



Alaska WWAMI Alaska's Medical School

Newsletter
March 9, 2007

Alaska WWAMI Class Size Increase—Proactive Planning

Doubling the size of the Alaska WWAMI class is very likely and could occur as early as fall 2007. Whichever year it takes place, Alaska WWAMI plans to be ready for the larger group. The Alaska Legislature appropriated half of the capital (one-time) costs required for the increase during last year's session. By the time this article appears they will be considering full funding of capital and recurring costs.

Alaska WWAMI's class size, 10 entering students per year, is unchanged from 1971 when the program began in Alaska. However, several prominent organizations have called for that number to increase. In 2005 the Alaska State Medical Association recommended an increase to 30 students per year, and Commonwealth North, a public policy forum of concerned Alaskans, advocated an increase in WWAMI class size to help address healthcare problems in the state. For the 2006 legislative session, Alaskans for Access to Health Care, a healthcare lobbying group, made the WWAMI class size increase their top legislative priority.

More recently, the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force, convened by University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton and State Commissioner of Health and Social Services Karleen Jackson, issued its final report calling for an immediate doubling of the Alaska WWAMI class size and a subsequent increase to 30 students per year as resources permit.

While the class size increase still requires legislative action, there is considerable support for the effort in the legislature, from the University of Alaska and from the University of Washington School of Medicine. What will the capital costs fund? The major expenses in this category are for modifications of classroom and laboratory space. The current classroom and lab accommodate 10 students *and* provide space for a small medical library, an examination area, student lockers and storage areas for teaching equipment and anatomical models. A class of 20 students can be accommodated in the same rooms, but only if the library, exam table, lockers, *etc.* are relocated. The capital funding will support the renovation of a new study area that will provide the needed space for relocation. In addition the classroom and laboratory will be reconfigured and refurnished for 20 students.

Long-range planning at UAA anticipates a Health Sciences building, perhaps within the next 5 years, that will include WWAMI. That facility could allow for the possibility of a class of 30 students per year. In the meantime, Alaska WWAMI will be ready when the currently proposed class size increase becomes a reality.

Dennis Valenzeno, Ph.D.

Clinical Teaching Sites Needed

With a doubling in Alaska WWAMI class size (possibly as early as fall 2007), more Alaska clinical teaching sites will be needed. This includes not only the third year required clerkships and fourth year electives, but also R/UOP (Rural Underserved Opportunities Program), the 4-week summer shadowing experience following the 1st year of medical school.

We are always looking for additional R/UOP sites. Any clinical sites outside of Anchorage are considered as rural sites for this program. R/UOP students are provided a \$3000 stipend. There can be housing assistance, but most housing is provided by the clinical site.

Additional third year internal medicine and Ob-Gyn required clerkship sites are currently needed, and other basic clerkships will be needed by 2010 as the class size increase adds more students to the clinical years of the curriculum. Most of these clerkships are 6-week experiences.

Clerkship faculty receive faculty appointments in the appropriate department at the University of Washington. These appointments allow full access to the library and other educational resources of the School of Medicine.

Tom Nighswander, M.D., M.P.H.

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Dr. Kevin Creelman and Erin Lester, E05, at Kodiak R/UOP site

Anchorage Hosts Alaska WWAMI Applicant Interviews



Left to right: Dr. Deb Pollman, Dr. Peter Marshall, Dr. Werner Samson, Dr. Ray Bailey, and Tiffany Kelly, E07.

In an historic first, on January 10th and 11th the Alaska WWAMI admissions committee met at *UAA in Anchorage* to interview Alaskan applicants for the WWAMI program. Eleven students were interviewed on those two days by Drs. Peter Marshall, Deb Pohlman and Ray Bailey. Joining the three Alaskan interviewers was Dr. Werner Samson, UW Dean of Admissions, representing the Admissions Executive Committee (EXCOM) of which he is the chair. The interviews were flawlessly planned and executed by Dr. Dennis Valenzeno's staff. Special recognition is due to Maryann Kniffen who, with the assistance of Kathleen Boeckman, was responsible for the able execution and organization of the event. Five of Alaska WWAMI's current 1st Year class also returned early from their holiday break to assist with the interview days' activities, providing the applicants with that all-important student perspective of the program. So, special thanks to E2006 WWAMI students Katya Batilova, Katie Groundwater, Melissa Howell, Abraham Tsigonis and Ted Wright.

As is customary for a class of 10, we accepted three candidates of this group of 11 and in another first, Drs. Marshall and Bailey were able to participate in the deliberations of the EXCOM from Anchorage by interactive video with our colleagues in Seattle. All interviewers were pleased with the proceedings, and Dr. Samson remarked that the students interviewed at this session were among the best he'd seen from the entire WWAMI region this year.

Peter Marshall, M.D.

UW MEDEX to Convert to Masters Program in 2009

The MEDEX Northwest PA Program will convert to a master's-level program in 2009. Following careful deliberation by the faculty, this change is recognition that the master's degree is becoming the norm for PA education. MEDEX will continue to focus on training individuals with a significant level of previous healthcare experience. Initial paperwork has been filed with Washington state's Higher Education Coordinating Board, and official planning for the new **Master of Clinical Health Services** will take place over the next year. Please direct questions to the Program Director, Ruth Ballweg, at 206-616-4001 or email rballweg@u.washington.edu.

In the 2008 admissions cycle (for entry in 2009), a bachelor's degree will become a prerequisite for application to MEDEX. The application deadline for admission to the first Masters class will be October 15, 2008. The UW MEDEX admissions office is committed to working with potential applicants, and offers advice on preparation and eligibility for application to the program.

Alaskan MEDEX students will continue to complete their clinical year clerkships in Alaska. UAA's Department of Health Sciences is planning to expand the Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences to include a pre-professional track for potential UW MEDEX applicants and other graduate level health career students. The Department of Health Sciences will continue efforts to help facilitate the professional advancement of Community Health Aid Practitioners into the PA profession. For further information contact John Riley, M.S., PA-C, UAA/UW MEDEX PA Program coordinator at 907-786-6570 or afjor@uaa.alaska.edu.

John Riley, M.S., PA-C

Introducing the Alaska
MEDEX PA Class of
2008:

Vandy Cannon

Howard Chaitoff

Deborah Coolidge

Zachary Kile

Hope McGratty,J

Jennifer Nance,

Seamus Siddall

Claire Reilly

Lee Ann Wetzel

We welcome you!

Alaska Physician Supply Task Force

Alaska needs more physicians! We physicians are all aging! In fact 50% of us in the state are over 50. If you count new physicians who begin practice in Alaska each year and subtract retirements and those leaving practice, we are falling behind by 32 physicians each year.

That was the focus of the Physician Supply Task Force, co chaired by Dr Harold Johnston with active participation by Dr Dennis Valenzeno. In addition to recommending an increase in medical school class size and exploration of other residency opportunities in our state, it also recommends a centralized point for recruiting new physicians and improving the practice climate in Alaska. It suggests we explore the possibilities of our own medical school.

We have a lot of competition. Every state west of the Mississippi has to import physicians to meet their needs. Especially as the supply of primary care physicians has decreased, states have become more aggressive with multiple incentives to attract physicians.

If you would like to view or download a copy of the Task Force Report, go to: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/commissioner/Healthplanning/publications/assets/PSTF-06.pdf>

Tom Nighswander, M.D., M.P.H.

Your \$1,000 becomes a \$2,000 donation to Alaska WWAMI Support WWAMI with help from a Rasmuson Challenge Grant

Alaska WWAMI continues to develop to fulfill its role as Alaska's Medical School, and as part of that development we're in the early stages of establishing alumni and community physician support groups (e.g., see WWAMI Grad Focus Group). The Rasmuson Foundation has generously provided a Challenge Grant that can significantly enhance Alaska WWAMI's development efforts. All Alaska WWAMI grads who entered through UAA (or those who have taken a course at UAA) are eligible to have their \$1,000 contribution to the program at UAA matched. Alaska WWAMI will receive \$2,000 targeted to support the donor's specifications. Enclosed with this Newsletter, you'll find a form that describes the 3 funds – Excellence, Student Success and Biomedical Research. Simply complete the form and mail, fax or e-mail it along with your check or credit card information. The Challenge will continue until 100 donors have contributed to any UAA program, or until the end of the calendar year. Alaska WWAMI has six qualifying contributions so far, and with your help we believe that we can be the top program in this effort.

Even if you're not a UAA qualifier, please consider supporting the exciting developments at Alaska's Medical School. In future issues of the Newsletter we'll update you on the progress that we're making, thanks to your help.

Dennis Valenzeno, Ph.D.

AHEC Sponsors Student Gathering

The South Central Area Health Education Center (AHEC) was on the scene when first-year Alaska WWAMI medical students tackled the pigskin. The students didn't actually go toe-to-toe on the turf with the old pigskin. Rather, they gathered at the Alaska Family Medicine Residency's classroom where all practiced knot-tying and suturing skills under the direction of residency faculty Drs. Dwight Smith, Anne Musser, and Julie Sicilia. First-year family medicine residents Drs. Jane Moore and Tamara Huntington were on hand to offer their support and assistance. UAA Professor Dr. Cindy Knall was also present to help inspire the students in their endeavors.

The Alaska WWAMI class showed up in full number and were very enthusiastic to begin the instruction. High school junior Robin Macy attended for her hands-on job shadowing experience. The students' ability to tie knots ranged from surgeon to occasional gift wrapper. Skills were improved and perfected on the knot tying boards in record time. When invited to select a pigskin pallet for the final phase of the evening the students eagerly retrieved their "patients." The pigskin provided a more authentic suture and knot tying experience than the commercial kit platforms used for the initial practice. The volume of noise in the room reduced radically as minds became focused. When the happy voices returned, it was obvious that the Alaska WWAMI students had conquered yet another challenge. Strong work!

South Central AHEC extends its appreciation to the Alaska Family Medicine Residency for donating program resources, allowing this event to be successful. We especially want to thank Drs. Dwight Smith, Anne Musser, Julie Sicilia, Jane Moore and Tamara Huntington for contributing their personal time, professional expertise and positive energy for these great students. Good luck to you, Alaska WWAMI first-year students.

If you would like to learn more about the South Central AHEC and its mission to encourage youth to pursue medical careers, contact Roni Macy, Director, South Central AHEC at (907) 646-9977 or via e-mail at rmacy@provak.org.

Roni Macy, Director



Dr. Dwight Smith demonstrates knot tying



Dr. Dwight Smith helps E06 students Katya Batilova and Ross Baldwin



Dr. Anne Musser demonstrates the finer points of knot tying to E06 students Josh Zwart and Katya Batilova



E06 students Katya Batilova and Ross Baldwin collaborate to perfect their suturing skills.



WWAMI Grads Offer Ideas in a February Focus Group

About 25 Alaska WWAMI grads gathered on February 27th at Providence Hospital to offer suggestions about major initiatives for program improvement. A sampling of graduates from the earliest years, starting in 1971 in Fairbanks, through those who had entered in the late '90s were on hand. Dr. Leo Bustad, Alaska Heart Institute, moderated the session which was hosted by the Advancement Office of the University of Alaska Anchorage on behalf of Alaska WWAMI. The discussion ranged over many aspects of the program, discussions that were valuable to Dr. Dennis Valenzeno, Alaska WWAMI Director at UAA and UAA Provost Dr. Michael Driscoll who both attended and contributed to the discussion.



It was apparent that Alaska WWAMI grads greatly appreciate their medical school experiences and feel considerable allegiance to the program in Alaska. They commented on the value of their visits to rural villages and medical practices and the importance of such visits in procuring future rural physicians for the state. Ideas for new initiatives included establishment of an endowed professorship at UAA in Alaska WWAMI, an annual meeting featuring a prominent scientist of national prominence and regular luncheons with first year medical students and a different local physician each week.

Several participants commented that they enjoyed the opportunity to participate in the focus group. Additional focus groups are anticipated several times a year in different locations. If you're an Alaska WWAMI alumnus and would like to be included, please let us know at aywwami@uaa.alaska.edu.

Dennis Valenzeno, Ph.D.

Dr. Tom Gordon, Farewell

Anchorage neurologist Dr. Tom Gordon died on February 4 after a battle with cancer. Tom was active in the WWAMI program as a preceptor and guest lecturer for first-year students and as the director in Alaska of the required neurology clerkship.

Tom was well known throughout the Alaska medical community, and he was loved by a large circle of friends. His passion for both outdoor activities and diverse intellectual and artistic pursuits forged strong bonds of friendship. Many of these friends gathered on February 15 in Grant Hall at APU to share their stories of Tom's exploits and interests. I left that gathering both inspired by the idea of trying to be more like Tom, and deeply saddened that I had not gotten to know him better.



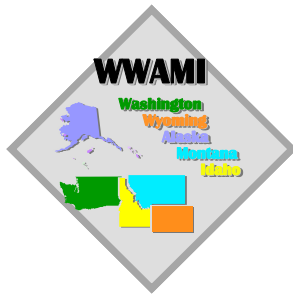
My interactions with Tom centered on his involvement in the WWAMI Program, going back to when I started teaching the Nervous System course to the first-year med students here in 1993. I was a new assistant professor in my first faculty position. Although I had taught in colleges of medicine at Illinois and Michigan, the notion of being responsible for an entire course was daunting. Moreover, neuroscience was not my primary area of training, and I knew that my grasp of many clinical aspects was weak. A colleague suggested that I contact Tom for help.

On several occasions during that first year I visited Tom in his office not far from the university. He had a private practice then in a building on Dale Street. He demystified concepts that puzzled me, and together we would go over the exams I'd been handed by the course's previous instructor. More than once he confirmed that a question didn't quite make sense to him either, much to my relief. Talking with Tom reassured me that I would eventually get the hang of this, and everything would be okay. Then we'd poke through the cabinets in his office's little kitchen for a snack.

Tom also gave a couple of guest lectures in my course that year and most of the years thereafter, typically one lecture on the neuro exam and one on movement disorders. I'm sure none of the students will ever forget the tall, somewhat rumpled neurologist with the bow tie and crooked grin who visited their classroom and made giving a complicated neuro exam look like the easiest thing in the world – especially those students who volunteered to be subjects in the demonstration. His simulation of a patient's unsteady, shuffling gait or intention tremor was what I copied for my own lectures.

Tom Gordon left a legacy for the WWAMI Program in the training he gave to me as well as to dozens of medical students. It's just one small example of the many ways he touched people and gave of himself.

Tim Hinterberger, Ph. D.



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We are always looking for articles for the newsletter. Please submit news and photos related to any aspect of WWAMI to mjd3@u.washington.edu.

News from the University of Washington School of Medicine

The latest happenings of note from the Seattle campus:

- Dr. Werner Samson, the senior dean of admissions in the United States is retiring and will be replaced by Dr. Carol Teitz, an orthopedic surgeon at UW SoM.
- Al Berg, the current Chairman of Family Medicine and frequent visitor to Alaska has announced his resignation as of August 1.
- In addition to the anticipated increase by 10 students from Alaska, a new first year program of 20 students is beginning in Spokane in 2008. Additional enrollment increases are likely in Idaho and Wyoming.
- This will be the first significant addition to WWAMI class size since the '70s necessitating extensive remodeling of facilities in Seattle.
- The American Association of Medical Colleges has called for a 30% increase in medical school capacity to deal with the future expected shortages in MD workforce.
- UW's Dental School has adopted the R/UOP program for first year dental students, and last summer four dental students were placed in Alaska. In addition the new first year medical school class in Spokane will also include dental students in an experiment to see if combined first year coursework is feasible.

Tom Nighswander, M.D., M.P.H.

Wanted: Alaska WWAMI Admissions Committee Members

The Alaska WWAMI Admissions Committee is actively searching for new members who are available to interview medical school applicants in a collegial setting in Anchorage and Seattle and interact with the other members of the committee to help nominate candidates for admission to Alaska's medical school. We have identified the following desirable qualities:

1. Availability for interviews for approximately two weeks each winter to interview prospective students. Only travel-associated expenses are reimbursed for this activity.
2. Willingness to become familiar with 20 to 30 applications – each is approximately 40 pages long and must be reviewed prior to the interviews.
3. Tech and computer savvy with access to high speed internet; all admissions work is conducted online and by e-mail.
4. Understanding of the unique challenges in providing medical care in our diverse state. We are especially interested in representing the broad spectrum of medical specialties and all areas of the state.
5. Understanding of Alaska's physician workforce needs.
6. Understanding and appreciation of the unique contributions and importance of Alaska's Native Peoples to healthcare in the state.
7. Willingness to serve for 6 years to provide continuity in Committee dealings.

If you have already submitted your name we would appreciate a confirmation of your continued interest. Others interested in helping to identify the next generation of physicians for Alaska, please send a short statement explaining your interest (≤ 1 page) and a brief CV to:

Alaska WWAMI Biomedical Program
University of Alaska Anchorage
3211 Providence Dr. ENGR 331
Anchorage, AK 99508-4614



Yes, I want to support Alaska WWAMI as it works to expand medical education opportunities for Alaskans. Please direct my contribution to:

- Alaska WWAMI Biomedical Excellence
The Excellence Fund provides support for the broadest spectrum of innovative programs. Its flexibility allows the development of exciting new programs that might otherwise lack the seed funding so vital to dynamic fields such as biomedicine.

- Alaska WWAMI Student Success
This Fund focuses on the most critical needs to ensure the success of program graduates. For current students it provides the latest extras, technological and otherwise, that maintain quality education. Additionally, it enhances the quality of the applicant pool through support for pathway programs leading to medicine.

- Alaska WWAMI Biomedical Research
The pursuit of new biomedical knowledge – research – is the hallmark of the best medical schools. Extramural grants support these efforts, but leave gaps that must be provided from other funds to maintain the viability of a research program. This fund enables those activities.

- Apply my contribution to Alaska WWAMI where it is most needed.

Enclosed is my gift of \$_____.

Please charge my credit card. Visa Master Card (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE)

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

V Code _____ Signature _____

Multi-year pledge

I/We pledge \$ _____ per year for _____ years for a total of \$ _____.

- I wish this gift to be anonymous. Please contact me about including Alaska WWAMI in my will.

Signature: _____

NAME (printed): _____

ADDRESS: _____

You will receive a letter acknowledging your donation and its application toward the WWAMI Biomedical Program. All contributions are fully tax deductible.