

**Nevada Office of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education
(Nevada WICHE Commission) Minutes**

Nevada System of Higher Education
System Administration Building
2601 Enterprise Road
Reno, NV 89512
Room 114

Video or Telephone Conference Connection from the Meeting Site to:

Nevada System of Higher Education
System Administration Building
4300 S. Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89119
Room 105

Friday, February 13, 2026, 1:00 pm

Members Present: Mr. Fred Lokken, Executive Commissioner
Ms. Patricia Charlton, Commissioner
Ms. Cathy Dinauer, Commissioner

Others Present: Ms. Patty Porter, Director, Nevada Office of WICHE
Ms. Carrie Parker, Esq., Assistant System Counsel
Ms. Amber Jorgensen, Finance and Treasury Accountant, NSHE
Dr. Cathleen Kovarik, Director of Veterinary Admissions, Utah State University, College of Veterinary Medicine
Mr. Dirk Vanderwall, Professor and Dean, Utah State University, College of Veterinary Medicine
Mr. Rhett Vertrees, Assistant Chief Financial Officer, NSHE
Ms. Jennifer Porrier, Executive Assistant, Department of Academic and Student Affairs, NSHE

Executive Commissioner Fred Lokken called the meeting to order at 1:01 pm.

1. Information Only: Public Comment

- There was no public comment.

2. Information Only: WICHE Commissioner Updates

- Executive Commissioner Lokken stated that a strategic planning discussion at regional WICHE will take place, to solicit opinions from all commissioners as work begins on a new strategic draft. This work will center around WICHE's role in D.C., certain less successful programs, and challenges emerging in the west.
- Preparation continues for the May WICHE meeting in Seattle, with invitations coming out in March.

3. Information Only: Patty Porter, WICHE Director, Update

Director Patty Porter shared the following updates:

- PSEP slots for 2025-2026
 - Occupational Therapy had 5 available slots and 4 were filled.
 - 3 new slots were budgeted for \$16,300 and 2 continuing slots at \$27,167. Only 1 of the new slots were filled and 3 of the continuing slots were filled due to the receipt of more 2nd year OT applications.
 - Physical Therapy had 5 slots and filled 5 slots.
 - Physician Assistant had 12 slots and filled 12 slots.
 - Veterinary slots available were 0. We have 4 slots with continuing students. There will be 1 slot open for 2026-2027.
 - Pharmacy had 10 slots available for the 3 years accelerated program and 10 slots were filled.
 - HPEP slots for 2025-2026
 - Master of Social Work had 12 slots available and 10 slots were filled 10. Initially had filled 12 but 2 declined.
 - Advanced Practice Nursing had 25 slots available and 18 slots were filled. Received 64 applicants and attempts at reaching out to those remaining on the list are in progress, but are nearing the opening 2026-2027 HPEP applications.
 - Registered Nurse had 12 slots available and 12 slots were filled. This program took a while to take off but with outreach in the last two years an application pool is accumulating.
- Governor Finance Office (GFO) Budget Kick Off scheduled for Wednesday, February 25, 2026, all day. This is the meeting where WICHE receives directions from GFO on what can be included in the budget request. The 2024 Budget Kick Off direction was no increase and low expectation on receiving enhancement requests.
 - Commissioner Charlton commented that while having these conversations these items should be looked at as maintenance due to cost, inflation or other kinds of factors. Director Porter agreed and will discuss adjustments needed.

4. **October 16, 2025 Minutes Approval** (*Ref. 2-Nevada WICHE Commission Meeting Minutes October 16, 2025 meeting*)

APPROVED: Commissioner Dinauer moved for approval of the October 16, 2025 meeting minutes.

Commissioner Charlton seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

5. **Information Only: Nevada WICHE 2024-2025 Financial Statement** (*Ref. 3-Nevada Office of WICHE Combining Statements of Net Position, Nevada Office of WICHE Combining Statements of Revenues, Expenses, and Changes in Net Position in 1,000's*)

Nevada System of Higher Education Assistant Chief Financial Officer Rhett Vertrees presented an overview of Nevada WICHE 2024-2025 Financial Statement.

- Statement of net position is the loan balances that you have remaining that need to be paid back to the state. Fairly flat this year. Gets adjusted by payments that come in and transfer to loans. Net impact each year. It went up this year more transferred into loans versus being paid off.

- Small reconciliation issue this year which we hope to correct going forward. It was difference of \$465. It was difference between what WICHE reported as being paid on principle interest and penalties and what we have reported at NSHE. We hope this year to do some interim work to get this resolved.
- Employee compensation and benefits increased by 9% which is in line with increase in merit for the state.
- Noted an increase in Services and Supplies for Administration account up by 12% due to ECSI, DocuSign contract, and the purchase of two monitors and two office chairs.
- Stipend and internships had a 4% increase.
- Noted an increase in Loan and Stipend accounts due to an increase of 14% in state appropriations
- Had \$78,000 in state reversions.

Discussion: *Commissioner Charlton asked about the adjustment item gap and if that might be due to a timing issue, and perhaps doing a timelier reconciliation would be beneficial.*

Assistant CFO Vertrees agreed and stated the next reconciliation would be in December 31st of this year, with the goal of correcting issues before year end, but indicated this reconciliation could be done monthly if needed.

Director Porter thanked Mr. Vertrees for his work to support WICHE. Assistant CFO Vertrees thanked his staff as well.

6. Information Only: Update on Nevada WICHE/Utah State University (USU) College of Veterinary Medicine *(Ref. 4-USU College of Veterinary Medicine Admissions and Recruiting Activities for the 2025 Calendar Year)*

Director Porter introduced Director of Admissions Dr. Cathleen Kovarik and Professor and Dean Dr. Dirk Vanderwall of Utah State University College of Veterinary Medicine to provide an update on the recruiting activities and status on admissions cycle for Nevada applicants.

- Dr. Vanderwall shared that an update that with the matriculation of the inaugural class of 42 veterinary students (including 2 students from Nevada) USU has now been provisionally accredited with the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education and will remain in that status through graduation of the inaugural cohort. Once this cohort has achieved an 80% pass rate on the National Veterinary Licensing Exam, the program will move to fully accredited. Secondly, in November, USU will be hosting the third site visit with the AVMA Council on Education and will be submitting their self-assessment prior to the visit as further work toward accreditation.
- Dr. Cathleen Kovarik then shared an update on admissions this year. Last year 2 Nevada residents were admitted. For this year they were hoping the number would increase this year. For second cycle, the application was through VMVAS, much more of a normal cycle veterinary students apply, they had a total of 39 applicants from Nevada with 29 meeting GPA minimal requirements (2.9 cumulative, 3.1 prerequisite). This was 75%, which is a good percentage of admitted students. Also they have a policy that any Nevada student that meets the cutoffs through the selection committee would be offered an interview. Of the 29, one was not interested and the other took a position elsewhere. After interviews, a total of 17 offer letters were sent out

to Nevada applicants (or about 63% of interviewees). Those offered have until April 15, 2026 to accept so do not have final numbers.

Discussion: *Commissioner Charlton asked what might contribute to the uptick in Nevada applicants.*

Dr. Kovarik believes it could be due to multiple things. First cycle was unique with different timing than usual, as well as the program being new. USU has also had recruiters and faculty visiting Nevada as well as the assistance from Director Porter in getting the word out. Ultimately, this latest cycle was “normal” and that helped a lot. *Commissioner Charlton asked if any profiling or data analysis of the existing applicants is being undertaken to get a better understanding of who is applying.*

Dr. Kovarik says that is a desire, but time and bandwidth is a factor in not being able to complete that right now.

Executive Commissioner Lokken asked Director Porter how Nevada students are informed of the WICHE financial offers of support.

Director Porter shared that multiple efforts are underway to inform the applicants, including information booth at the Wild West Vet Show in Reno which saw a lot of traffic. Also, connecting with vets and vet techs in the state which aids in encouragement for students to apply.

Dr. Vanderwall also shared that USU’s Associate Dean for Clinical Programs, Kerry Rood, has made multiple trips to Nevada visiting clinics which are potential host sites for 4th year veterinary students. These trips serve to increase visibility of the USU Veterinary program and spread the word on the HPEP program and the partnership with Nevada.

Executive Commissioner Lokken asked when the deadline was to accept offers and Dr. Kovarik responded that they have until April 15th to reserve a seat. So will not know until April 15th till it shakes out.

Director Porter stated that they are working closely with Dr. Kovarik office and asked if USU would include a Nevada WICHE flyer and already received a phone call about the stipend. Executive Commissioner Lokken thanked Director Porter for their efforts.

7. Nevada Residents Attending NSHE Institution with a PSEP Program

Director Patty Porter began by requesting possible action and approval to

- a) allow Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) stipend slots to go to Nevada residents attending an NSHE institution that has a program and
- b) If regional WICHE does not approve such action, delegating authority to the Director to reassign slots to Health Profession Education Program (HPEP) for such programs, dependent upon demand at NSHE institutions.

Discussion: Director Porter elaborated that currently, UNLV Doctor of Physical Therapy is a PSEP school and Nevada residents cannot apply for Nevada WICHE PSEP stipend if accepted to this program per a WICHE practice Argument behind this is that the stipend is to pay for the difference between in an out of state tuition and in state resident would get more than that. But with recent tuition increases for undergraduate and graduate residents as well with the changes with One Big Beautiful Bill loan caps there is appetite for possible action. Once the commissioners vote for approval on 7a Director Porter will inform WICHE of their approval so they can bring this to a vote. If WICHE chooses not to approve or make decision by the May Commission Meeting to submit the budget to the Governor’s Office, then Director Porter is

asking for approval to move some PSEP slots down to HPEP. The commission currently funds Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant and Veterinary Medicine. The current programs that are PSEP eligible are Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy at UNLV and Physician Assistant at UNR. Director Porter will reach out after this vote to UNLV's Physical Therapy and UNR Physician Assistant program to see if they are interested in becoming a PSEP program.

Commissioner Dinauer asked Director Porter for clarification that the eligible programs are UNLV's Occupational Therapy program and UNR's Physician Assistant program. Director Porter replied yes. Commissioner Dinauer asked if there are any NSHE schools on the horizon? Director Porter said yes, currently the eligible programs are UNLV Occupational and UNR PA program. If more programs came online, then they would need to reach out to WICHE to form an agreement.

Executive Commissioner Lokken asked if it is known what the current rate of retention in the State of Nevada from PSEP? For HPEP they are here already here but for PSEP we lose some thus why we have loan conversion? Director Porter stated that we have students at PSEP private schools in Nevada which are a part of the sticky rate, in our backyard, such as Touro and Roseman in Henderson. Director Porter stated that we are at a stage now where the argument that instate residents would get more support is getting weaker with cost going up for these programs.

Executive Commissioner Lokken stated that when PSEP started in late 1950's there were limited graduate programs in Nevada. Now our population has grown and that reality has changed. Should we be looking at a two track solution of asking Governor's Office budget process to request separate funding for these HPEP programs to address the loan caps and tuition increases to incentivize local residents to obtain these degrees and remain in Nevada because we have critical shortages in these areas and support own institutions in our State. Executive Commissioner Lokken supports Director Porter's request but believes we need to have a separate conversation about this. If we are trying to move our state and elevate, this could be a great way to do that.

Director Porter responded to Executive Commissioner Lokken that they could see a two-tier system but if Nevada WICHE followed what other compact states are doing then we would support Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine, Optometry and not support Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Physician Assistant. Only reason you are supporting fields being offered in our backyard is due to lack of capacity.

Director Porter discussed an item coming to you as commissioners for a vote to increase some but not all support fees and standardize them so there will no longer have accelerated support fee rates. Issue we are trying to get clarity is regarding proposed changes that could occur in 2026-2027. Practice has been that Commissioners vote for changes that are effective for next two years, and we can plan for it but if this change happens for 2026-2027 what is the impact on our office. The agenda item is at the early stage so we will have an update for you at the next meeting.

Commissioner Charlton added that the cost of higher education is increasing and that will not change. The challenge is to avoid pricing students out and pushing them towards the private sector. With the prices going up, it will create gaps and WICHE needs to be ready to capitalize on opportunities to help with the financial challenges. She then encouraged Nevada WICHE to continue the conversations with WICHE surrounding the funding of Health Professions and getting students graduated into these positions. Everyone across the country knows there is not enough health positions in the pipeline.

Executive Commissioner Lokken briefly outlined the agenda for the meeting in Seattle, with speakers and roundtables regarding the changes in Washington and what is coming. He went on to agree it could become cost prohibitive to some students and that threatens the potential

dismantling of these programs. This could result in a huge drop in the feed to our graduate schools so would like to prompt the State of Nevada that a little money upfront can help with heartache down the road.

Commissioner Charlton agreed that close attention needs to be paid to the fiscal issues of supporting the funding of the programs and discuss this with our legislative advocates This is a message that has to be continued. There is concern among the private sector that with the loan caps and exceptions it will not be enough, especially with medical schools. Whatever we can do to support this message is essential.

Executive Commissioner Lokken replied that another issue is the impact of the private solution which has higher tuition rate, but support at a public goes farther. You do not want to do away with private sector but get the greatest impact. It is important to discuss with legislative advisory members that we want to find a solution for everyone.

Commissioner Charlton said I hope we have more applicants than slots. There is not a spot for everyone and that is a factor. We know if we get them here, we want to keep them. For public nursing programs, it is a capacity issue and limited entry programs turn 2/3 applicants away with a high number are qualified. Privates will expand faster because there is not public funds available to support public institutions.

Commissioner Dinauer said they share what Commissioner Charlton stated and that at the federal level they have taken nursing off the professional list which has sparked enormous debate across the country. As well as capping loans at graduate schools.

Executive Commissioner Lokken does not want people to deny their chance at opportunity due to background they come from by making up the difference in fees. Promoting at WICHE level looking at community college level for workforce development but regional WICHE sees it as postgraduate/graduate.

Director Porter asked to bring it back to agenda item for possible action.

Commissioner Charlton asked for clarification regarding approval of PSEP slots to go to residents for this agenda item Certain steps that have to occur and it has to go to WICHE. Does it have to go to Certifying Official or May meeting?

Director Porter elaborated that if Nevada WICHE approves this item, Director Porter will notify WICHE and it will then go to the Executive Committee or Commission for a vote. Due to concern this action would move slowly or if WICHE votes no Director Porter would like flexibility from the commissioners to adjust the biennial budget to move some of these slots to PSEP.

Commissioner Charlton said, trying to understand why we have to do both items. If we make a motion to approve A we could come back after the meeting, but it sounds like the decision needs to be made for the budget process.

Director Porter said that is correct and hoped to get another meeting in April 2026 to share slot matrix.

Commissioner Charlton asked if we could separate out item A and vote on it first and Legal Counsel Carrie Parker said that would not be a problem.

APPROVED: Commissioner Charleton moved to approve the allowing of Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) stipend slots to go to Nevada residents attending an NSHE institution that has a program.

Commissioner Dinauer seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Charlton expressed hesitation in approving the second part of the requested approval due to contingency based on other parties and conversation that has not been held with the State.

Director Porter stated item B would be deferred, with further detail, at the April meeting of the Commission (prior to the April 26th meeting of the Executive Commission meeting).

8. Nevada WICHE 2027-2029 Biannual Budget Priorities

Director Porter shared that she will be presenting the following recommendations for Nevada WICHE 2027-2029 biannual budget priorities for discussion and possible action:

- a. Request an adjustment of \$10,900 (\$5,400 for FY 28, \$5,500 for FY 29) in Nevada WICHE Administrative operations account for an estimated 3% increase in Nevada State Membership fee for 2027-2029 to continue Nevada's participation in the Western Regional Compact.

APPROVED: Commissioner Charlton moved to approve WICHE 2027-2029 biannual budget adjustment of \$10,900 Nevada WICHE Administrative operations account for an estimated 3% increase in Nevada State Membership fee for 2027-2029 to continue Nevada's participation in the Western Regional Compact.

Commissioner Dinauer seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

- b. Request an adjustment* of the Nevada WICHE Loan and Stipend budget for an increase in Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) support fees for 2027-2029. Fields currently supported by the Nevada WICHE Commission is Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant, 3-Year Accelerated Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine. *Note: Support fee increases unknown, currently waiting on regional WICHE for amount.

APPROVED: Commissioner Dinauer moved to approve the request of an adjustment of the Nevada WICHE Loan and Stipend budget for an increase in Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) support fees for 2027-2029. Commissioner Charlton seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

- c. Request approval to increase PSEP program slots for the 2027–2029 biennium as follows: Physical Therapy (5 slots), and Physician Assistant (4 slots). These additional slots will be assigned to PSEP contingent upon regional WICHE approval allowing Nevada residents attending NSHE PSEP programs to qualify for the Nevada WICHE PSEP stipend.

Director Porter asked at the Chairs discretion that this item be deferred to the next commission meeting in order for Director Porter to come back with more detailed research and numbers for the Commission.

Executive Commissioner Lokken agreed.

- d. Request change in Nevada Revised Statute 397 language eliminating requirement for Health Profession Education Program (HPEP) to work in a medically underserved area in Nevada to anywhere in the State of Nevada so requirement is the same as PSEP participants. Nevada WICHE will promote to public Nevada Administrative Code 397.020, which allows for reduction up to 1 year of required practice in rural areas or as a full-time employee of the State of Nevada, as the incentive to work in most underserved areas in Nevada.

Commissioner Dinauer asked for clarification regarding what specific change is being asked, Nevada Revised Statute and/or Nevada Administrative Code. Are we looking at the whole thing or specific section? Is it a statute change or regulation change?

Director Porter responded that change is Nevada Revised Statute and thinks 397.065 where it refers to participants in office programs, which is HPEP, those participants must serve in an underserved area as defined by HRSA.

Legal Counsel Parker had a correction. It is NRS 397.0645 and term is area with a medically underserved population; there is a definition for where that is where PSEP is the State of Nevada. They have different service requirements whether they are PSEP or HPEP.

Commissioner Dinauer asked if a regulation change is needed to promote Nevada Administrative Code 397.020.

Director Porter said no since Commission already approved this regulation and part of NAC code.

Legal Counsel Parker suggested that we can tell the Legislature that we already have this regulation and it already provides for service in the rural areas.

Commissioner Dinauer stated that the statute change is going from medically underserved areas to the State of Nevada.

Director Porter said that this would put this on parity with PSEP.

Commissioner Charlton expressed concern with disenfranchisement of rural communities with this policy language. The impetus of partnership with Utah State revolves around need in rural committees for veterinary medicine. Does like looking at this but need more exploration around what this policy language would look like and have conversations with Senator Titus or other people in the rural such as President Denali at Great Basin College.

Executive Commissioner Lokken agreed with that concern understanding disconnect with PSEP and said we could look at identifying additional stipends such as HPEP slots to rural areas with different funding source

Director Porter responded that HPEP USU stipend there was change in statute that it can be anywhere in the State of Nevada, so it was on par with PSEP Veterinary Medicine. Agrees that there is a need in rural Nevada and the whole State of Nevada. If you limit a program that you can only get this money if you practice in rural Nevada, you will limit your applicants and will be a challenge to hit targets. But we have a regulation that states if you work a year in a rural area, you can knock off a year. The thought was to put this back in the statute, strengthen it stating you can practice anywhere in the State of Nevada, HPEP or PSEP, but if you work in a rural area or full time state employee or USDA underserved area for veterinary medicine you can take up to one year for practice obligation. This is underused regulation because they do not know. Also, people do not want to be told what to do.

It was agreed to defer this item, pending conversations with Senator Titus as well as constituents from rural areas.

- e. Request flexibility from Nevada WICHE Commissioners for Nevada WICHE Director to adjust biannual budget requests due to changes in support fees from regional WICHE and finalizing budget with Governor's Finance Office.

Director Porter questioned if item E is necessary to cover and Deputy General Counsel Carrie Parker agreed that this item was covered in item B.

Commissioner Charlton asked if support fees limited to PSEP or any program supported by WICHE? Because B is specific to PSEP.

Director Porter said increase in fees limited to PSEP. HPEP fees have stayed the same.

Legal Counsel Parker asked if Nevada Psychology Internship Consortium is set by WICHE? Director Porter said no this is amount negotiated with DPBH and this year did not ask for an increase. We did ask for increase last biennium but did not get the enhancement request. Executive Commissioner Lokken said

9. Information Only: New Business

Executive Commissioner Lokken raised the following:

- Ask for a meeting with Governor's staff to discuss our dilemma and look at other fields outside of healthcare such as technology and teaching to meet Nevada needs.
- Is it time to move the agency under NSHE instead of maintaining independent status? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current arrangement?
- Director Porter indicated she would be looking for responses on scheduling dates for the next meeting.

10. Information Only: Public Comment.

- There was no public comment or written comment.

Meeting adjourned at 2:37 pm

DRAFT