

Western Academic Leadership Academy



July 14-17, 2026

Program

The Western Academic Leadership Academy's intensive, two-and-a-half-day professional development seminar kicks off a year-long process of building the leadership skills and functional knowledge of academic leaders aspiring to become chief academic officers in the West's postsecondary two-year and four-year sectors.

Schedule

Tuesday, July 14, 2026

4:30 – 6:00 pm **Meet Your Mentor and Mentoring Group at WICHE**

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

8:00 - 8:30 am **Introductions and Goals for the Day**
Laura Woodworth-Ney, Academy program and mentoring coordinator

8:30 -10:00 am **Provost Uncovered: Thriving on Day 1 and Beyond**
All-Faculty Discussion:
TJ Bliss, associate commissioner for academic affairs and chief academic officer, Utah System of Higher Education
Jennifer Brown, provost and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs, Montana State University – Northern
Kari Brown-Herbst, senior vice president of academic affairs, Laramie County Community College
Denise Runge, provost and executive vice chancellor, University of Alaska Anchorage
Todd Schwarz, special assistant to the provost, University of Idaho

10:00 - 10:15 am **Break**

10:15 - 11:30 am **The Provost’s Role in Finance: Policy, Budget, and Funding Formulas**
Glen Nelson and Kari Brown-Herbst

11:30 – 11:45 am **Networking Break**

11:45 am – 1:15 pm **Lunch with WICHE Units**

1:15 – 2:00 pm **Small Group Reflection: Finding and Filling Gaps in Your Preparation**
Denise Runge

2:00 – 3:30 pm **Managing Personnel and Legal Issues**
Jean Bannon, attorney, German • Burnette & Associates

3:30 – 3:45 pm **Break**

3:45 – 4:15 pm **Small Group Reflection and Case Studies**

4:15 – 5:00 pm **Leadership and Building Great Teams**
Todd Schwarz and Kari Brown-Herbst

5:00 – 5:15 pm **Wrap-up and Adjourn**
Laura Woodworth-Ney

6:00 pm **Group Dinner with Table Topics**

Thursday, July 16, 2026

8:00 – 8:15 am	Reflections and Goals for the Day
8:15 - 9:15 am	Accreditation and Strategic Planning TJ Bliss, Kari Brown-Herbst, Denise Runge
9:15 - 10:00 am	Small Group Reflection and Case Studies
10:00 - 10:15 am	Break
10:15 – 11:15 am	Governance, Unions, and Faculty Relations All Faculty
11:15 – 12:15 pm	Political Landscape and Policy Update All Faculty, Patrick Lane, Vice President, Policy and Research, WICHE (invited)
12:15 pm – 1:45pm	Lunch with Your Mentoring Group
1:45 – 3:00 pm	Student Success: Enrollment Management and Collaborating with Student Affairs Kaylyn Bondy and Jennifer Brown
3:00 – 3:45 pm	Small Group Reflection and Case Studies
3:45 – 4:00 pm	Break
4:00 – 5:15 pm	Navigating Political Landscapes in Higher Education All Faculty
5:15 – 6:00 pm	Work/Life Balance: Is It Possible? Cassandra Manuelito-Kerkvliet, past president, Antioch University Seattle
Dinner on your own	

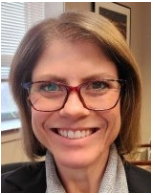
Friday, July 17, 2026

8:15 – 8:30 am	Reflections and Goals for the Day Laura Woodworth-Ney
8:30 – 9:45 am	The Importance of Building Coalitions: Presidential and Cabinet Relations Kaylyn Bondy, Glen Nelson, Denise Runge
9:45 - 10:00 am	Break
10:00 – 11:00 am	Case Study/Mentoring Report Out
11:00 – 12:00 am	Reflection Panel All Faculty
12:15	Adjourn

Academy Faculty



TJ Bliss, Ph.D., is the associate commissioner for academic affairs and chief academic officer for the Utah System of Higher Education. He is also a clinical assistant professor in education leadership at the University of Idaho. Previously, he served as the chief academic officer for the Idaho State Board of Education and has held several other executive leadership positions in governmental, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors. Bliss received a Ph.D. in education research and B.S. in microbiology from Brigham Young University and an M.S. in biology from the University of Nebraska.



Jennifer Brown, Ph.D., has served as provost and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs at Montana State University – Northern since June 2023. In this role, Brown oversees a wide array of academic programs in arts and sciences, education, health sciences, and technical sciences. Previously, she served as associate provost and dean of academic analytics at Eastern Connecticut State University, where she was also a tenured full professor of economics. Brown received her B.A. in economics from Weber State University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in economics from University of California, Santa Barbara. Her areas of expertise are in industrial organization, environmental economics, and econometrics.



Kari Brown-Herbst is the senior vice president of academic affairs at Laramie County Community College (LCCC) in Cheyenne, Wyoming. As the college's chief academic officer, Brown-Herbst provides executive oversight and strategic guidance in the planning, development, and implementation of all aspects of academic programming as well as instructional support services. Brown-Herbst serves on the AACC Commission on Structured Pathways and serves the Higher Learning Commission as a member of the Peer Review Corps as well as a member of their Institutional Actions Council. Regionally, Brown-Herbst represents Wyoming's community colleges on WICHE's Alliance executive committee. She received an Ed.D. in instructional technology from the University of Wyoming, her master's in education technology from Marian University (Wisconsin) and her bachelor's in sociology with an education endorsement from Kalamazoo College (Michigan).



Denise Runge, Ph.D., has served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Alaska Anchorage since 2020. She leads programming across five campuses and collaborates closely with the other campuses in the Alaska system. Previously, she held similar positions in Montana and Georgia. Runge received her B.A. in political science from Washington and Jefferson College, an M.A. from Jacksonville State University, and Ph.D. in policy and administration from the University of Alabama.



Todd Schwarz serves as the special assistant to the provost for community college relations for the University of Idaho. He has had a long career in a variety of roles spanning 35 years at CSI, including over 20 in administration as department chair, dean of career technical education, and served as provost for 11 years. In 2012 he was appointed to the role of state administrator of the Idaho Division of Career Technical Education before returning to College of Southern Idaho. Schwarz holds associate, baccalaureate, and master's degrees from three Idaho schools and a Ph.D. in education (leadership emphasis) from the University of Idaho for which he researched career decision-making characteristics of community college students and is currently studying community college to university transfer.



Laura Woodworth-Ney, Ph.D., joined AGB Search in 2022. Woodworth-Ney has more than thirty years of experience in higher education as a tenured full professor, academic historian, and administrator. With over a decade in the provost's office at Idaho State University, she was the first female executive vice president and provost. A staunch advocate for equity and accessibility, Woodworth-Ney helped pioneer initiatives that significantly expanded the application and retention rates of Idaho's public institutions and was honored with the 2021 President's Medallion Award from Idaho State University. An expert on the history of the North American West, Woodworth-Ney is the author of three books. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in History from Washington State University and a B.A. in English from the University of Idaho.

Guest Speakers



Jean Bannon enjoys advising clients on employment law compliance, mentoring other German • Burnette & Associates attorneys and assisting with the defense of cases in all of the firm's practice areas. Prior to joining the firm in 2009, Bannon served as senior in-house employment counsel for the University of New Mexico for many years and also worked in private practice. She is an experienced employment lawyer, advising clients on a variety of personnel matters, and other civil litigation claims against public and private entities. Jean offers practical legal advice and a wealth of expertise in employment and other areas of law. She has served as an arbitrator, has participated in numerous mediations and federal settlement conferences and has provided management training for public and private clients. She has been a frequently invited speaker at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities annual conferences.



Kaylyn Bondy serves as the vice president for student affairs at Bismarck State College (BSC) in Bismarck, North Dakota. She oversees student success and development, strategic enrollment planning, policy formation, and state/federal regulation implementation. Prior to her work at BSC, she led student affairs for nine years at Williston State College and worked prior to that in international education. Bondy received her B.A. in French from the University of North Dakota, a Master's in French American international business from l'Université de Caen Basse-Normandie, an M.B.A. from the University of St. Thomas and a Ph.D. in higher education from the University of North Dakota.



As president of Antioch University Seattle, **Cassandra Manuelito-Kerkvliet** became the first Native American woman to ascend to the presidency of a mainstream university outside the tribal colleges. Prior to her presidency in Seattle, she served as the first Navajo woman president of Diné College, a tribal college on the Navajo reservation in Arizona and New Mexico. Manuelito-Kerkvliet received her bachelors degree in social work and masters degree in counselor education from the University of Wyoming. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Oregon in educational policy and management, with a special emphasis in higher education administration.



Glen Nelson is the vice president, administration and finance/CFO for California State University Monterey Bay. He has worked in higher education for 26 years holding senior administrative positions at the college, university and system levels including service at Arizona State University, Idaho State University, the University of Nebraska, and the University of Wisconsin System. Prior to entering higher education, he spent fourteen years in the corporate sector. His research is focused on the unintended consequences of administrative actions such as differential tuition and tuition transparency on access and choices made by first generation students and those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Glen earned a Ph.D. in educational studies, with a specialization in educational leadership and higher education from the University of Nebraska, an M.B.A. from Thunderbird (AZ), and a B.S. in business administration from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

About the Western Academic Leadership Forum

The Western Academic Leadership Forum (Forum) provides a unique avenue by which the West's top academic leaders share perspectives on current issues to help inform their future decision making and leadership. Through the Forum, colleagues share the lessons they've learned from tackling challenges, and provide advice and assistance to one another based on their special expertise. They engage in planning and developing innovative regional initiatives addressing common concerns and together help build a stronger future for higher education in the West. The official representatives of the Forum's members are the chief academic leaders at the four-year institutions and their related system and state agencies in the WICHE region. www.wiche.edu/Forum

About the Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders

The Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders (Alliance) is a membership organization that serves as an incubator for collaborating and problem-solving among chief academic officers (or equivalent) at WICHE-region community colleges and technical schools, related systems, and state coordinating and governing boards. How should community colleges retool in a fast-evolving economy? What strategies work for increasing student access and completion? How can colleges foster a seamless interrelationship between their programs and workforce opportunities? These are just a few of countless issues of distinct concern to chief academic leaders, but common to peer two-year institutions across the Western United States. Together, this network's participants seek solutions to these and other issues beyond the scope of a single institution, system, or state on behalf of Alliance-member institutions.

www.wiche.edu/Alliance

About the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education works collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. WICHE's 16 members include 15 states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, as well as member U.S. Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States (which currently include the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam). www.wiche.edu



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