. By creating associations with other institutions, the learning experience is enriched for faculty and students. Discipline conferences are a good source of enrichment but they are infrequent and may be unfocused. Participating in ICE gives faculty ongoing access to new ideas and teaching techniques from their colleagues at other institutions.

"ICE also provides us with the additional flexibility we sometimes need in those scheduling anomalies. When we have someone on sabbatical or retiring, we may import courses through ICE until the faculty member returns or until we have a new position in place. By relying on seats in a course at another institution we can forgo course development costs, reducing our expenses even as we ensure that there is no disruption in service to our students. Conversely, we can earn revenue for seats in courses where we have extra capacity, enabling us to offer some courses that would otherwise be cancelled."

One of the real benefits Miller sees to ICE is that students maintain their relationship with their home institution. "Our faculty has reviewed courses we import through ICE so our students can work with their advisors to determine how they articulate to their program before they register. Otherwise, students take courses from a variety of places and these courses may or may not transfer. Some students get overwhelmed by the transfer and articulation process or they become distracted and simply stop out. ICE streamlines all of this and allows the students to apply their financial aid to a single institution. It could lead to better completion rates in the end."

There is so much potential for ICE in the future according to Miller. "For provosts, everything is always in flux. There are constant shifts in disciplines, curriculum, higher learning imperatives, and resources. It makes planning difficult but ICE, with its short-term and long-term solutions, provides administrators and faculty with another useful tool. The key is giving our faculty the opportunity to get to know and trust their colleagues at other institutions. Then we can focus on collaboratively generating capacity to address regional demands and develop more robust offerings in subject areas. It is a win-win for all of us."

