What’s Up in North Dakota Higher Education?

Speaker: Robert Potts, Chancellor of the North Dakota University System

Chancellor Robert Potts will discuss recent developments in the North Dakota system of higher education, touching on the unique challenges and opportunities that face the state. Over the years, WICHE commissioners have heard much about the North Dakota Roundtable and how it helped shape a new partnership between higher education leaders in the state and other policymakers and stakeholders. This past year the state’s legislature funded a major review of the roundtable process. Chancellor Potts will discuss the results of this review and how it is impacting higher education policy in the state.

North Dakota has the second smallest population of the WICHE states, with slightly over 600,000 residents, and is projected to have the greatest decline in high school graduates (22 percent) over the next decade. Despite recent declines in the number of high school graduates, however, the state system of higher education has been able to sustain college and university enrollments, in part by attracting students from other states.

North Dakota has the second least ethnically diverse population in the WICHE region, with less than 10 percent of its population coming from communities of color. American Indians are the largest minority community in the state; at 4.5 percent of the population.

North Dakota was not one of the 13 states or territories included in the original Congressional charter that created the Western Regional Education Compact. The state joined WICHE in 1985, originally as an affiliate state but gaining full membership in 1999. North Dakota is unique in that it belongs to both WICHE and the Midwest Higher Education Compact. The North Dakota University System consists of 11 institutions:

- University of North Dakota, Dickinson State University, Mayville State University, Minot State University, Minot State University-Bottineau Campus, North Dakota State University, Valley City State University, Bismarck State College, Lake Region State College, North Dakota State College of Science, and Williston State College. The state is also served by a number of tribally controlled or nonprofit American Indian colleges and a small number of private colleges. On the 2004 Measuring Up report card, North Dakota received a B on preparation, an A- on participation, a B on completion, and a C on benefits.

Biographical Information on the Speaker

Robert L. Potts became chancellor and CEO of the North Dakota University System in 2005. Previous to this, he served for over 14 years as president of the University of North Alabama (UNA) and for six years
as general counsel of the University of Alabama System. His career has also included clerking for the U.S. District Court chief judge for the Northern District of Alabama; practicing law in Florence, AL, where educational issues were a significant part of his work; and teaching at Boston University, the University of Alabama, and UNA. He is a member of the North Dakota Commerce Cabinet and of the board of directors of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, as well as a commissioner with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact and immediate past chair of the Alabama Council of College and University Presidents. Potts received a B.A. from Southern Adventist University in Tennessee, a J.D. from the University of Alabama School of Law, and a master of laws from Harvard. He has lectured widely on legal and education topics and is the author of several published articles.