Plenary Session I: What’s Up in the West?

As the recently released *State Higher Education Finance* (SHEF) report from the State Higher Education Executive Officers Organization (SHEEO) shows, last year was a banner year for American higher education. While many higher education pundits continue to point out that state funding (inflation adjusted, per student funding) has yet to reach the high water mark of 2001, they tend not to mention that state funding has returned to pre-recession levels in aggregate inflation adjusted terms, just not in per student terms because of the very significant increases in enrollment since the beginning of the new Millennium. They also tend not to point out that total per student inflation adjusted funding – including both state funding and tuition revenues – is now at the highest level in history. From an economic perspective, therefore, we are either buying more quality in our product, ergo the higher costs, or we are becoming less productive; you make the choice. Now, the return to the good times was not realized universally within American higher education or within the WICHE region. While the WICHE region experienced a remarkable overall increase of 7.1 percent in per student inflation adjusted funding in FY 2015, only ten of the 15 states received actual increases in per student inflation adjusted funding with Nevada, North Dakota, and Washington experiencing actual decreases in total state and local appropriations.

But, that was last year. What’s happening in the West this year? This session will describe what the governors indicated would be their agenda for higher education this year, what has actually happened, and where what is happening in the West appears consistent or inconsistent with what is going on throughout the rest of the country.

**Speaker:** David Longanecker, president, WICHE

**Biographical Information on the Speaker**

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.