



***Nevada Governor's Office of the Western Regional Education Compact  
Nevada Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (Nevada WICHE)***

Commission Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 23, 2020  
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

In Attendance:

Fred Lokken: Executive Commissioner, Nevada WICHE  
Dr. Gillian Barclay: Nevada WICHE Commissioner  
Dr. Thom Reilly: Nevada WICHE Commissioner  
David Gardner: Senior Deputy Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General  
Jennifer Ouellette: Nevada WICHE Director  
Brian Mitchell: Director, Governor's Office of Science, Innovation and Technology (OSIT)

- 1. Call to order.** The meeting was called to order. This meeting was posted in accordance with Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 241, Nevada's Open Meeting Law (OML).
- 2. Public Comment.** There was no public comment.
- 3. Discussion, recommendations, and action, regarding the minutes from the April 24, 2019, and June 19, 2019 Commission meetings.** Director Ouellette stated that only the minutes from the April 24, 2019, meeting were ready. Commissioner Reilly made a motion to approve the minutes; seconded by Commissioner Barclay. Commissioner Lokken called for all those in favor of accepting the April 24, 2019, minutes. All voted aye. The motion carried unanimously.
- 4. Strategic Planning Session.** Director Ouellette detailed the intent of the strategic planning session was to provide an overview of current operations and challenges identified for each program operated by the agency and the agency as a whole. This session is the first of two strategic planning sessions for the Commission to provide feedback for budget planning in anticipation of the 2021 Legislative Session.

Nevada WICHE operates two programs and provides funding to approximately 75 students through (1) the regional WICHE Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) and (2) the Nevada Health Care Access program (HCAP). Approximately 61% of students supported are

from Clark County, 24% are from Washoe County, and 15% are from the rural and frontier counties outside of Clark and Washoe counties.

WICHE Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP)

While Nevada's program refers to itself as WICHE - WICHE is a non-profit entity based out of Boulder, Colorado. WICHE organized the Western Regional Education Compact in 1953, which serves as the foundational document underlying the creation of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Sixteen western states and U.S. territories participate in the compact, including Nevada. Nevada is the only member state that created its own state agency also named WICHE; this practice creates confusion amongst students, universities, vendors, and partnering organizations.

The WICHE Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) provides funding to individuals studying professions not available at a public Nevada institution. Students pursuing careers in 10 different health fields - including: dentistry, allopathic medicine, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, podiatry, and veterinary medicine – may enroll in participating programs across state lines and receive substantial tuition support from their home state. In return for funding, students commit to returning to Nevada after graduation for employment – one year of employment is required for each year of funding.

The Nevada PSEP funding model consists of a 75% grant upon the student returning to Nevada for employment, and a 25% loan. The 25% loan component is required under *Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 397.0615*. Commissioner Lokken indicated the 25% loan component was unique to Nevada; no other participating state in the compact required a student to return to home to practice and pay back a portion of the funding. Aside from Alaska whose funding represents a 100% loan, all other participating PSEP states give 100% of the funding as a grant.

Director Ouellette continued the presentation and noted that at present, Nevada funds 5 of the 10 health fields offered by WICHE, including: occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, and veterinary medicine. Nevada is budgeted to support 46 PSEP students in FY 2020 for approximately \$890K. She continued that it doesn't appear the fields of support have been reviewed since 2015, and that in the last several years some of the fields currently supported by the agency are now available at Nevada public institutions. At the next strategic planning meeting the Commission would revisit the fields of support.

Director Ouellette then proceeded to highlight each PSEP field currently funded with summary information including: the number of students supported, the support fee by field, which Nevada county the students are from, and the enrolling institutions. Outside of veterinary medicine, many students in each field were attending private institutions within Nevada such as Touro University and Roseman University. Commissioner Barclay expressed

appreciation for the overview, noting that she had been asking for this type of information since she joined the Commission.

PSEP Program Structure across States

Director Ouellette shifted to the next portion of the presentation. She noted that regional WICHE had helped facilitate a conversation about the operating structure of the PSEP from all 11 participating states. The information yielded helped to illustrate areas of improvement for Nevada's program.

Of 11 participating PSEP states, there were several items of note:

- Nevada is the only participating state who has its own dedicated agency outside of the state's higher education system - all other states operate the PSEP as part of a larger program within the state's higher education system.
- Nevada and Alaska are the only states to administer a loan component to the PSEP. Alaska's program is a 100% loan with no return requirement upon graduation. Nevada's program has two conditions for funding: a 25% loan of the support fee plus accrued interest and a requirement to return to the state upon graduation in order to forgive the remaining 75% as a stipend/grant.
- Nevada WICHE employs 2 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs). The agency also operates the Health Care Access Program (HCAP), however, it is estimated at this time that Nevada devotes 70% of staff time for 2 FTE to operate the PSEP. Arizona devotes 100% of 1 FTE to its PSEP, however, Arizona supports 3.5 times more students than Nevada does (158 students per year to Nevada's 46). All other states estimated staff time for the PSEP ranges from 3% to 25%.
- Program policies have the ability to significantly influence the estimated amount of time staff spend administering the PSEP. Policies such as a loan component, a return requirement, the number of fields supported, and the number of students supported play a large role in the amount of resources necessary to administer the PSEP program in each state. Nevada's policy of requiring a loan component and a service requirement make Nevada's program more time-consuming to administer.
- The state most comparable to Nevada in terms of the number of students supported, the number of fields supported, and a return requirement is Hawaii. Hawaii's program is housed within the University of Hawai'i Office of Student Affairs, supports 47 students per year (compared to Nevada's 46), participates in 5 fields (same as Nevada) and has a return requirement (same as Nevada). Unlike Nevada, Hawaii does not have a loan component. Hawaii (like Nevada) has two staff that administer the PSEP, however, Hawaii's two staff devote 25% of their time to the PSEP program (compared to Nevada's 70%).

Commissioner Reilly questioned why Nevada's program was not located within the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), similar to other states. Discussion ensued regarding the history of the Nevada WICHE program, its move to NSHE and the move from NSHE to the Governor's Office in 2015. All Commissioners agreed the program should be located with

other higher education programs. Commissioner Reilly committed to discussing a move for the program back to NSHE with the Board of Regents and the Chancellor's Cabinet.

#### Nevada PSEP Challenges

Director Ouellette proceeded to summarize challenges associated with Nevada's PSEP.

- Many students turn down Nevada's PSEP funding offers due to the 25% loan component. This was observed by the director while trying to fill the slots for this academic year and reported as a frequent occurrence by regional WICHE staff. Some schools will even offer scholarships to highly ranked Nevadans in order to avoid WICHE funding.
- Administration of the loan component utilizes significant staff time. The federal government requires certain disclosures for student loans which lengthen the funding process. Nevada WICHE staff spend much time explaining the loan component to prospective students, calculating payments, processing payments, monitoring repayment statuses and going through the collections process.
- When Nevada's loan component is combined with tracking service requirement compliance, administrative burdens are multiplied.

#### Nevada's Health Care Access Program (HCAP)

Created in 1997, the Nevada HCAP provides funding to individuals pursuing graduate healthcare education in the fields of nursing and social work. In exchange for funding, students commit to practicing in health profession shortage areas in the state upon graduation. One year of employment is required for each year of funding, although employment requirements are capped at a maximum of two years per *Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS)*. Defaulting on the employment requirement results in a penalty of 3 times the initial support fee plus interest. In addition to the service requirement and the penalty for non-fulfillment, the Nevada WICHE Commission added a 10% loan component to the funding in 2007. The loan component for the HCAP is not required by *NRS*.

In FY 2019, 11 nursing slots went unfilled. While staff turnover within the agency contributed to this problem, staff suspect the 10% loan component combined with the service requirement for medically underserved areas in tandem with the substantial default penalty is a detriment to filling the HCAP slots. The HCAP slots fund at amounts significantly lower than PSEP slots (\$5,000 for social work, and up to \$7,700 for nursing), meaning the loan component for each student totals \$500 up to \$770 per slot. Revenue generated from the loan component of the HCAP is insignificant, creates a substantial administrative burden to the agency, and is unattractive to prospective students.

#### Director Initiatives and Solutions

Director Ouellette summarized the actions she was pursuing to streamline, simplify and modernize agency activities, including: transitioning from paper contracts to electronic contracts, creation of a system to track student data and performance measures, increased marketing activities to help fill slots, and re-establishing community partnerships. The

director is also working on a backlog of activities that had not occurred over the last three years and that were the subject of recent executive and legislative branch audits.

Commission Consideration and Solutions

Director Ouellette asked the Commission to consider the following challenges: the 10% HCAP loan component, difficulties filling nursing slots, and a bill draft request for the 2021 Legislative Session to eliminate the 25% PSEP loan component. Discussion ensued regarding eliminating the 10% loan component for the HCAP. The Commissioners agreed to remove the loan component for the HCAP, however, Deputy Attorney General David Gardner reminded the Commission that this action would need to be included on a future agenda for public comment. Director Ouellette committed to organizing a brief Commission meeting to formally eliminate the 10% HCAP loan component within the next month. Commissioner Reilly offered to bring together the deans and directors of various programs for an introduction to the program and discussion about the fields and student needs. Commissioner Barclay offered to introduce the director to individuals who can assist with marketing efforts.

Geriatric Nurse Funding – Senate Bill 102 (2019 Legislative Session)

Director Ouellette stated SB 102 provided \$77,000 in funding for FY 2020 and FY 2021 intended to support 10 students in each year who will receive training on treating and understanding the special needs of elderly persons. Director Ouellette noted that UNR had an Adult Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner program, which focuses on adults and the elderly in acute care settings. However, no Nevada schools currently offer an exclusive focus on geriatric training. She noted Commissioner Barclay had introduced her to several nursing professionals throughout Southern Nevada and there may be some partnerships available to meet this goal through clinical hours. She would update the Commission at a later date.

Director Ouellette then turned the meeting over to Commissioner Lokken.

5. **Committee Appointments.** The Regional WICHE Veterinary Medicine Advisory Committee has two representatives from each state. Commissioner Lokken asked for a motion to reappoint Senator Pete Goicoechea for another term, and to appoint Coretta Patterson, Veterinary Internist at the University of Nevada, Reno, Department of Agriculture, Veterinary & Rangeland Sciences for her first term. Commissioner Reilly made a motion to appoint both individuals for a new term; seconded by Commissioner Barclay. Commissioner Lokken called for all those in favor; all voted aye. The motion carried unanimously.
6. **Discussion, recommendations, and actions regarding NV WICHE student medical hardship request. CLOSED SESSION. Under NRS 241.030 (1)(a), a closed session will be held for the purposes of discussion of a person’s physical or mental health. Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 397.060 allows program participants to petition the Commissioners in writing for a reduction in stipend and loan balances due to hardship. The Commission entered**

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closed session for discussion. The Commission reentered open session. Commissioner Reilly moved to forgive the entirety of the participants' grant and loan balances due to medical hardship; seconded by Commissioner Barclay. Commissioner Lokken called for all those in favor; all voted aye. The motion carried unanimously.

- 7. Public Comment.** There was no public comment.
- 8. Adjournment.** Having no further business and receiving no public comment, the meeting was adjourned.