

MEDIA RELEASE

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WICHE Awarded First in the World Federal Grant to Expand Interstate Passport

Boulder, Colorado – The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) has been awarded a grant totaling \$2.99 million from the U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, to scale and enhance the Interstate Passport – a new transfer framework that seeks to improve graduation rates, shorten time to degree, and save students money. As a grassroots effort led by academic leaders in the WICHE region, the Passport (www.wiche.edu/passport) is reforming transfer using an interstate approach. The new framework focuses on lower-division general education, the common denominator among institutions – concentrating on it as a whole, not on individual courses – and allows for a cross-border “match” of outcomes-integrated general education for block transfer. The Passport is based on learning outcomes – what the student knows and can do – and proficiency criteria – ways students demonstrate their achievement level with the learning outcomes.

WICHE is one of 17 First in the World (FITW) recipients representing 14 states; ten public, private, and nonprofit four-year institutions; five public two-year institutions; and two educational agencies or organizations (<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/department-awards-60-million-first-world-grants-17-colleges-universities-and-organizations>). This year more than 300 applications were submitted for FITW’s two competitions: development grants to seed and rigorously evaluate earlier stage innovations, and validation grants to test, at a broad scale, interventions supported by significant evidence. Starting October 1, 2015, the WICHE grant-funded project will run for four years.

“Many states have improved transfer pathways for students within their states, but this is not enough for today’s increasingly mobile student population. Students who earn a Passport at a participating institution in one state and transfer to one in another state will have their learning achievement recognized; they will not be required to repeat courses at the receiving institution to meet lower-division general education requirements”, said Pat Shea, the Passport’s project director.

The Passport is being rolled out in phases. Phase II is currently underway to complete development of the Passport framework, expand participation, and begin the automation process for data collection and student tracking. In Phase I, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, faculty members from two- and four-year institutions in five states of the WICHE region collaborated to develop the Passport Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and transfer-level proficiency criteria in three lower-division general education foundational skill areas: oral communication, written communication and quantitative literacy. The content areas included in the Passport spring from the work of the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Liberal Education and America’s Promise, known as LEAP, which provides a quartet of targets that a college curriculum should aim to foster in students in order to prepare them for work, life, and strong citizenship that have been widely adopted at a variety of institutions and higher education systems.

Phase II will conclude in September 2016 and has been made possible through the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation. Twenty-two two-year and four-year institutions from seven states (CA, HI, ND, OR, SD, UT, WY) in the WICHE region are participating in the development work. Faculty members from these institutions are working together to define the PLOs and transfer-level proficiency criteria for the remaining six areas: knowledge of concepts in natural sciences, human cultures, creative arts, and human society and the individual; and crosscutting skills in critical thinking and teamwork and value systems. Up to 12 other institutions in six states outside of the WICHE region will begin participating in this phase by the end of the calendar year.

“The Passport is a game changer for higher education on many levels. As more campuses sign on, transfer students will graduate more quickly and Passport institutions will be recognized for their leadership in advancing outcomes-based education. Having the Passport brand will also be an important marketing tool for colleges and universities in the years ahead,” said David Longanecker, WICHE president.

The First in the World grant funds will help build a more robust and automated national data collection and student tracking infrastructure for the Passport, in partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). The expanded Passport-Verify infrastructure will allow institutions to find out if, where, and when incoming transfer students have earned a Passport so that their learning is recognized. NSC will also collaborate with Passport institutions and Utah State University, the Passport’s Central Data Repository, to provide aggregated data reports on the academic progress of Passport transfer students for two terms after transfer. These services will be provided at no additional cost to institutions already participating in NSC’s Student Tracker.

In addition to the NSC work, First in the World grant funds will support three other important components:

- **Modeling the Mapping of Critical Assignments to Passport Learning Outcomes.** In partnership with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), WICHE will engage lower-division general education faculty at partner institutions in a closer look at how and what types of evidence are being used to determine the same lower-division general education competencies. The goal is to expand faculty understanding and choices of critical assignments in designated courses and to share ideas in competency assessment among institutions. Six institutions in three WICHE states (CO, MT and NM) will participate in this work.
- **Scaling Participation in the Passport.** To generate interest in the Passport and better serve the mobile student population, WICHE will launch a robust marketing campaign that builds awareness of the benefits of participating in the Passport program including webinars for key stakeholders in the higher education community, targeting faculty, registrars and institutional researchers, advisors and marketing specialists. An online application process also will be further automated.
- **Researching the Impact of the Passport on Transfer Students.** The School of Management and Labor Relations’ Education and Employment Research Center at Rutgers University will evaluate the initiative to identify the commonalities and unique challenges of integrating the Passport into institutions’ transfer policies and procedures; examine the processes of ensuring quality and external validity for the new learning outcomes; and assess the impact of the Passport on transfer student retention and completion, especially for low-income students.

About WICHE

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education’s contributions to the region’s social, economic, and civic life. Our programs – Student Exchange, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), Policy Analysis and Research, and Mental Health – are working to find answers to some of the most critical questions facing higher education today. WICHE’s 16 members include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, (the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate).

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina’s outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. For more information, log on to www.luminafoundation.org.