Plenary Session III
WICHE and Reauthorization

Monday, November 10, 2014
3:15 – 4:30 pm
Ballroom
When the discussions about reauthorization become serious, how should WICHE engage in those discussions? Preceding the 2008 reauthorization WICHE was very parsimonious in reauthorization recommendations. In a response to an invitation from the House Committee on Education and the Workforce “to share views on the issues most important to the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act,” WICHE offered three simple straightforward recommendations:

- To recast funding formulas to recognize growth in demand for services.
- To modernize aid eligibility to serve needy students rather than traditional ones (including reconsideration of the rule that limited aid eligibility to students enrolled in programs in which no more than 50 percent of instruction was provided online).
- To partner with the states on accountability through incentives rather than regulation.

As we look forward to the upcoming reauthorization, your staff has already been in a number of discussions regarding future federal directions with other organizations, foundations, Congressional representatives, and members of the Executive branch. Certainly there are topics with respect to reauthorization that are extremely important to the West and, in some instances, directly related to WICHE’s workplan, such as issues around the funding, the focus and delivery of financial aid, federal engagement in student unit record systems, federal involvement in customer information for students including assessment of student learning, possible federal/state partnerships, etc. To date, however, WICHE has made no recommendations with regard to federal activities.

In this plenary session we will discuss how WICHE should proceed in discussions with Congress and the Executive branch on reauthorization issues; and what will be our protocol. Because a number of your staff have become nationally recognized as experts in various policy arenas that may well become discussion points during reauthorization, they will almost certainly be asked for their perspectives and it seems both prudent and reasonable for them to feel reasonably comfortable entering into discussions about what constitutes good public policy within their sphere of knowledge and experience. For example, President Longanecker knows a good deal about federal/state policy and relations, Brian Prescott knows much about financial aid and student unit data bases, and Demi Michelau, director of policy analysis, knows a good deal about adult students and policy related to them. It seems reasonable that they should feel free, when their perspective is sought, for them to provide that perspective.
When it comes to WICHE proactively making a formal recommendation regarding reauthorization or responding to a solicitation for WICHE to take a position, however, it seems reasonable to expect that the commission membership should endorse that recommendation. The dilemma arises, however, when action on an issue, to be useful, must be made in a timely fashion that does not coincide with WICHE’s semi-annual meeting schedule. The WICHE bylaws allow for the Executive Committee to act on behalf of the Committee of the Whole between the semi-annual meetings, but is the commission as a whole comfortable with the Executive Committee taking positions on reauthorization? And in the event that there is something staff believes should be considered by the commission that requires urgent attention, how should we proceed?

I am hopeful that our discussion will address these procedural issues.

Furthermore, I would hope that we would have a preliminary discussion about what issues are likely to be among those that WICHE may wish to address. From a staff perspective these might include:

- Discussions of federal/state partnerships
- Federal attention to state or national student unit record databases
- Student aid simplification, including revising the family contribution schedule in the federal need analysis
- Data driven institutional comparisons for use in consumer information systems and for accountability purposes
- Federal recognition of state authorization

I would hope that at the end of this session we would be able to construct both a draft process for engaging in the reauthorization process and draft WICHE reauthorization recommendations, consistent with the discussion, that could be affirmed at a future meeting of the commission or Executive Committee.

Speaker: David Longanecker, president, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

Facilitated Discussion on WICHE and Reauthorization

Facilitator: David Longanecker

Biographical Information on the Speaker & Facilitator

David Longanecker has served as the president of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in Boulder since 1999. Previously, Longanecker served for six years as the assistant secretary for postsecondary education at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to that he was the state higher education executive officer in Colorado and Minnesota. He was also the principal analyst for higher education for the Congressional Budget
Office. Longanecker has served on numerous boards and commissions. He has written extensively on a range of higher education issues. His primary interests in higher education are: expanding access to successful completion for students within all sectors of higher education, promoting student and institutional performance, assuring efficient and effective finance and financial aid strategies, and fostering effective use of educational technologies, all for the purpose of sustaining the nation’s strength in the world and increasing the quality of life for all Americans, particularly those who have traditionally been left out in the past. He holds an Ed.D. from Stanford University, an M.A. in student personnel work from George Washington University, and a B.A. in sociology from Washington State University.