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### Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Supports New Initiative at UMN Morris

Communications and Marketing

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## [Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Supports New Initiative at UMN Morris](#)

- *The \$10,000 planning grant furthers campus efforts to close college attainment gaps for American Indian students.*
- *The grant allows the campus to build on work supported by its 2016 Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution (NASNTI) grant from the U.S. Department of Education.*
- *As part of this work, a UMN Morris team is attending the first national convening of the NASNTIs.*

The University of Minnesota Morris received a \$10,000 award from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), with the support of Lumina Foundation. The grant will extend work on campus to close college attainment gaps for American Indian students.

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education tracks college participation and completion. Their [reports](#) from the State Demographer's Office show that less than 10% of adults aged 25 and older from Minnesota's Dakota and Ojibwe communities have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, well below Minnesotans overall (35%) and Minnesota's white adults (45%). (*US Census American Community Survey, 2011-2014*).

The Morris team intends to put in place a plan of action that will add peer cohorts and programming for American Indian students entering with declared majors in science, engineering, technology, and math (STEM) fields. The team also will work with campus partners to identify areas of progress and opportunity in closing college achievement gaps for American Indian students at Morris.

### **The Background**

The only Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution (NASNTI) in the Upper Midwest, Morris has supported a growing number of American Indian students over the last three decades. In Fall 2017, 320 American Indian students were enrolled as degree-seeking students.

The campus is situated on lands first inhabited by indigenous peoples. It later housed an American Indian boarding school operated by the Sisters of Mercy and the U.S. government from 1887 to 1909. Today Morris honors the federal and state mandated tuition waiver tied to the transfer of the campus from the federal government to the State of Minnesota and admits eligible American Indian students [tuition-free](#).

More than half of Morris's American Indian students are from the regions' Ojibwe tribes, with another 25% from area Dakota/Lakota/Nakota communities. Overall, 65 American Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages are represented on campus. The campus's unique history and student body suit it to the kind of work WICHE and Lumina support.

### **The Work**

The grant allows the campus to build on work supported by its 2016 [NASNTI grant from the U.S. Department of Education](#). It is expected not only to boost educational attainment of

American Indian students at Morris, but also to inform the national conversation on opportunities to address barriers experienced by American Indian students.

### **The Partners**

In December 2017 the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education launched a new collaboration of institutions designated as NASNTIs by the U.S. Department of Education. A three-year grant provided by Lumina Foundation will help cultivate a network within the 24 colleges and universities that have at least 10% Native students in their student populations.

In addition to gathering and sharing data and engaging in planning activities, the NASNTIs were invited to attend a national convening in Denver, Colorado, July 26–27. Morris participants include Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean Janet Schrunk Ericksen, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Sandra Olson-Loy, Native American Student Success Assistant Director Tara Nelson, and Associate Professor of Chemistry and American Indian Science and Engineering Society Chapter Faculty Adviser Joseph Alia.

The convening creates a forum for institutions to showcase their planning activities as well as to hear from nationally recognized speakers on topics relevant to American Indian and Alaska Native postsecondary success. It represents the first opportunity for the NASNTIs to gather and collaborate to define common goals, metrics, and priorities.

The Morris “Reducing the Postsecondary Attainment Gap for Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions” project will continue through April 2020.

### **About WICHE**

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education is a regional organization created by the Western Regional Education Compact and adopted in the 1950s by Western states. WICHE was created to facilitate resource sharing among the higher education systems of the West. Learn more at [wiche.edu](http://wiche.edu)

### **About Lumina Foundation**

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. Learn more at [luminafoundation.org](http://luminafoundation.org)