



Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

media release

WICHE & South Dakota Celebrate 50 Years

Boulder, Colorado — The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is celebrating 50 years as a force shaping higher education in the West. WICHE, along with South Dakota and 14 other member states, works collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for the West's citizens. WICHE is the only organization in the West that focuses exclusively on higher education issues, from accountability to tuition and fees to distance learning and innovation. Its primary issue – access – has been one of the region's most pressing educational and social issues, from the days of the GI Bill down to the present.

South Dakota has been an integral part of WICHE since joining the commission in 1988. Originally founded in 1952 to broaden access to medical, dental, and veterinary schools for students in states that didn't support such programs, WICHE currently enrolls more than 18,000 students in 13 professional degree programs, 134 graduate programs, and scores of undergraduate disciplines. Today, when our economy demands a highly educated workforce, WICHE actively supports the idea that every student should be prepared for college, and everyone should have access to a college education.

South Dakota's students and their families are the primary beneficiaries of WICHE's Student Exchange programs, particularly the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) and Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP). They saved some \$4 million in tuition and fees this year through WUE, which enables South Dakota students to enroll in institutions in other states and pay 150 percent of resident tuition. Over 950 of South Dakota's undergraduate students, as well as a number of graduate students, are currently enrolled in out-of-state programs via WICHE. In addition, some 1,450 students from other states enrolled in South Dakota institutions through WUE this year, filling slots in programs that have excess capacity.

South Dakota has been an active participant in several other WICHE projects. It is currently involved in the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities (WCALO). Funded with \$2.4 million from the federal Advanced Placement (AP) Incentive Program over two years, the nine-state consortium is increasing the number of low-income students enrolling and succeeding in Advanced Placement courses and other accelerated-learning options. Under the auspices of this program, the South Dakota Dept. of Education and Cultural Affairs and the South Dakota Board of Regents are working together to improve college access and success for large numbers of underserved youth, including low-income, minority, and first-generation students. In another area, WICHE's Mental Health Program is engaged in three

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P.O. Box 9752 Boulder, CO 80301-9752 (303) 541-0222 fax: (303) 541-0291

major South Dakota projects. It is facilitating a statewide task force on children's mental health that was created by the legislature in its last session. WICHE is also conducting a statewide assessment of the prevalence of mental illness, utilization of public mental health services, and unmet need, as well as facilitating a statewide mental health consumer satisfaction survey.

More about WICHE

WICHE's 15 member states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming – work collaboratively to promote innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, strengthening higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. In addition to its Student Exchange, WICHE's programs include WCET (Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications), an international leader in helping states and institutions use new technologies to improve education; Policy Analysis and Research; Mental Health; and the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC), a rapidly expanding trilateral initiative headquartered at the University of Arizona.

Each state has three commissioners who help guide the work of the commission: Robert Burns, distinguished professor in the Political Science Dept. at South Dakota State University, Brookings; James O. Hansen, chair, Committee on Academic and Student Affairs, South Dakota Board of Regents; and Robert T. Tad Perry, executive director of the South Dakota Board of Regents, Pierre (and WICHE's 2002 chair) currently serve South Dakota on the commission. In addition, WICHE's Legislative Advisory Committee works to strengthen state policymaking in higher education, engaging legislators in the discussion of higher ed issues and seeking their input on strategies for interstate collaboration. Rep. Jim Putnam, Armour, represents South Dakota on this committee.

A reception to honor WICHE's 50th anniversary and South Dakota's participation in the commission will be held on Jan. 15, 2003, at the South Dakota Board of Regents offices in Pierre.

1/14/2003

Contacts

David Longanecker, Executive Director: 303-541-0201; dlonganecker@wiche.edu.

Cheryl Blanco, Director, Policy Analysis and Research: 303-541-0221; cblanco@wiche.edu.

Jere Mock, Director, Projects and Services: 303-541-0222, jmock@wiche.edu.

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