

## ACTION ITEM

# Approval of WICHE Resolution Supporting Postsecondary Flexibility in Response to COVID-19

For more than 65 years, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) has been strengthening higher education, workforce development, and behavioral health throughout the region. As an interstate compact, WICHE partners with states, territories, and postsecondary institutions to share knowledge, create resources, and develop innovative solutions that address some of our society's most pressing needs. Today, the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has created unprecedented challenges across the globe with short-term effects being felt in myriad ways throughout our states, postsecondary institutions, and communities and long-term impacts that will continue for years.

WICHE's mission of increasing access to high-quality higher education for all citizens of the West has never been more relevant than it is today as we face the extraordinary circumstances of COVID-19 and its impact on students and families. Therefore, the Western states and territories stand together in support of our current and future students at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels as they maintain hope about their future and pursue their postsecondary and professional goals. In these evolving and unusual circumstances, we encourage our Western states, systems, and postsecondary institutions to consider the following so that disruptions due to the current pandemic will not threaten students' ability to pursue and attain a high-quality education in the West:

1. Integrate flexibility into admissions requirements and processes to ease, to the extent possible and within accreditation guidelines, the disruption caused by COVID-19 for applicants at all levels—undergraduate, graduate, and professional—including, for example, relaxing caps on Pass/Fail courses eligible for admissions and transfer, providing flexibility for extensions with respect to deadlines, easing requirements for admissions examinations, etc.
2. Integrate flexibility into financial aid requirements and processes to ease, to the extent possible, the disruptions for applicants at all levels—undergraduate, graduate, and professional—including relaxing deadlines, considering students' and families' current economic situations, etc.
3. Integrate flexibility for students of special tuition rate/scholarship programs, including but not limited to, WICHE's Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) and Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), and clearly communicate whether or not prospective and/or enrolled students in these programs will be affected if they choose (or are required to take) courses pass/fail for the terms during the pandemic. WICHE encourages its partner professional healthcare programs that enroll PSEP students to integrate flexibility where possible, as well.
4. Communicate clearly with students and families the most recent policies and practices, including details about upcoming admission decisions and deadlines, to ensure that students are successful in attaining their education and career goals.
5. Collaborate across sectors, institutions, and state lines to identify student-centered approaches that will promote education continuity, postsecondary attainment, and success.
6. Establish useful resources, where possible, dedicated to COVID-19 information to inform students and promote their health and safety.
7. Move all activities related to admitted student programs, transfer advising, prospective student events, and campus visitations to a virtual experience/platform when possible rather than canceling events.
8. Ensure equitable access to all of the flexibilities and accommodations established to minimize disruption from COVID-19 for all students, including those with disabilities, English language learners, and other vulnerable populations.
9. Recognize that many students – likely through no fault of their own – were not able to continue their studies as learning shifted to a distance-based model and deserve the flexibility and accommodation in trying to reengage and continue their educational journey.

WICHE recognizes the impact of COVID-19 on students, families, and postsecondary institutions is fluid and changing. These uncertainties are also unsettling for those who work on our campuses and are committed to ensuring that our students are receiving the best education possible. By keeping the focus squarely on students and their success, WICHE can continue to advance our organizational mission and strengthen the region's social, economic, and civic life.

### Action Requested:

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