



WICHE & MONTANA

Partnering for Over Six Decades

WICHE



ACCESS • COLLABORATION • INNOVATION

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. Montana has been a member of WICHE since 1952.

Benefits to Montana

- ▶ Tens of thousands of students from Montana have attended undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in other Western states through WICHE's Student Access Programs, saving millions of dollars, thanks to reduced tuition rates. In just one of the programs, the Western Undergraduate Exchange, Montana students and their families have saved \$124 million since 1988, when the program was founded.
- ▶ Montana has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- ▶ Montana has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

Doing the Math:

Montana's Return on Investment

- ▶ In 2018-19 Montana, its institutions, and its students saved **\$8.8 million** through WICHE and spent \$153,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a **5,742 percent return on investment**.
- ▶ In the last five years, Montana students' savings from WUE alone have added up to **\$27.4 million**.

WICHE's Student Access & Related Programs

Montana is active in all three WICHE **Student Access Programs**: the Western Undergraduate Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2018-19 Montana's students and families saved more than **\$8.8 million**. Montana saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Montana students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Montana's

borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2018-19, 977 students from Montana were enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving \$5.6 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to \$5,700. In the last 10 years, students have saved **\$55.2 million**.

Montana benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Montana'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 Montana after graduating. In 2018-19 Montana received 2,516 students through WUE.

Professional Student Exchange Program. Montana has sent **1,621 students** to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in a host of critical fields, including dentistry, medicine, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathic medicine, podiatry, and veterinary medicine. Historically, 55 percent of PSEP students return to Montana to pursue their professional careers. In addition, in 2018-19, the state received three students and \$38,125 in support fees from other Western states.

Western Regional Graduate Program. Montana's students also enroll in graduate and certificate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to more than 700 high-quality programs at some 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 2018-19 Montana sent 70 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 99.

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

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

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, including projections of high school graduates for Alaska and a state profile, which indicates that:

- ▶ Montana is projected to produce 10,000 high school graduates per year, on average, between school years 2012 and 2032. The number of high school graduates in Montana will increase 11% between 2012 and 2026.
- ▶ Non-White public high school graduates are currently about 13% of all of Montana's public high school graduates and will increase to 18% of the total by 2032.

Policy & Workforce Development. Montana has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision-making at the state level. WICHE initiatives have been sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Helmsley Charitable Trusts, the Ford



“To all the legislators and supporters of WICHE’s PSEP program: I just wanted to express my sincere appreciation. Through WICHE, I am achieving something that no one in my family has done before: becoming an optometrist. While the money helps alleviate some of the expense of optometry school, this program provides more than just money to a student. It provides a head start to graduates. When I finish school, I may be able to start a family sooner. Most of all, I am very proud to know that Montana supports a nucleus of future professionals that will truly help the residents of Montana. I can’t wait to return the favor that WICHE and Montana gave to me; I look forward to providing exceptional care for my future patients.”

– Jordan, Montana resident,
Pacific University, College of Optometry

Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and others. In addition, WICHE policy experts often visit the state to present or consult on a number of vital issues, including workforce needs, balancing the financial aid portfolio, educational policy and practice, and demographic change. In August 2017, WICHE staff presented at the Montana Post Secondary Educational Opportunities Council’s (MPSEOC) Annual Summer Conference. WICHE staff led a discussion of *Knocking* projections and Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) trends in the Western region and Montana with the group of admissions officers from Montana’s postsecondary institutions.

Montana participated in a Gates-funded meeting that brought together the stewards of the data systems in 14 of the WICHE states for discussions around linking data internally and with other states. A central topic of conversation was how to address the challenges to data-sharing presented by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Regional Academic Leadership Initiatives. The Montana University System, MSU Billings, MSU Bozeman, Montana Technological University, University of Montana Missoula, and University of Montana Western 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, 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 and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. Montana University System and all of its 12 community colleges are members. Montana hosted a joint annual meeting of the Forum and the Alliance in Missoula in 2016.

Figure 1. Montana Savings and Revenues through WICHE Programs in 2018

Student Savings

WUE	\$5,560,971
PSEP	\$2,151,602
WRGP	\$1,073,450
Total Student Savings	\$8,786,023

Revenue to MT

Institutions (PSEP)	\$38,125
TOTAL	\$8,824,148



"Paying for an undergraduate degree is a big undertaking for anyone. My family was never able to support me financially going through school – it was up to me. I was able to pay for my bachelor's, but when I graduated and it came time to apply to veterinary school, I was unsure if the cost of high student debt was worth pursuing my dream of becoming a veterinarian. When I was awarded PSEP funding from my home state, Montana, my whole world changed. This program made it possible for me to continue my studies and go to veterinary school. I wouldn't be where I am today without WICHE's PSEP, and I can't wait to return to Montana to practice what I love!"

Sadie, Montana resident,
Colorado State University, Veterinary Medicine

Technology. Several Montana colleges and universities are active participants 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, managing e-learning, faculty success, emerging technologies, and evolving policy issues.

Behavioral Health. The Behavioral Health Program recently completed a study of staffing at the Montana State Hospital for the Montana Department of Human Services, Addictive and Mental Disorders Division. WICHE analyzed Montana State Hospital (MSH) staffing, length of stay, and hospital bed data, as well as registered nursing staff duties and supervision models for direct care staff, and compared MSH to five similar hospitals on these indicators.

Through a grant from the American Psychological Association (APA), WICHE provided consultation to the Montana Veterans Administration doctoral psychology internship program to help prepare them for successful APA accreditation.

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). 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. Montana 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 in the West 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 more than 160 campuses with total insured values of over \$93.4 billion. WICHE is also partnering with MHEC to offer **MHECare**, a 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.

Montana & WICHE's Leadership

The **WICHE Commission**, with three commissioners from each member state, molds the organization's mission and set its



"The WRGP resident tuition rate allowed me to earn a valuable education without forcing me to go into large amounts of debt. This financial benefit and affordable education has provided me the opportunity to pay for additional trainings, books, and educational endeavors. These "bonus" avenues of training and education are giving me the skills to help people from all walks of life overcome various mental health difficulties. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve others in the future as a psychologist, and may not have had the opportunity to do so without the benefit of the WRGP tuition rate."

– Julio, Montana resident,
University of North Dakota,
Counseling Psychology PhD program

“I’m a non-traditional student with many family responsibilities: aging parents, high school and college-age children, and I live on a farm in Montana. I never would have been able to afford out-of-state tuition for a graduate nursing program. But by taking part-time classes, I’ve been able to keep up with my responsibilities at home and pay for my classes as I go. I’m in my last semester of classes and was recently hired for a nursing informatics position at a local hospital. None of this would have been possible without WRGP.”

– Sandi, Montana resident,
University of Colorado Denver,
Nursing Informatics Master’s Program (online)

priorities. Montana’s commissioners are: Laurie Bishop, state representative, Livingston; Clayton Christian, immediate past WICHE chair, commissioner of higher education, Montana University System, Helena; and Sheila Stearns, former president, University of Montana, Missoula.



Laurie Bishop



Clayton Christian



Sheila Stearns

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. Nate McConnell and Sen. JP Pommichowski—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 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:

Demarée Michelau, president

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

Patrick Lane, vice president, policy analysis and research

Jere Mock, vice president, programs and services

Dennis Mohatt, vice president, behavioral health

How can I find out more about WICHE?

Visit our website at wiche.edu or contact 303.541.0200.

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Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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