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. Arizona has been a member of WICHE since 1953.

Benefits to Arizona

- Tens of thousands of students from Arizona 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, Arizona students and their families have saved some $109.6 million since 1998, when Arizona began using the program.
- Arizona has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- Arizona has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

Doing the Math: Arizona’s Return on Investment

- In 2016-17 Arizona saved or brought in $20.9 million through WICHE and spent $145,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 144-fold return on investment.
- In the last five years, Arizona students’ savings from WUE alone have added up to $53.1 million, yielding a 78-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.

WICHE’s Student Exchange & Related Programs

Arizona 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, Arizona’s students and families saved over $18.1 million. Arizona saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Arizona students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Arizona’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1998. In 2016-17, 1,632 students from Arizona were enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving some $12.9 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $7,900. In the last 10 years, students have saved $87.9 million.

Arizona benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Arizona’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 Arizona after graduating. In 2016-17 Arizona received 7,518 students through WUE.

Professional Student Exchange Program. Arizona has sent 2,602 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in a host of critical fields, including dentistry, optometry, osteopathic medicine, and veterinary medicine. Historically, 83 percent of PSEP students return to Arizona to pursue their professional careers. In addition, in 2016-17 the state received 144 students and more than $2.8 million in support fees from other Western states.

Western Regional Graduate Program. Arizona’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 Arizona sent 76 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 509.

Interstate Passport® is a program that facilitates block transfer of lower-division general education based on learning outcomes and proficiency criteria. It includes learning outcomes for nine knowledge and skill areas developed by
faculties at institutions in multiple states as well as an academic progress tracking system for Passport transfer students designed by registrars and institutional researchers. The goal of the Interstate Passport is to eliminate transfer students’ unnecessary repetition of learning previously achieved.

**WICHE’s Added Value**

Arizona gains added value from WICHE’s programs in policy, workforce development, technology, mental health, and other areas.

One of WICHE’s most widely known publications is the *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates* series, which for almost 40 years has provided strategic data about how high school graduates are likely to change in the years ahead. The 9th edition of *Knocking at the College Door*, released in December 2016, describes how the nation has entered a decade of stabilization in the number of high school graduates, with substantial contraction in the number of White high school graduates and rapid increases of non-White populations. After about 2025, the nation and most states will produce fewer high school graduates than in recent years, due to a recent “baby bust”. The WICHE region will generally 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 Arizona’s state profile, which indicates that:

- Arizona is projected to produce 66,900 high school graduates per year, on average, between school years 2012 and 2032. There will be about 10% more graduates in 2024 than in 2012, but this increase will then be followed by a 14% decrease in the number of graduates produced by 2032.
- Non-White public high school graduates are already about 52% of all Arizona public high school graduates. The non-White share will increase only slightly, to 55% by 2032, as most populations decrease in number after 2024.

**Figure 1. Arizona Savings and Revenues through WICHE Programs in 2016**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Savings</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$12,895,005</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSEP</td>
<td>$4,086,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revenue to AZ Institutions (PSEP)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$20,932,525</td>
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**Policy & Workforce Development.** Arizona has been an active participant in projects to support better-informed decision making at the state level. WICHE initiatives have been sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and others. Teams of policymakers and education leaders from Arizona participate each year in regional policy forums and meetings hosted by WICHE. WICHE has also worked closely with Arizona decision makers in a number of key areas, including performance funding, the alignment of college education with workforce demand, and financial aid.

Arizona participated in a Gates-funded meeting that brought together the stewards of the data systems in 14 WICHE states for discussions around linking data internally and with other states. A central topic was how to address the challenges to data sharing presented by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

The implementation of new common academic standards and assessments is well underway in most states. As implementation continues, there are a variety of challenges that K-12 and higher education leaders will face in the coming years related to student movement across state lines. To begin the conversation about these challenges, WICHE, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, convened higher education and K-12 leaders from the Western region and additional bordering states in October 2014. Arizona was one of 17 states along with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to participate.

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 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.

The Arizona Board of Regents and the University of Arizona 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. The Western Alliance for Community College Academic Leaders (the Alliance) brings academic leaders of community colleges and technical schools and
Continuing engagement with the Arizona State Hospital in WICHE’s deployment of a medical director for the Division of Behavioral Health and MMIC. The Forum and the Alliance held their 2012 annual meetings in Phoenix, and the Alliance returned to Tempe in 2014.

Technology. Arizona has been involved with 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. Activity in Arizona increased dramatically in the past year, as the Department of Health issued a major Medicaid behavioral health contract to a new vendor, Aetna – Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care (MMIC), which serves the Maricopa County area (Metro Phoenix). Additionally, on Jan. 8, 2014, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer announced that a final agreement had been reached in the Arnold v. Sarn class-action lawsuit, which was filed in 1981 by Charles L. “Chick” Arnold on behalf of individuals with serious mental illnesses. These two developments increased WICHE’s engagement in the success of the Arizona behavioral health system, including:

- Continuing engagement with the Arizona State Hospital in the promotion of a culture of safety, and other quality care initiatives.
- WICHE’s deployment of a medical director for the Division of Behavioral Health. In late FY15 a portion of this position funding transferred to MMIC with a focus on integrated care and support for the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs).
- WICHE management and deployment of an EBP Fidelity Review Team, to support the quality improvement of Assertive Community Treatment, Supported Employment, Permanent Supported Housing, and Consumer Operated Services that are a part of the pathway to the Arnold settlement.
- Technical assistance to MMIC relating to EBPs integration with a new first-episode psychosis initiative.
- Development of training and quality improvement activities related to EBP fidelity, jointly funded by the Division of Behavioral Health and MMIC.

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. Arizona is among the WICHE states that are members of W-SARA in this reciprocal relationship.

**Other Initiatives.** The Pima County Community College system, with six campuses and four learning and education centers, participates in the Master Property Program (MPP). The program helps institutions in the West 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 and universities in the West, enabling them to purchase hardware and software products and services from competitively bid purchasing agreements to reduce costs.

**Arizona & WICHE’s Leadership**

The WICHE Commission, with three commissioners from each member state, molds the organization’s mission and sets its priorities. Arizona’s commissioners are: Chris Bustamante, president, Rio Salado College, Tempe; and Eileen Klein, president, Arizona Board of Regents, Phoenix. One appointment is pending.

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. Paul Boyer and Sen. Catherine Miranda – 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, informing its members about emerging policy issues in the West. Two appointments are pending.

**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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