



ALASKA & WICHE

Working Together for Over a Half Century

WICHE



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Western Interstate
Commission for Higher
Education

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Since 1955 Alaska has been a member of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), a 15-state commission working to boost access to higher education for students in the West and, as importantly, to ensure their success.

In the five-plus decades since Alaska joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of essential ways.

- ▶ 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 \$156 million** since 1988, when the program was founded. (See "Doing the Math," below, for Alaska's return on investment.)
- ▶ 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.

WICHE and Alaska have shared a remarkably fruitful history. But their prospects for the future are even more exciting.

WICHE's Student Exchange

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 2011-12 Alaska's students and families saved **\$12.7 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, **saving on 27,496 annual tuition bills**. In 2011-12, 1,496 students from Alaska are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving

Doing the Math: Alaska's Return on Investment

In 2011-12 Alaska, its institutions, and its students saved **\$12.7 million** through WICHE and spent \$125,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a **100-fold return on investment**.

In the last 5 years, Alaska students' savings from WUE alone have added up to **\$61.6 million**, again yielding a **100-fold return** on the state's investment in WICHE.

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more than \$12.2 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to \$8,162. In the last dozen years, students have saved **\$127 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 2011-12 Alaska received 562 students through WUE.

Professional Student Exchange Program. Alaska has sent over **1,225 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 50 percent of PSEP students return to Alaska to pursue their professional careers.

Western Regional Graduate Program. Alaska’s postgraduates also participate in graduate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to over 250 high-quality, distinctive programs (“distinctive” meaning they’re offered at only four or fewer institutions in the WICHE region) at 47 institutions in all WICHE states. WRGP programs run the gamut, but emerging social, environmental, and resource-management fields and innovative interdisciplinary programs are particular strengths. In 2011-12 Alaska sent 19 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 14.

Internet Course Exchange (ICE). The University of Alaska Anchorage is a founding member of WICHE’s newest exchange, ICE, an alliance of member institutions and systems with a set of policies, procedures, and support systems for sharing distance-delivered courses among two- and four-year institutions in the 15-state WICHE region.

Figure 1. Alaska Residents’ Tuition Savings through WUE, WRGP, & PSEP in 2011

Student Savings	
WUE	\$12,210,623
PSEP	\$203,220
WRGP	\$254,337
TOTAL	\$12,668,180

“WICHE ICE provides tangible benefits to a quartet of constituencies: students, to whom it offers greater choice in course and program offerings; faculty members, whom it provides with incentives to teach online and the means to collaborate with peers; institutions, which it assists by enabling the efficient use of resources and the expanded ability to respond to student, state, and workforce needs; and higher education, to which it offers a model for course and program exchanges, where credit transferability and course applicability are determined and facilitated by faculty.”



– Thomas Miller
Vice Provost for Accreditation and Undergraduate Programs
University of Alaska Anchorage

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. For the last three years, Alaska has been a leader in WICHE’s **College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Consortium and Network**, which work to increase the number of low-income students prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. WICHE provides Alaska with expert consultation and services focused on grant development and management and program implementation and evaluation. Through CACG the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) has worked closely with WICHE to design and implement a near-peer mentoring program: recent University of Alaska graduates have worked with over 2,400 students at Service and Bartlett high schools in activities ranging from career exploration to postsecondary preparation and the college application process. Data collected at the end of year one indicate that the program’s near-peer encouragement and engagement strategies have had a significant impact, increasing the number of students who plan on attending four or more years of postsecondary education and the number who have taken the ACT or SAT. As ACPE expands its program into rural areas, WICHE is assisting with site selection and hiring.

WICHE has been active in supporting Alaska’s efforts to develop a **statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS)**, both with its own resources and through grant-supported projects and contract work. First, Alaska participated in a

WORKING TOGETHER *for* OVER a HALF CENTURY

“I was born and raised in Alaska. I wanted to travel and study outside of my home state, but I was discouraged by the high out-of-state tuition rates. After hearing about WUE, I began to look at Western universities outside of Alaska. I am now enrolled at Central Washington University and thoroughly enjoying my educational experience and involvement with the Central Equestrian Team. This would not have been possible without WUE!”

– Mary, Alaska resident, Class of 2014, Central Washington University, Biology

meeting that brought together the stewards of the data systems in 14 WICHE states in 2008 for discussions around linking education and workforce data longitudinally. A central topic was how to address the challenges to data sharing presented by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. WICHE also facilitated a meeting of key state officials in Anchorage that aided in accelerating Alaska’s SLDS development efforts and prepared a report based on interviews with state agency personnel, including recommendations addressing the design and function of SLDS for Alaska. WICHE helped Alaska secure technical assistance from federal Department of Education (at no cost to the state) and facilitated a 2010 retreat at our facilities for state officials integrally involved in SLDS development and consultants supplied by the federal government. WICHE’s work also contributed directly to the applications Alaska submitted for the last two SLDS competitions the federal government conducted.

WICHE lent its expertise on state-funded financial aid to a debate in Alaska on the **financial aid policy** proposed by Governor Parnell for the 2010 legislative session. WICHE prepared detailed cost projections for a version of a state need-based grant program. WICHE President David Longanecker met with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education to discuss strategic planning for higher education and the possibility of developing a state student aid program, as well as testifying before the Senate Education Committee on student aid.

Alaska was chosen for the Ford Foundation-funded project *Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education*, which engaged state officials and business community members to strengthen the alignment of state investments in **postsecondary education and state workforce needs**.

Additionally, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the University of Alaska Statewide Systems belong to the **Western Academic Leadership Forum**, whose members address regional higher education issues and engage in cooperative resource sharing. The Forum held its 2009 annual meeting at the University of Alaska Anchorage. A new WICHE initiative, the **Western Alliance for Community College Academic Leaders**, 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 and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Alaska Fairbanks–Bristol Bay, and University of Alaska Anchorage Community and Technical College are members.

Technology. Alaska has been very active in the **WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET)**, a membership organization that advances access and excellence in higher education through the innovative use of technology. WCET staff has presented to the Alaska Advisory Task Force on Higher Education and Career Readiness on how distance education can help to serve the remediation needs of students. The University of Alaska’s institutions have benefitted from WCET’s focus on federal distance education regulations, with WCET helping member institutions understand how to respond to regulations regarding issues such as student authentication, financial aid last-day-of-attendance, and state approval of distance education institutions.

WCET members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and exemplars of successful learning technology innovation in practice. WCET provides access to peers, colleagues, common interest groups, experts, and decision makers; communications tools that enable members to stay informed about developments affecting technology-enabled teaching and learning; and information about key developments affecting e-learning providers, such as new federal rules pertaining to distance education. WCET also manages multi-institutional projects, one aimed at adult online learners and another on large-scale student data aggregation and predictive analytics to improve student outcomes.

Mental Health. WICHE’s Mental Health Program has worked with Alaska on a wide range of initiatives. It is currently leading the development of the pioneering Alaska Psychology Internship Consortium, a partnership between five training sites that focuses on rural and indigenous people. Alaska does not have an American Psychology Association-accredited internship program, and this project will allow University of Alaska psychology doctoral students to complete their training within the

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state. WICHE is also providing technical assistance to improve the application of a “person-centered” treatment planning and discharge process within a short-term, acute care inpatient framework for involuntary committed adults at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute.

Through a multiyear project with the Annapolis Coalition on the Behavioral Health Workforce that focused on improving the skills of direct care workers via the development of core competencies, WICHE helped develop the Alaskan Core Competencies, along with a standardized curriculum and tools to assess worker skills. In addition, Two Alaska higher education campuses participated in a research study, funded by the National Institute for Mental Health, that focused on campus mental health and the effects of mental health first aid training for campus residence life staff.

WICHE has provided support to the Alaska Division of Behavioral Health on the use of data to inform decisions. Data sources have been developed and implemented for performance indicators on access, outcomes, and appropriateness of services. WICHE staff has also led several evaluation studies in Alaska, including systems-level and individual program evaluations utilizing multimethod approaches to provide information to funders on the viability of program structure and progress toward goals.

Other Initiatives. Another initiative, the **Master Property Program (MPP)**, helps institutions reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact in 1994 and expanded to the WICHE region in 2004, the MPP includes 50 member institutions with total insured values of \$78.9 billion. It has generated some \$65.4 million in savings for the participating institutions while expanding their insurance coverage.

Alaska & WICHE’s Leadership

In 2008 Alaska’s Diane M. Barrans, executive director of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education in Juneau, chaired the **WICHE Commission**, whose members mold the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Barrans is one of three Alaska commissioners, along with Susan A. Anderson, president/CEO, CIRI



Diane Barrans



Susan Anderson



James Johnsen

Foundation, Anchorage, and James Johnsen, senior vice president of administration, Doyon, Limited, Fairbanks.

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 Rep. Paul Seaton and Sen. Bettye Davis – has been crucial in this regard. The LAC 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 serves the LAC, by informing its members about emerging policy issues in the West.

WICHE Commission & Staff

The WICHE Commission includes 45 members from 15 Western states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

WICHE and its staff are headquartered in Boulder, CO, 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

Margo Colalancia, director, Student Exchange Program

Demarée Michelau, director of policy analysis

Jere Mock, vice president, Programs and Services

Dennis Mohatt, director, Mental Health Program, and vice president, behavioral health

Brian Prescott, director of policy research

Pat Shea, director, Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders, WICHE ICE, and Western Academic Leadership Forum

Ellen Wagner, executive director, WCET

How can I find out more about WICHE?

Visit our website at www.wiche.edu or contact President David Longanecker at 303.541.0201.

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Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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