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. Washington has been a member of WICHE since 1955.

Benefits to Washington

- Tens of thousands of students from Washington 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, Washington students and their families have saved more than $447.6 million since 1997, when the state started participating.
- Washington has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- Washington has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

Doing the Math: Washington’s Return on Investment

- In 2017-18 Washington, its institutions, and its students saved or brought in over $45.9 million through WICHE and spent $149,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 293-fold return on investment.
- In the last five years, Washington students’ savings from WUE alone have added up to $173 million, yielding a 246-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Washington students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Washington’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1997. In 2017-18, 3,817 students from Washington were enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving $41.2 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $10,700. In the last 10 years, students saved more than $329.8 million.

Washington benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Washington’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 Washington after graduating. In 2017-18 Washington received 3,017 students through WUE.

Professional Student Exchange Program. Washington sent some 240 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). Until recently, the state supported students studying in optometry and osteopathic medicine. Historically, some 90 percent of PSEP graduates returned to Washington to pursue their professional careers. In addition, in 2017-18 the state received 85 students, along with more than $2.37 million in support fees.

Western Regional Graduate Program. Washington’s postgraduates also enroll in graduate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to 435 high-quality programs at 60 institutions in all WICHE states. WRGP programs run the gamut, but emerging social, environmental, resource-management, and healthcare fields are particular strengths, as are innovative interdisciplinary programs. In 2017-18 Washington sent 156 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 106.

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

WICHE’s 9th edition of Knocking at the College Door high school graduate projections, released in December 2016 (and updated in September 2017 with additional data), describes how the nation and many states have entered a decade of stabilization in the number of high school graduates through about 2025—with substantial contraction in the number of White high school graduates and rapid increases of non-White populations—before entering a period of fewer high school graduates related to a recent “baby bust.” The WICHE region will generally track the national trend, but less so based on trends with White youth and more due to 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 projections of high school graduates for Washington and a state profile, which indicates that:

- Washington is projected to produce 71,800 high school graduates per year, on average, between school years 2012 and 2032, reflecting moderate growth through 2026—about 11% more graduates—and then a relatively stable number of graduates from 2026 to 2032.
- Non-White public high school graduates are currently about 31% of all of Washington’s public high school graduates and will increase to 41% of the total by 2032.

Policy & Workforce Development. Washington has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision-making at the state level. Washington is one of four states chosen to participate in WICHE’s Facilitating Development of a Multistate Policy & Workforce Development

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Longitudinal Data Exchange pilot project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The initiative attempts to enable a more comprehensive regional view of the creation of human capital and its flow among multiple states by exchanging data across K-12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. The success of that pilot led Gates to fund a second phase in which the MLDE project will expand to other states. In addition, the state 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.

In FY 2017, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) received funding from the Washington Legislature through a budget proviso to complete a higher education needs assessment for southeast King County in Washington state. WICHE conducted the assessment in partnership with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), a private nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve strategic decision-making in postsecondary education for states, systems, institutions, and workforce development organizations in the United States and abroad, and one of the three partners with WICHE in the State Higher Education Policy Center (SHEPC) in Boulder, Colo. WICHE and NCHEMS provided key findings, along with a recommended approach to meet needs outlined in the assessment, and a cost estimate to WSAC and the state legislature for consideration.

Most recently, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) selected WICHE to convene focus groups with regional employers, leaders from education, industry, labor, nonprofit, and community groups, students, and parents in each of the state’s nine Educational Service Districts or “ESDs.” The project’s goal is to gain insights into emerging economic trends, employers’ long-term planning, student demand, community needs and other factors as they relate to specific regional educational needs. The team is supplementing the focus groups with key informant interviews and an online employer survey. The insights garnered through this process will contribute to regional data profiles, offering more nuanced perspectives on regional needs than quantitative data alone can provide. A report on the key themes from these focus groups will go to the Washington Student Achievement Council staff, the Council itself, and key policymakers, including the Governor and state legislature and will also be posted publicly on the Student Achievement Council website.

**Figure 1. Washington Savings and Revenues through WICHE Programs in 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$41,163,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$2,449,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$43,613,039</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue to WA Institutions (PSEP)</td>
<td>$2,366,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$45,979,530</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“As a graduate student at University of North Dakota, WRGP gave me access to a unique education that could not have experienced elsewhere. As a result, I’ve become a strong researcher, and have discovered new loves and passions within my clinical work. Thank you so much for the opportunity to pursue my professional passion with fewer worries about finances.”

– Kayte, Washington resident, Class of 2017, University of North Dakota, Counseling Psychology
Regional Academic Leadership Initiatives. Evergreen State College, Eastern Washington University, Central Washington University, Washington State University, and the Washington Student Achievement Council are members of the Western Academic Leadership Forum (the Forum). Their official representatives are 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 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. Clover Park Technical College, Columbia Basin College, Edmonds Community College, Spokane Falls Community College, and Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges are members.

Technology. Washington has been very active 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.

The University of Washington’s Catalyst program won the WCET Outstanding Work (WOW) award, which recognizes effective and innovative uses of technology to address specific needs in higher education. In addition, WICHE has worked with the state on pursuing grants from the national Broadband Technology Opportunities Program and other programs.

Mental Health. The Mental Health Program is currently working with Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) to identify potential options to fulfill Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reporting requirements in a way that minimizes the burden on behavioral health (BH) providers and maximizes the use of existing data sources.

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is a voluntary, nationwide initiative of states that makes distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and makes 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. Washington was among the first WICHE states to become a member of W-SARA in this reciprocal relationship.

Other Initiatives. Seattle Pacific University and Whitman College in Walla Walla participate in another initiative, the Master Property Program (MPP), which helps institutions in the West reduce their insurance premiums and improve

“WUE has made it possible for me to go to the college that I fell in love with. Finances have always been an issue with my family, as I have two older siblings in college as well, and it has taken a major financial toll on my parents. However, the financial stress has been eased by WUE, and I’ve been able to follow my dreams and explore another part of the world. I am now attending Northern Arizona University and pursuing a forestry degree, something that I have wanted to do for many years. I hope that that WUE will continue for a long time, so that others can benefit too”

– Natalie, Washington resident, Northern Arizona University, Forestry

“When it came time for me to choose which colleges I wanted to apply to, I was looking for the most “bang for my buck,” so out-of-state colleges didn’t seem like a viable option. When I learned about WUE, it opened up so many more opportunities that I thought weren’t possible. I ended up attending college in Colorado, quite a ways away from my home state of Washington. The reduced tuition rate I pay (thanks to WUE) has given me the financial means to experience college to the fullest, including study abroad, participation in student organizations, and honor society. I am forever grateful for WUE and am always spreading the news to other prospective students who think they don’t have many choices because of high out-of-state tuition.”

– Alicia, Washington resident, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Criminal Justice and Spanish
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 $93.4 billion. 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 off competitively bid purchasing agreements to reduce costs on a range of hardware and software products and services.

Washington & WICHE’s Leadership

The WICHE Commission, with three commissioners from each member state, molds the organization’s mission and sets its priorities. Washington’s commissioners are: Don Bennett, deputy director, Washington Student Achievement Council, Olympia; Gerry Pollet, state representative, Seattle; and Thomas L. “Les” Purce, president emeritus, The Evergreen State College, Olympia.

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. Jeff Holy, Sen. David Frockt, and Rep. Gerry Pollet—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 serve the LAC by informing members about emerging policy issues in the West.

WICHE Commission & Staff

The WICHE Commission includes three gubernatorial selected representatives from each member: 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, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Members work collaboratively to provide educational access and excellence for all citizens.

WICHE and its staff are headquartered in Boulder, Colo., 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:

Demarée Michelau, president
Michael Abbiatti, vice president for educational technologies and executive director, WCET
Patrick Lane, vice president, policy analysis and research
Jere Mock, vice president, programs and services
Dennis Mohatt, vice president, behavioral health

How can I find out more about WICHE?
Visit our website at wiche.edu or contact 303.541.0200.

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