

# **WWAMI is Alaska's Medical School!**



**WWAMI** is a collaborative medical school among universities in five northwestern states ( Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho) and the University of Washington School of Medicine.

The Alaska WWAMI Program began at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (as WAMI) in 1971. The program moved to the University of Alaska Anchorage in 1989. Historically, ten Alaska residents were admitted to the Alaska WWAMI program each year. However, through the combined efforts of the Alaska WWAMI Program, the University of Alaska, and the Alaska legislature, the Alaska WWAMI class size has been doubled.

## ***The Alaska WWAMI Program now admits 20 students per year!***

Students apply to the University of Washington School of Medicine; upon admission, Alaska's WWAMI students complete their first year of medical school at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The first year of training includes courses in basic sciences and an introduction to clinical medicine.

Students from all five WWAMI states attend second-year courses at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. The third and fourth years of the medical school curriculum are comprised of "clerkships"--rotations in the various medical specialty areas. These clerkships may be taken in any of the five WWAMI states. Students who choose the "Alaska Track" can take nearly all of these clerkships in Alaska.

## ***Alaskans can now complete approximately 3 of the 4 years of medical school in Alaska!***

## **Alaska WWAMI Payback Obligation**

The education of all Alaska WWAMI medical students is subsidized by the State of Alaska via payments to the University of Washington School of Medicine. The State of Alaska views these subsidies as loans that are repayable once medical education is complete. Loan repayment can be deferred during residency training. Repayment can take two forms. The loan can simply be repaid in regular payments, or it can be forgiven by medical practice in the State of Alaska. For Alaska WWAMI medical students who entered medical school in the fall of 2007 or later, complete loan forgiveness requires three (3) years of medical practice in a rural setting in Alaska or five (5) years in an urban location in the state.

## HISTORY OF ALASKA WWAMI

Alaska was the first state to partner with the University of Washington School of Medicine in the collaborative medical school known as WWAMI. Classes began at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 1971. Classes in Montana and Idaho were started in 1972. Wyoming became a partner, adding the second “W” to the acronym, in 1996. The purpose of WWAMI is to provide publicly funded medical education to residents of this five-state region, and to train physicians who will return to practice in their home states.

Alaska’s WWAMI Program has historically provided a very good return on the state’s investment. On average, for every ten medical school seats funded by the State of Alaska, eight WWAMI-trained physicians have entered practice in the State. Alaska WWAMI has admitted students from virtually all parts of the state; slightly more than half of these students have been female.



92 FEMALE

78 MALE

Geographical distribution of home towns (red triangles) and gender distribution (bar at bottom) of Alaska WWAMI students from 1989 through 2005.

## Development of Alaska WWAMI

The first Alaska “WAMI” class in 1971 consisted of five Alaskan students and four students from Washington. They completed the first quarter of their medical education at UAF, and the remainder was completed at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle.

Alaska WWAMI relocated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks to the University of Alaska Anchorage in 1989, where it currently resides. Through the years, Alaska WWAMI evolved to provide nearly three of the four years of medical school education in the State. Alaska’s WWAMI students complete their first year of medical school in Alaska. Students from all five WWAMI states take second-year classes in Seattle. The third and fourth years are comprised of clinical clerkship rotations in the various medical specialty areas, each four to six weeks in length. These clerkships may be taken in any of the five WWAMI states. The Alaska Track provides Alaska WWAMI students with the ability to complete nearly all third- and fourth-year clerkships in Alaska.



## **WWAMI Overview and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

### **WWAMI Overview**

WWAMI provides Alaska residents with high quality medical education. WWAMI is a collaboration among universities in five northwestern states (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho) under the overarching administration of the University of Washington School of Medicine (UWSOM). After admission, Alaska students attend the University of Alaska Anchorage for the 1<sup>st</sup> year of medical school. Students attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> years of medical school at UWSOM with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years including opportunities for training rotations throughout the region.

Each year 20 Alaskans are admitted to Alaska WWAMI. Alaska's WWAMI medical students take their first-year courses at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Students from all WWAMI states take second-year courses in Seattle. The series of clinical clerkships that comprise the third and fourth years of the curriculum may be taken in any of the five WWAMI states. The "Alaska Track" allows students the option to take nearly all of these clerkships in Alaska.

The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) is the fiscal agent for the State of Alaska which funds Alaska's WWAMI participation and is the servicer for the WWAMI loan obligation.

### **WWAMI FAQs**

#### **Who should Alaskans contact if they are interested in information about the WWAMI program?**

The Director of the WWAMI program at the University of Alaska Anchorage can be contacted at 3211 Providence Drive Engr 331, Anchorage, AK 99508. The e-mail address is [aywwami@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:aywwami@uaa.alaska.edu) and the phone number is (907)786-4789.

#### **How are new participants selected for participation in the WWAMI program?**

Each year the Alaska WWAMI and the UWSOM Admissions Committees work together to interview and select 20 Alaskans for the program. The Alaska WWAMI office at UAA certifies an applicant's eligibility for the program based on responses to an Eligibility Questionnaire. Once an Alaska applicant is admitted, ACPE is prompted to send the individual the WWAMI service obligation Master Promissory Note (MPN) and a related cover letter. Individuals who accept the offers of admission must sign the MPN and return it to ACPE by July 30, prior to beginning their program of study.

#### **What is the annual WWAMI repayment obligation based upon?**

During the first year of medical school at University of Alaska Anchorage, the principal balance of the loan will be zero. However, by signing the WWAMI Master Promissory Note, each participant has entered into a loan contract and will have a loan repayment obligation for their second, third, and fourth years of medical school at UWSOM. In accordance with state statute governing the WWAMI program, the financial support to be repaid is equal to 50 percent of the amount the State pays to UWSOM, on behalf of the participant, plus interest.

#### **How is Alaska's payment disbursed to UWSOM?**

ACPE annually issues a single warrant to UWSOM to cover the entire amount the State pays for Alaska's contractual costs for the program. An annual Notification of Award letter is sent to each participant advising them of the amount of their financial obligation for the related program year.

#### **How does the service obligation discharge a WWAMI participant's financial obligation?**

The participant who successfully completes the graduate education program for which the financial support was provided and is employed within Alaska in a qualifying medical residency program or other qualifying professional medical practice and who is otherwise qualified shall have the outstanding principal<sup>1</sup> and accrued interest forgiven and considered a grant in accordance with the following percentages:

- (1) for employment in rural<sup>2</sup> areas of the state,
  - (a) up to three years of employment, 33 1/3 percent for each year;

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<sup>1</sup> No amount due and payable prior to the participant entering deferment or forgiveness-qualifying employment is subject to forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup> "Rural" is defined in Alaska law as a community with a population of 7,500 or less that is not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks or with a population of 3,500 or less that is connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks.

- (2) for employment in areas of the state that do not qualify under the program definition as rural,  
 (a) up to five years of employment, 20 percent for each year.

Participants employed as physicians in the state must immediately notify ACPE of the date their qualifying employment began. ACPE will make available to the participant the necessary forms for documenting completion of each annual period of documenting employment until such time as the obligation is fully discharged.

**What are the impacts on my forgiveness benefits if I move from a rural to a non-rural community while performing my qualifying service, or vice versa?**

Participants who initially practice medicine in a rural community will receive their first forgiveness of 33 and 1/3 percent of the loan after their first year of practice. If the participant should then choose to move to a non-rural community and practice medicine, he or she will then receive forgiveness benefits of 20 percent of the remaining loan amount for each year they practice medicine until the balance of the loan is forgiven. The same is true for a participant who practices medicine in a non-rural community and receives forgiveness of 20 percent of the loan and then moves to a rural community to practice medicine. The subsequent forgiveness will be for 33 and 1/3 percent of the remaining loan balance until the loan balance is forgiven.

Forgiveness Benefit	Forgiveness % for all rural practice	Forgiveness % for 2 years of rural practice	Forgiveness % for 1 year of rural practice	Forgiveness % for all non-rural practice
1	33 1/3%	33 1/3%	33 1/3%	20 %
2	66 2/3%	66 2/3%	53 1/3%	40%
3	100%	86 2/3%	73 1/3%	60%
4		100%	93 1/3%	80%
5			100%	100%

**Are participants required to make payments while engaged in employment which satisfies their WWAMI service obligation?**

Generally not. It is critical for a participant to immediately advise ACPE of qualifying employment. Once ACPE is in receipt of documentation the participant is in full-time, qualifying employment in Alaska, the repayment requirement will be deferred. The deferment continues until either the entire period of service is completed or the participant ends the full-time employment or leaves the state, whichever occurs first. However, if a participant enters otherwise qualifying employment after the start of repayment and has past due payments, that participant must pay the loan obligation current before the employment will be considered part of the qualifying period. Additionally, those payments made prior to entering into qualifying repayment will not be subject to forgiveness.

**Who is required to repay a WWAMI loan?**

Any participant who fails to fully satisfy the terms of their service obligation is required to repay their outstanding WWAMI financial obligation plus accrued interest. The obligation converts to a regular loan status at the time the participant fails to qualify for a permitted deferment and the active repayment period begins. In the event a participant is in active repayment for a period of time and thereafter enters qualifying employment, any amount of the loan obligation which was not yet due and payable may be deferred and subsequently be subject to forgiveness in the increments noted above.

**Will ACPE facilitate payment arrangements for participants in a contractual arrangement with a third-party organization for payment of their WWAMI loan?**

ACPE cannot facilitate payment arrangements or otherwise bill a third party but will accept payment on behalf of the borrower from any source.

**What repayment deferment provisions are available to WWAMI participants?**

In addition to the qualifying employment deferment, WWAMI participants are eligible for deferment:

- ◆ while enrolled in a medical education residency program or fellowship required for their specialty field of practice;
- ◆ while performing a service obligation to the National Health Services Corps, the Indian Health Service, or a Uniformed Services Scholarship Program; or,
- ◆ while totally, temporarily disabled.

**What if a WWAMI participant is in a medical education residency program in Alaska?**

WWAMI participants in an Alaska medical education residency program can claim that period of service as qualifying under their WWAMI obligation so long as they hold an Alaska medical license or residency permit and have proof of full-time employment for the relevant period.