The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is a 16-member commission working to boost access to higher education for students in the West and, as importantly, to ensure their success. Utah has been a member of WICHE since 1953.

Benefits to Utah

- Thousands of students from Utah have attended undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in other Western states through WICHE’s Student Exchange Program, saving millions of dollars thanks to reduced tuition rates. In just one of the programs, the Western Undergraduate Exchange, Utah students and their families have saved more than $74.9 million since 1988, when the program was founded.
- Utah has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- Utah has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

Doing the Math: Utah’s Return on Investment

- In 2016-17 Utah, its institutions, and its students saved or brought in over $8 million through WICHE and spent $145,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 56-fold return on investment.
- In the last five years, Utah students’ savings from WUE alone have added up to $26.6 million, yielding a 39-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Utah students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Utah’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2016-17, 942 students from Utah were enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving some $5.8 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $6,163. In the last 10 years, students have saved $47.7 million.

Utah benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Utah's institutions can choose how many out-of-state slots to offer and in which areas, allowing them to make the best use of their resources by accepting students in underenrolled programs. There’s a workforce benefit for the state, too, as students often stay in Utah after graduating. In 2016-17 Utah received 1,523 students through WUE.

Professional Student Exchange Program. Utah has sent 737 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in a host of critical fields, including optometry, podiatry, and veterinary medicine. Historically, some 69 percent of PSEP students return to Utah to pursue their professional careers. In addition, in 2016-17, the state received eight students and $187,758 in support fees from other Western states.

Western Regional Graduate Program. Utah's postgraduates also participate in graduate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to some 450 high-quality, distinctive programs at 61 institutions in all WICHE states. WRGP programs run the gamut, but emerging social, environmental, and resource-management fields are particular strengths, as are innovative interdisciplinary programs. In 2016-17 Utah sent 95 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 116.

WICHE’s Student Exchange & Related Programs

Utah is active in all three WICHE Student Exchange Programs: the Western Undergraduate Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2016-17 Utah’s students and families saved over $7.8 million. Utah saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Interstate Passport® is a program that facilitates block transfer of lower-division general education based on learning
Steady increase in the number of high school graduates

The number of Hispanic high school graduates in Utah will likely track the national trend, but it will be less impacted by the contraction of White youth and more influenced by a projected 20 percent increase of Hispanic high school graduates through 2024 and then decrease by about the same amount between 2025 and 2032.

There is an abundance of information on knocking.wiche.edu, including the publication and other reports, projections data, interactive data dashboards, recorded webinars and presentations, and XXX’s state profile, which indicates that:

- Steady increase in the number of high school graduates is projected for Utah, increasing about 37% from around 34,000 graduates in 2012 to 45,000 in 2026. The number of high school graduates will then decrease about 8% between 2026 and 2032.
- The number of Hispanic high school graduates in Utah will increase rapidly through 2026 but then drop substantially by 2032, while the number of White graduates steadily increases. So, the non-White portion of public high school graduates increases only slightly, from 18% to 21%, between 2012 and 2032.

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Utah has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision making at the state level. WICHE initiatives have been sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and others. In addition, WICHE policy experts often visit the state to present or consult on a number of vital issues, including the state’s workforce needs and balancing the financial aid portfolio between grants, loans, and scholarships, as well as between merit- and need-based aid. Utah decision makers also keep current on pressing policy issues developing all over the nation through WICHE’s extensive network.

The Adult College Completion (ACC) Network, funded by Lumina Foundation, was an 800-member learning network that united organizations and agencies working to increase college completion by adults with prior college credits but no degree. Activities included an annual workshop, a webinar series, publications, a listserv, and other resources. The ACC Network and WICHE became national leaders in the area of adult learners and continue to be an important resource to those who strive to better serve non-traditional students.

The State Higher Education Policy Database (SHEPD) is WICHE’s online searchable database. It provides state and national policymakers, education leaders, practitioners, and education consumers with an inventory of state-level policies and resources in key policy issue areas related to access and success in higher education. It contains a blog and an electronic SHEPD alert distribution list to keep subscribers current on important updates. A related resource is the Policy Publications Clearinghouse, a depository of publications, reports, and briefs related to higher education.
“WICHE’s PSEP made it possible for me to attend Pacific University College of Optometry. I have the privilege of having a family while in school, but with that comes monetary responsibility. Had I not been awarded the PSEP scholarship, it would be extremely hard (almost impossible) to pay off student loans after I graduate. It’s allowed me to provide for my family and pay tuition without taking out as many loans. PSEP has made my career possible and my studies a little less stressful.”

– Brayden, Utah resident, Class of 2019, Pacific University, Optometry

Additionally, Dixie State University, the Utah System of Higher Education, the University of Utah, and Utah Valley University are members of the Western Academic Leadership Forum (the Forum), the chief academic leaders of the four-year institutions and their related system and state agencies, who address regional higher education issues, and engage in resource sharing. Utah will host the Forum annual meeting in Salt Lake City, April 26-28, 2017, with the theme “Designing for Quality in Higher Education Facet by Facet.” The Western Alliance for Community College Academic Leaders (the Alliance) brings academic leaders of community colleges and technical schools and systems together with state governing and coordinating boards associated with two-year institutions to exchange ideas and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. Salt Lake Community College is a member.

Technology. Several Utah colleges and universities are active participants in the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), the leader in the practice, policy, and advocacy of technology-enhanced learning in higher education. WCET is widely recognized as one of the most informative, reliable, and forward-thinking organizations regarding the role of technology and innovation in higher education. Our growing membership includes more than 350 institutions, state and system-wide higher education agencies, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations in nearly all U.S. states and many Canadian provinces. WCET members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and exemplars of successful learning technology innovation in practice. Key WCET activities include an annual meeting, leadership summits, national webcasts, and email list-based discussions among members. Major topics of interest to the WCET membership include student success, managing e-learning, faculty success, emerging technologies, and evolving policy issues.

Mental Health. In March 2017, the Utah Department of Human Services, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, retained the WICHE Mental Health Program to provide technical assistance to reduce the average length of stay at the Utah State Hospital for forensic patients at the Utah State Hospital being restored to competency to stand trial. The project also includes funding for a Lean Rapid Improvement Event to assist the Utah State Hospital in reducing forensic length of stay.

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is a voluntary, nationwide initiative of states that will make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and make it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. The effort initially was funded by $3.2 million in grants from Lumina Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and is now supported by fees paid by institutions. The initiative is administered by the country’s four regional higher education compacts – the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) – and overseen by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). States and institutions that choose to participate agree to operate under common standards and procedures, providing a more uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states, and better resolution of student complaints. Utah is among the WICHE states that are members of W-SARA in this reciprocal relationship.

Other Initiatives. Utah’s Westminster College participates in another initiative, the Master Property Program (MPP), which helps institutions reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact in 1994 and expanded to the WICHE region in 2004, the MPP includes more than 160 campuses with total insured values of over $106 million. WICHE is also partnering with MHEC to offer MHECare, a health program providing vetted, competitively priced medical benefits for students. Underwritten by UnitedHealthcare StudentResources, MHECare offers a variety of plans. In a third collaboration with MHEC, WICHE extends the benefits of MHECtech to colleges.

“I am from Utah and would have never been able to afford out-of-state tuition. Thanks to WUE, I am studying accounting at MSU Denver and have loved every minute of it. I have met amazing people and have grown to love this city and state. I am so grateful for the opportunity I have to go to school here and the experiences it’s given me.”

– Kailey, Utah resident, Class of 2017, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Accounting
and universities in the West, enabling them to purchase from competitively bid purchasing agreements to reduce costs on a range of hardware and software products and services.

Utah & WICHE’s Leadership
The WICHE Commission, with three commissioners from each state, molds the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Utah’s commissioners are David Buhler, commissioner, Utah System of Higher Education, Salt Lake City; Patricia Jones, CEO, Women’s Leadership Institute, Salt Lake City; and Peter C. Knudson, state senator, Brigham City.

WICHE also seeks assistance and advice from policymakers, educators, administrators and legislators. WICHE’s Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC), composed of legislator-members from each state – including Rep. Keith Grover, Sen. Knudson, and Sen. Evan Vickers – has been crucial in this regard. The LAC works to keep the commission’s Executive Committee and staff current on significant legislative issues related to higher education, provides input on WICHE initiatives, and advises staff on a host of issues. WICHE staff also serves the LAC, by informing its members about emerging policy issues in the West.

WICHE Commission & Staff
The WICHE Commission’s 16 members include representatives from 15 Western states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai‘i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states (the various entities can decide to participate), Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Members work collaboratively to provide educational access and excellence for all citizens.

WICHE and its staff are headquartered in Boulder, CO, and operate out of the State Higher Education Policy Center, which WICHE owns with the State Higher Education Executive Officers association and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

Staff leadership includes:

- **Joseph A. Garcia**, president
- **Michael Abbiatti**, vice president for educational technologies and executive director, WCET
- **John Lopez**, special assistant to the president and chief administrative officer, and director, W-SARA
- **Demarée Michelau**, vice president, policy analysis and research
- **Jere Mock**, vice president, programs and services
- **Dennis Mohatt**, vice president, behavioral health
- **Jeremy Simon**, director of strategic communications

How can I find out more about WICHE?
Visit our website at www.wiche.edu or contact President Joseph A. Garcia at 303.541.0201.

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