



# WICHE & ALASKA

## Partnering for 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. Alaska has been a member of WICHE since 1955.

### Benefits to Alaska

- ▶ 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 \$198.3 million since 1988, when the program was founded.
- ▶ 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.

### Doing the Math:

#### Alaska's Return on Investment

- ▶ In 2015-16 Alaska, its institutions, and its students saved **\$10.4 million** through WICHE and spent \$141,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a **74-fold return on investment**.
- ▶ In the last five years, Alaska students' savings from WUE alone have added up to **\$54.2 million**, yielding an **82-fold return** on the state's investment in WICHE.

### State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)

SARA is a voluntary, nationwide initiative of states that will make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and make 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. Alaska was among the first WICHE states to become a member of W-SARA in this reciprocal relationship.

### WICHE Student Exchange and Related Programs

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 2015-16 Alaska's students and families saved \$10.4 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. In 2015-16, 1,101 students from Alaska were enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving more than \$9.6 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to \$8,755. In the last 10 years, students have saved nearly \$115.4 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 2015-16 Alaska received 533 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Alaska has sent 1,250 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 59 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 380 high-quality, distinctive programs (“distinctive” meaning they’re offered at only four or fewer institutions in the WICHE region) at 60 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 2015-16 Alaska sent 35 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 10.

The **Interstate Passport** is an outcomes-based framework for block transfer of lower division general education. Developed by faculty, registrars, institutional researchers, and academic advisors at two- and four-year institutions in seven states (CA, HI, ND, OR, SD, UT, and WY), the framework addresses barriers to degree completion posed by uneven transfer policies and practices across states. Institutions in four other WICHE states (CO, ID, MT, and NM) and additional states outside the region are involved in its Phase III expansion and scaling efforts to build a nationwide infrastructure supporting friction-free transfer for Passport students. By earning a Passport, students who transfer to another Passport institution will have their learning recognized regardless of differences in course titles and credits, and will not be required to repeat courses to meet general education requirements.

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.** Alaska has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision making at the state level. Alaska participates in the **College Access Challenge Grant Consortium**, in which WICHE assists the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) with the implementation of a near-peer mentoring program and the creation of a statewide college access and success



"I always had ambitions of furthering my education and playing football after high school. Being a graduate from an Alaskan high school made it difficult to choose a school that best fit me, because out-of-state tuition was high. With the help of WUE, I was able to pick a university that fit my needs on the field and in the classroom. I've been given the best chance to succeed in life."

– Josh, Alaska resident, Class of 2014,  
Mayville State University, History Education  
and Physical Education

network. Since 2009 recent college graduates, known as “College Guides,” have worked with thousands of high school students across the entire state in activities ranging from career exploration to postsecondary preparation and the college application and financial aid process. Alaska College & Career Advising Corps data indicate the program has boosted the number of students who have been admitted to (or plan on attending) a postsecondary institution, in addition to the number who have completed the FAFSA. WICHE has helped with ongoing program expansion and the development of sustainability strategies in an effort to keep the program viable once grant funding comes to an end. Beginning with a statewide summit facilitated by WICHE in November 2013, ACPE has also developed the Alaska Postsecondary Access and Completion Network, which seeks to strengthen partnerships, reduce duplication of efforts, and ultimately increase the percentage of Alaskans with a postsecondary degree or credential to 65 percent by 2025. With the assistance of WICHE, network leadership and committees were formed during a series of planning meetings in 2014 and a larger statewide conference of key stakeholders convened in March 2015.

The implementation of academic standards and assessment systems is well underway. As implementation continues, there are a variety of challenges that K-12 and higher education leaders will face in the coming years related to student movement across state lines. To begin the conversation about these challenges, WICHE, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, convened higher education and K-12 leaders from the Western region and additional bordering states in October 2014. Alaska was one of 17 states along with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to participate.

The **Adult College Completion (ACC) Network**, funded by Lumina Foundation, is a 750-member learning network that unites organizations and agencies working to increase college completion by adults with prior college credits but no degree. Activities include an annual workshop, a webinar series, publications, a listserv, and other resources. The ACC Network and WICHE have become national leaders in the area of adult learners and continue to be an important resource to those who strive to better serve non-traditional students.

Figure 1. Alaska Savings through WICHE Programs in 2015	
WUE	\$9,639,260
PSEP	\$282,900
WRGP	\$512,295
Total	\$10,434,455

The [State Higher Education Policy Database \(SHEPD\)](#) is WICHE's online searchable database. It provides state and national policymakers, education leaders, practitioners, and education consumers with an inventory of state-level policies and resources in key issue areas related to access and success in higher education. It contains a blog and an electronic SHEPD alert distribution list to keep subscribers current on important updates. A related resource is the Policy Publications Clearinghouse, a depository of publications, reports, and briefs related to higher education.

WICHE supported Alaska's efforts to develop a [statewide longitudinal data system \(SLDS\)](#), with both its own resources and through grant-supported projects and contract work. The system, known as "ANSWERS," will link existing Alaska K-12, higher education, and employment data to deliver critical information to Alaska's policymakers, educators, and the general public about the state's education continuum. Alaska also participated in a meeting that brought together stewards of the data systems in 14 WICHE states for discussions around linking education and workforce data longitudinally. 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 the U.S. Department of Education (at no cost to the state) and facilitated a 2010 retreat at the WICHE facilities for state officials involved in SLDS development and consultants supplied by the federal government. WICHE's work also contributed directly to the applications Alaska submitted for the SLDS federal competitions.

WICHE prepared detailed cost projections for a version of a state need-based grant program. WICHE President David Longanecker met with the ACPE 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.

The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Southeast, and the University of Alaska System belong to the [Western Academic Leadership Forum](#) (the Forum), whose members address regional higher education issues and engage in cooperative 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, share resources, and collaborate on regional initiatives. The University of Alaska Fairbanks; University of Alaska Fairbanks – Bristol Bay Campus, Chukchi Campus, Interior-Aleutians Campus, Kuskokwim Campus, and Northwest Campus; University of Alaska Community and Technical College; and University of Alaska Anchorage Community and Technical College are members.

**Technology.** Alaska has been active 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 member institutions actively serve more than 4 million college students taking all or part of their academic programs via technology.

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, faculty success, managing e-learning, emerging technologies, and evolving policy issues.

**Mental Health.** WICHE's Mental Health Program has maintained a high level of engagement with Alaska for most of its 60 years of service to the West. Our earliest efforts spanned the transition from territory to statehood, and included deploying an itinerant clinical team each summer from the late 1950s through the 1960s. This team travelled across Alaska providing both mental health and special education-related evaluations to assist in service planning. WICHE led the development of the pioneering [Alaska Psychology Internship Consortium](#). This project allows University of Alaska psychology doctoral students to complete their training within the state at training sites that focus on rural and indigenous people. The program is accredited by the American Psychology Association (APA). WICHE has also partnered with the Alaska Pacific University Psychology Doctoral Program to support its accreditation by the APA. Since the inception of the project, the WICHE MHP has provided administrative leadership and technical assistance related to curriculum enhancements, admissions processes, practicum and dissertation guidelines, and program leadership. The program admitted its first cohort into the new curriculum in May 2015, with plans of submitting a self-study for accreditation by the APA in December 2015.

Also in the area of training and education, WICHE helped develop the [Alaskan Core Competencies](#) as part of a multiyear project that focused on improving the skills of direct-care workers, along with a standardized curriculum and tools to assess worker skills. WICHE also conducted three train-the-trainer events on the competencies, in order to grow the pool of instructors who are skilled to disseminate the training for direct-care workers in agencies across Alaska. 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 staff has also led several evaluation studies in Alaska, including systems-level and individual program evaluations utilizing multi-method approaches to provide information to funders on the viability of program structure and progress toward goals. In FY15, WICHE was engaged in supporting a range of projects, including:

- ▶ Quality improvement efforts at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute.
- ▶ Community needs assessment for the Mat-Su Health Foundation.
- ▶ Technical assistance to the Alaska Psychology Internship Consortium (AK-PIC).
- ▶ Core Competencies for direct care workers training for the Alaska MH Trust Authority.
- ▶ Consultation to support doctoral program accreditation of the counseling psychology program at Alaska Pacific University.
- ▶ Technical assistance to the Division of Behavioral Health related to its Outcomes Identification and System Performance Project (OISP).

**Other Initiatives.** The [Master Property Program \(MPP\)](#) helps institutions reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) and expanded to the WICHE region, the MPP includes more than 160 campuses with total insured values of over \$103 billion. WICHE is also partnering with MHEC to offer [MHECare](#), a new 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.

## Alaska & WICHE's Leadership

The [WICHE Commission](#), with three commissioners from each state, molds the organization's mission and set its priorities. Alaska's commissioners are Susan A. Anderson, president/CEO, CIRI Foundation, Anchorage; Diane Barrans, retired executive director of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education in Juneau; and James Johnsen, president, University of Alaska System, Fairbanks.



Susan Anderson



Diane Barrans



James Johnsen

WICHE also seeks assistance and advice from policy-makers, educators, administrators and legislators. WICHE's [Legislative Advisory Committee \(LAC\)](#), composed of legislator-members from each state – including Alaska Rep. Paul Seaton and Sen. Gary Stevens – has been crucial in this regard. It 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's 16 members include representatives from 15 Western states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and two of the six U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states are now members – the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam. (American Samoa, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau are also eligible to join.) Members work collaboratively to provide educational access and excellence for all citizens.

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:

**Joseph A. Garcia**, president

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

**John Lopez**, director, W-SARA

**Demarée Michelau**, vice president, office of 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 [www.wiche.edu](http://www.wiche.edu) or contact President Joseph A. Garcia at 303.541.0201.

September 2016



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