

SECTION VI

PART E OPTOMETRY STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM -- WICHE

1.00 General Description

1.1 History of the Program

In 1978 the Colorado State Legislature appropriated funds to assist ten Colorado residents in their study of optometry at schools participating in the student exchange program of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). In subsequent years the legislature has provided continuation funding for the original students and for additional students each year.

1.2 Program Purpose

The State of Colorado does not have an educational institution providing an optometry program, but does have a need for professionals in this field. The WICHE Student Exchange Program in Optometry is designed to allow Colorado residents to attend one of the four participating in-region WICHE institutions: Pacific University, Southern California College of Optometry, Midwestern University - Glendale Campus or Western University of Health Sciences, at a price comparable to that of resident students attending state-supported institutions and at a fraction of regular tuition in a private institution. Students who do not attend one of the two in-region institutions may be eligible, on a case by case basis, to be funded at an out-of-region institution. The State of Colorado pays the institution a support fee in order to make that lower price possible.

In return for the benefit of lower price, students must agree to practice optometry in Colorado, beginning within one year after completing their education, for a period of one year for each year in which they were supported as an exchange student, or agree to repay the total support fee provided by the State of Colorado with interest.

2.00 Student Eligibility

To be certified for the WICHE Student Exchange Program from Colorado, a student must:

- 2.1 Be a Colorado resident who is eligible for in-state tuition classification, as defined in Title 23, Article 7, C.R.S., and plan to maintain Colorado residence through the course of their optometry study.
- 2.2 Complete pre-professional requirements and meet admission standards for the

optometry program in which enrollment is desired.

- 2.3 Sign a contract with the State of Colorado to practice optometry within the state for a period of one year for each year of support received; or to otherwise repay, with interest, the support fee paid by the state.

3.00 Application and Certification Procedures

3.1 Application

Students must apply for acceptance to the optometry program at one or more of these four WICHE participating institutions: Pacific University, Southern California College of Optometry, Midwestern University – Glendale Campus, or Western University of Health Sciences. Applications for certification to the WICHE Student Exchange Program can be obtained from the Department of Higher Education (DHE). Applications are typically available in June of the year prior to the year for which certification is sought. The filing deadline is October 15 of the year prior to the year for which support is sought, e.g. October 1983 for 1984-85. Students who do not submit applications prior to the October 15 deadline may be certified as “Alternates”. They will receive support consideration after the continuing and entering students whose applications were received prior to October 15, and who were admitted prior to June 1 of the year for which support is funded.

Continuing students will be sent a “continuation form” each year to determine their eligibility for the next year’s support. DHE will mail the form to the students in late June preceding the academic year for which certification is made, e.g., June 1985 for 1985-86.

3.2 Certification

- 3.2.1 The legislature determines the number of students to be supported each year by establishing the appropriation for the program. Within available funding, previously supported continuing students receive first priority for support; entering students and certified continuing students who have not been supported receive second priority.
- 3.2.2 Students who are required to repeat a year are not eligible for support during the repeat year. Upon successful completion of the repeat and promotion to the following year, the student is again eligible for support and will be given first priority as a continuing student.
- 3.2.3 Students who take a leave of absence approved by the school will be considered to be continuing for up to one year. Students who do not renew enrollment in their program within one year must reapply to the DHE for consideration of renewed support.

- 3.2.4 Students who are dropped from their program for academic failure or other good cause may reapply for certification if they reapply for admission. They would receive a first priority for funding if readmitted.

4.00 Fulfillment of Contract

- 4.1 Students are expected to begin the practice of optometry in the State of Colorado within one year after graduation and shall notify DHE that they have begun such practice.

The repayment, through practice, of each year's support fee will begin the first day of practice. Continuous practice is to be maintained within the state until the number of support years is repaid.

- 4.2 Exceptions to the requirement to begin practice in Colorado within one year after graduation and the requirement for continuous practice will be at the discretion of the Department of Higher Education. Categories for which deferments can be granted are: health problems, postsecondary study, active duty in the military, or temporarily disabled. Deferments can be granted on a year-to-year basis.

- 4.3 In the event a student does not practice optometry in Colorado, or does not complete the training, all support the State of Colorado has provided for the course of study must be repaid, with interest, as specified in the contract between the student and the State of Colorado.

Funds will be paid to the Commission, on behalf of the State of Colorado, at an interest rate equal to the PLUS loan rate which is calculated by adding 3.25 to the bond equivalent rate of 52-week Treasury bills auctioned at the final auction held prior to the June 1 preceding a student's initial award year. The payback will begin one year after completion of study according to terms of repayment negotiated with the Commission. The Commission will forward the total repayment to the State Treasurer.

- 4.4 The Department of Higher Education maintains records of all WICHE Student Exchange Program support, and will maintain records of fulfillment of the support contract.

HISTORY: CCHE Agenda Item III, A – April 1, 2011