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Interstate Passport Initiative Framework Complete New College Transfer Framework Streamlines Cross-State Transfer

Boulder, Colorado – Lost academic credits and tuition dollars, delayed graduations, and dampened students' hopes and aspirations have been commonplace for thousands of transfer students because of the reluctance of many colleges and universities to accept course credits earned elsewhere. Although many states have improved their intrastate transfer policies, students wanting to move credits earned from a campus in one state to a college or university in another state have often faced a host of persistent barriers.

A concerned group of academic leaders, initially from seven Western states, decided to tackle these problems head-on. They recruited staff of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to assist them in devising a new approach to student transfer that is based on what knowledge students should gain through their lower-division general education. Most students complete their lower division general education requirements during their first two years of college. During that period many students also opt to move to another campus, and the National Student Clearinghouse reports that today nearly one in four transfer students do so across state lines.

The academic leaders coined the name Interstate Passport to represent the new framework they envisioned that would allow block transfer of lower division general education learning across state borders. The process of creating the new framework brought together teams of faculty from two- and four-year institutions over five years to hammer out what a student should know and be able to do (the Passport Learning Outcomes) in concert with identifying examples of how a student demonstrates proficiency in a learning outcome (the attendant Proficiency Criteria). The framework covers nine knowledge and skill areas: Oral Communication, Written Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Natural Sciences, Human Cultures, Human Society and the Individual, Creative Expression, Critical Thinking, and Teamwork and Value Systems.

"Chairing the Human Cultures team was a great experience," said Laura Vidler, professor of Languages and Linguistics at the University of South Dakota. "Together, we developed a cohesive set of learning outcomes and proficiency criteria that took into account the diverse disciplines we represent, while upholding institutional identity and ensuring academic rigor. The conversations were truly stimulating, interdisciplinary, and collegial, and a tremendous developmental opportunity for all of us."

With the framework now complete, faculty may use the Passport Learning Outcomes to construct their institution's Passport Block, which is a list of courses or other learning experiences by which its students achieve the Passport Learning Outcomes. Once an institution has completed its Passport Block, it can apply to participate in the Interstate Passport Network. Network members award the Passport to students who achieve the learning outcomes in all nine areas. Those students who then transfer with a Passport to another Network member institution will have their learning recognized and will not have to repeat coursework in the Interstate Passport's nine areas to meet lower division general education requirements at the receiving institution.

"Time and again we hear about students whose academic progress is slowed or halted because of transfer barriers and their associated costs," said Joe Garcia, president of WICHE. "The Interstate Passport streamlines the transfer process for students and enables the participating institutions to focus on student learning outcomes rather than a tally of courses and credits. This shift in

emphasis is especially important for first-generation and low-income students, and members of the military and their dependents who are in need of seamless transfer solutions.”

The Interstate Passport includes several quality assurance measures, in particular a robust data collection and tracking system that will measure the academic progress of Passport students for two terms after transfer. Registrars and institutional researchers from institutions participating in the framework’s development devised the processes for recording the Passport on student records, and for tracking and reporting the academic progress of Passport students through two new services to be provided by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Using PassportVerify, Network member institutions will be able to query the Clearinghouse to find out if an incoming transfer student has earned the Passport and if so, where and when. Through the second new service – Academic Progress Tracking – NSC will produce and deliver reports to Passport sending institutions about the academic progress of their former students for use in continuous improvement efforts, as well as a composite report to the Passport Review Board, the project’s policy-making body, for use in evaluating the overall effectiveness of the Passport program.

“Institutions that join the Interstate Passport Network will attract transfer students who want to complete degrees in a timely fashion. It can be a great recruiting tool for campuses that join,” said Patricia Shea, principal investigator of the project and director of Academic Leadership Initiatives at WICHE. “Starting July 1, 2016, regionally accredited public and private not-for-profit institutions can apply to become members of the Interstate Passport Network.”

For more information about participation in the Interstate Passport Network and to apply, visit the Interstate Passport website at <http://www.wiche.edu/passport/membership>.

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. Its programs – Student Exchange, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, Policy Analysis and Research, Mental Health, and several other interstate collaborations – 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, along with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam (the first two of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate as WICHE’s Pacific Islands member).