

**Final Evaluation Report
Administration of the State Scholars Initiative by the
Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education**

October 1, 2005 – August 25, 2009

Submitted to:

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

By:

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policies of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



This report builds on the insight and dedication of many individuals instrumental in the design and implementation of the State Scholars Initiative (SSI). Foremost among these are Terese Rainwater, WICHE's program director for the State Scholars Initiative, Nancy Brooks, the program officer for SSI at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Adult and Vocational Education, and the SSI State-level program directors and their staff. All were unstinting in their time, knowledge, and commitment to all aspects of SSI implementation.

WICHE President, David Longanecker, and Vice President for Programs and Services, Jere Mock, provided invaluable leadership. Superb program support was provided by Candy Allen, Annie Finnigan, Kay Hulstrom, Deborah Jang, Christian Martinez, and Michelle Médal. OVAE leadership, many of whom have changed positions over the four years of this evaluation project, provided consistent support and guidance for SSI. They included Acting Assistant Secretary Dennis Berry, former Assistant Secretary Troy Justesen, and Gail Schwartz, Senior Advisor to the Office of the Assistant Secretary, Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

However, it was at the state and local levels that the remarkable SSI implementation efforts unfolded with great intensity and impact. In addition to the efforts of the SSI state directors and their staff, the evaluator deeply appreciates the many contributions of the State-level business-education partnership members, the participating SSI schools and districts, state-level education agencies, and the thousands of students, parents, employers, and community members who participated in SSI.

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Executive Summary

The State Scholars Initiative (SSI) uses business-education partnerships to motivate high school students to enroll in and complete a rigorous course of study. As the SSI program administrator, WICHE provides funding and technical assistance, including program monitoring and oversight, to the state-level business-education partnerships. This final evaluation report summarizes and synthesizes the findings of four years of formative evaluation reports addressing WICHE's administration of SSI.

Finding 1: SSI has met or exceeded all federal program expectations. SSI has been implemented by WICHE in a manner that fully addresses both the programmatic intent of the program and the administrative requirements set forth in the *Federal Register* and related accountability documents.

Finding 2: WICHE was the right organization at the right time to assume administrative responsibility for SSI. WICHE possessed a number of critical capabilities uniquely suited to the task at hand. These included the managerial capability to assume immediate control of the program while quickly putting in place an exceptionally qualified staff team, the programmatic infrastructure needed to support SSI, politically sensitive leadership and incisive program guidance, and a rich policy and research capacity.

Finding 3: Commitment, communication, and continuity at all levels were core to the successful administration of SSI. Three themes emerged early in this evaluation and were reinforced throughout the four years of WICHE's administration: commitment to the success of SSI by the individuals responsible for implementing SSI at all levels, multilateral and multi-modal communication, and continuity in project management by WICHE and OVAE.

Finding 4: Meaningful evaluation activities and related data enhanced WICHE's ability to successfully administer SSI. In addition to creating a communication structure that ensured monthly opportunities to reflect on progress, formative evaluation activities provided information used by OVAE and WICHE to address emerging challenges and take advantage of potential program improvement opportunities.

Finding 5: WICHE, in partnership with OVAE, was able to attain rigorous administrative oversight while addressing program capacity. WICHE restored the SSI program to a high level of accountability and responded to every federal requirement and expectation. However, this occurred at some cost to long-term program impact. Although more might have been done to ameliorate certain of SSI's administrative requirements, a

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remarkable balance was attained between administrative accountability and maximizing program impact.

Final Evaluation Report Administration of the State Scholars Initiative by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

October 1, 2005 – August 25, 2009

I. Background

OVAE funds the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to administer the State Scholars Initiative (SSI). The program uses state- and local-level business-education partnerships to encourage students to pursue a more rigorous course of study in high school than they might have otherwise taken. The SSI Core Course of Study consists of four years of English, three years of math (including algebra 1 and 2 and geometry), three years of lab-based sciences (biology, chemistry, and physics), three and one-half years of social sciences (chosen from U.S. and world history, geography, economics, and government), and two years of the same language other than English.

As the SSI program administrator, WICHE provides funding and technical assistance, including program monitoring and oversight, to the state-level business-education partnerships. The Center for Governmental Studies of Northern Illinois University (NIU) has been contracted by WICHE to serve as an independent third-party evaluator of WICHE's administration of SSI.

The first SSI program administrator was the Texas-based Center for State Scholars ("the Center"). In August 2002, the Center was awarded a four-year grant of \$9.6 million to create a national initiative based on the Texas Scholars model. In November 2002, the Center and OVAE signed a cooperative agreement to ensure that the Center complied with appropriate federal regulations and provided adequate accountability for the funds. However, as a result of an audit released by ED's Office of Inspector General, the grant award was terminated. In September 2005, ED approved WICHE's application to assume administration of SSI.

The cooperative agreement between WICHE and OVAE includes a number of provisions that focus on the problems surfaced in the OIG audit: grantee oversight, accountability, and administrative capacity. These provisions prescribe a close and cooperative working relationship between WICHE and OVAE, adherence by WICHE and the state-level business-education partnerships to proper contracting and fiscal regulations and procedures, and submission by the state partnerships of an array of key documents (e.g., contracts, financial

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documents, reports, job descriptions, and other products) for review by WICHE and/or OVAE. Other provisions of the cooperative agreement include using a fair and objective process to select new state-level business-education partnerships, training staff in effective SSI model implementation strategies, and selection of independent, third-party evaluators.

This history is important to understanding the context within which WICHE was selected to administer the SSI grant and many of the administrative constraints under which both WICHE and ED operated.

II. Evaluation Scope and Methodology

NIU is one of two external evaluators contracted by WICHE to study different aspects of SSI program implementation. In addition to evaluating WICHE's administration of SSI, NIU also evaluated progress toward SSI Goal One, which involves the use of business-education partnerships to influence high school student course-taking.

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) is the other SSI evaluator and has focused on SSI Goals Two and Three:

- Influence high school student course-taking patterns; and
- Influence stakeholders' perceptions regarding high school student course-taking patterns.

Both evaluators have produced annual evaluation reports for all four years of the State Scholars Initiative from October 1, 2005, through September 30, 2008. They also partnered on the development of an integrated summative evaluation report. This evaluation represents a summative evaluation of WICHE's administrative performance covering the period October 1, 2005 through August 25, 2009. All of these evaluation products are available on the SSI Web site maintained by WICHE.¹

Three aspects of WICHE's performance are the focus of this evaluation: communication, project management, and the provision of technical assistance. These evaluation areas were mutually determined with WICHE as part of the contracting process with NIU and are reflected in the evaluation framework contained in Attachment A. It is important to note that the 24 state-level business-education partnerships involved in SSI since 2003 have been grouped into three cohorts based on when they were brought into the SSI network. Fourteen

¹ <http://www.wiche.edu/statescholars/research/evaluationReports.aspx>

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states were selected and funded in 2002 by the Center for State Scholars prior to WICHE's cooperative agreement with OVAE in 2005 to administer SSI and make up the "Group A" states. Six "Group B" states were selected on March 31, 2006. The four "Group C" cohort states were selected on November 28, 2006. All 24 SSI states are listed below by cohort. Five states - Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Washington - have concluded their SSI programs.

Table 1: SSI States by Cohort

Group A States	Group B States	Group C States
Arizona	Louisiana	Missouri
Arkansas	Massachusetts	New Hampshire
Connecticut	Nebraska*	South Dakota
Indiana	Utah	Wyoming
Kentucky	Virginia	
Maryland	West Virginia	
Michigan		
Mississippi		
New Jersey*		
New Mexico*		
Oklahoma		
Rhode Island*		
Tennessee		
Washington*		

* Inactive prior to this evaluation period

Because WICHE’s administrative responsibility has focused primarily on Group B and C states, they are the main focus of this evaluation. However, where data are available, the experience of the Group A states is also incorporated into the analysis.

Both program evaluators were provided with an exceptionally high degree of access to information about WICHE’s administration of SSI over the entire four year period. Many sources of useful information addressing all aspects of WICHE’s performance were drawn upon for this evaluation. Among the most important of these sources were those that were sustained over time and allowed the evaluator to identify and observe administrative issues as they evolved. These included:

- a. Emails sent within the SSI network, including information shared among WICHE, OVAE, NCHEMS, and the States active in the SSI network.
- b. Quarterly and final progress reports submitted by the State directors and by WICHE to OVAE.
- c. WICHE’s monthly conference calls with the State directors.
- d. Monthly evaluation team conference calls among Terese Rainwater and Jere Mock from WICHE, Nancy Brooks from OVAE, and Diana Robinson, the NIU evaluator, summaries of which were prepared and distributed by the evaluator.
- e. Program meetings and conferences for the State partnership directors including new director orientations, network meetings, and a sustainability workshop facilitated by The Grantsmanship Center (including meeting feedback information).

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- f. SSI Advisory Board meetings and conference calls.
- g. Informational meetings arranged by OVAE with various ED staff at their Washington, D.C. office.
- h. On- and off-site Federal monitoring visits conducted by Nancy Brooks.
- i. WICHE's National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance held in Boston on April 29 and 30, 2008.

Other information was more episodic but was also factored into this evaluation. One example of such data is the information collected by WICHE via conference call from the 14 states that were part of the SSI network under the Center for State Scholars. The focus of these calls was on understanding the status of each program and contract. Another example is the survey data collected from State partnership directors and SSI Advisory Board members in October 2006, addressing their perceptions of WICHE's administration of SSI. While useful, the survey was not repeated due to the extensive reporting already required of the State directors and because other sources of similar information were available to the evaluator.

Finally, the analysis reflected in this report also was informed by informational interviews the evaluator conducted with four key SSI administrative personnel between July 29 and August 10, 2009. Interviewees included:

Nancy Brooks, SSI Program Officer, OVAE
David Longanecker, President of WICHE
Jere Mock, Vice President for Programs and Services, WICHE
Terese Rainwater, SSI Program Director, WICHE

III. Findings

Finding 1: SSI has met or exceeded all federal program expectations.

SSI has been implemented by WICHE in a manner that fully addresses both the programmatic intent of the program and the administrative requirements set forth in the *Federal Register* and related accountability documents. In particular, the Cooperative Agreement developed between OVAE and WICHE is a detailed framework for the roles and responsibilities of the two organizations. Detailed support for this finding is presented in Attachment B which provides a comprehensive description of the activities that WICHE has undertaken in response to the Cooperative Agreement. These activities also have been exhaustively documented by WICHE in reports to OVAE and correspond to the five main responsibilities of the SSI program administrator summarized in the table below.

SSI Program Requirement	WICHE Effort
<p>Institute a process for selecting, in conjunction with ED, State-level business-education partnerships to carry out the SSI in their states.</p>	<p>WICHE has designed and implemented two competitive processes that resulted in the selection of 10 additional State-level business-education partnerships (Groups B and C).</p>
<p>Disseminate a model that State-level business-education partnerships can use to implement SSI activities.</p>	<p>A <i>State Partnership Resource Manual</i> has been developed by WICHE and shared with all SSI State-level partnerships. Included within this comprehensive Resource Manual is an “Implementation Manual” providing a program overview; activities for launching and building support for SSI; the 8th grade presentation and volunteer recruitment and training; student incentives, rewards, and recognition; measures of success and progress; budgeting; and program sustainability.</p>
<p>Oversee funds awarded to the State-level business-education partnerships that were selected and funded both by the Center for State Scholars and WICHE.</p>	<p>WICHE has developed fiscal processes and procedures addressing all aspects of program administration. No audit concerns or exceptions have been found by ED in WICHE’s fiscal oversight of SSI or in external audits conducted annually.</p>
<p>Provide technical assistance, monitoring, and oversight to help all SSI-funded State-level business-education partnerships strengthen the involvement of business and community organizations in high school improvement efforts and establish self-sustaining SSI programs.</p>	<p>WICHE has provided extensive and varied support to the SSI State partnerships, including in-person directors’ meetings, monthly directors’ conference calls, an SSI Web site with a directors-only section, a National Summit on Rigor and Relevance, as well as on-site technical assistance as needed. WICHE program staff responded quickly to inquiries by phone and email. WICHE also funded the development of a volunteer management database for use by states in coordinating employer involvement in the schools.</p>
<p>Implement the dissemination, communication, evaluation, and reporting responsibilities described in the Cooperative Agreement with ED.</p>	<p>In addition to sharing SSI program materials developed by State-level partnerships, WICHE has designed and disseminated a range of products addressing the importance of high school level rigor. These include an SSI brochure, posters, postcards, logo, videos, a DVD, newsletters, news clips, policy</p>

	briefs, the proceedings of the National Summit, and an extensive catalog of relevant research. WICHE has met all evaluation and reporting requirements set forth by ED.
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The achievement reflected in this finding is particularly noteworthy in light of the history of SSI's program administration. The first SSI program administrator was the Texas-based Center for State Scholars ("the Center"). In August 2002, the Center was awarded a four-year grant of \$9.6 million to create a national initiative based on the Texas Scholars model. In an audit released in June 2005, ED's Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that during the first two years of its administration of SSI, the Center did not properly account for and use over \$1.09 million of its funds and it lacked the administrative capability to effectively administer the grant. The grant award was terminated and, in September 2005, three years into the SSI program, WICHE's application to assume administration of SSI was approved.

This history is important to understanding the context within which WICHE administered SSI. Three aspects are considered briefly with their associated challenges and opportunities:

- the implications for program oversight at the state and national levels
- a shortened timeframe for program implementation
- additional administrative start-up effort.

Implications for Program Oversight. OVAE responded quickly to the findings in the OIG report by seeking a new program administrator for SSI and explicitly addressing the issues documented by the OIG. OVAE's expectations were made explicit in the cooperative agreement crafted with WICHE that included provisions focusing on grantee oversight, accountability, and administrative capacity. These provisions required an unusually close and cooperative working relationship between WICHE and OVAE to ensure that (a) all SSI program requirements were fully addressed, and (b) that WICHE and the state-level business-education partnerships adhered to proper contracting and fiscal regulations and procedures. One of the key provisions was that an array of program materials (e.g., contracts, financial documents, reports, job descriptions, and other products) was to be submitted by the state partnerships for review and approval by WICHE and/or OVAE; and WICHE similarly was to submit virtually all program materials and decisions to OVAE for review and approval.

The chief drawback associated with this requirement was that the additional time required for document review by WICHE and/or OVAE tended to slow the implementation

process, particularly when WICHE first assumed SSI program administration. This occasionally occurred despite the best efforts by both WICHE and OVAE to quickly respond to requests from states for approval. However, the length of time required to review submitted materials declined from several days during the first year of WICHE's administration of SSU to less than one day in many instances.

This high level of oversight also had its advantages. First, it fostered a close and highly effective working relationship between OVAE and WICHE. The process of joint review and decision-making helped WICHE's SSI program director and the OVAE program manager develop a shared understanding of all aspects of SSI administration and the environments within which each was operating. A second advantage was a high level of quality control resulting from the close scrutiny applied to all SSI products.

Shortened Timeframe. Including a no-cost contract extension, WICHE had less than four years to achieve and document the objectives associated with a seven-year initiative. These timing pressures created some substantial administrative challenges. For example, two competitive funding processes were held in 2006 with approximately two months time between announcement of the Request for Proposal and the orientation for SSI directors of selected states. This compressed timeline placed substantial strain on WICHE staff, but OVAE staff were also pressured by the tight timelines.

Recreate Administrative Infrastructure. Although 14 states had already received SSI funds when WICHE assumed responsibility for administering SSI, many of whom had strong programs in place, there was negligible administrative information that passed from the Center to WICHE. As a result, WICHE had to recreate the program files and financial records of the first cohort of 14 states as well as the administrative processes used by the Center.

Finding 2: WICHE was the right organization at the right time to assume administrative responsibility for SSI.

Following the release of the OIG audit of SSI, a new program administrator for SSI was needed who could quickly put in a system of administrative controls, move forward with a competitive process to select additional grantees for the program funds, provide a high level of technical and subject matter expertise, and perform these functions under the heightened level of accountability stipulated in the Cooperative Agreement.

WICHE possessed a number of critical capabilities that were uniquely suited to the task at hand. WICHE had the managerial capability to assume immediate control of the program while quickly putting in place an exceptionally qualified staff team, and also possessed the programmatic infrastructure -- accounting, human resources, communications, and marketing -- needed to support SSI. Also, as a former federal assistant secretary for postsecondary education, WICHE's president was able to provide politically sensitive leadership to the entire enterprise, incisive guidance to the SSI staff team, and tap other national education and business leaders for the SSI Advisory Board. Finally, as an organization dedicated to improving access to higher education and ensuring student success, WICHE was able to offer a rich policy and research capability to SSI.

WICHE's approach to SSI administration differed from that of the Center for State Scholars in three important respects. These included:

- a. Collection of program data. There was no evidence that outcome data on any aspect of SSI was required or collected by CSS from the first group of 14 State-level partnerships. When WICHE assumed responsibility for the program, a major focus was to establish a data collection framework that responded to the requirements described in the *Federal Register*.²
- b. Overall record-keeping. Few useful administrative records were provided by CSS to WICHE when the latter organization assumed responsibility for SSI. One of WICHE's first tasks was to create program files for each of the 14 Group A states that included current information about contracts, budgets and funding, staffing, and program performance. WICHE staff were vigilant with respect to setting up the required administration systems from the outset and were briefed in all aspects of federal record-keeping consistent with the federal Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR). WICHE spent considerable time working with all of the SSI states to ensure that basic administrative requirements were followed, including maintaining time and effort reports, submitting accurate and timely expense reports, filing regular performance reports, determining that all expenses were allocable, allowable, and reasonable.
- c. Evaluation. No evaluation plan or evaluative information was available from CSS. By contrast, WICHE invested considerable time and resources in developing a comprehensive evaluation framework early in their role as national SSI administrator,

² *Federal Register*, Vol. 20, No. 150, p. 45373

communicated evaluation-related expectations to the SSI State partnerships, and used evaluation data to continuously improve their administration of SSI.

Finding 3: Commitment, communication, and continuity at all levels were core to the successful administration of SSI.

Three themes emerged early in this evaluation of WICHE's administration of SSI and were reinforced throughout the four years of the organization's leadership and oversight of the program. The first of these was the *commitment* of the individuals responsible for implementing SSI at all levels. The federal OVAE staff provided swift and focused intervention when the OIG results were made available, and assigned a skilled program officer to oversee this effort on a daily basis. Her efforts were supported by her supervisors and at the assistant secretary level. WICHE's commitment to providing exceptional leadership and support to SSI has been evident from the outset and has remained constant over the four-year period to program close-out. The State-level partnership directors were the third essential link in their ongoing commitment to administering high quality programs.

Multilateral and multi-modal *communication* was a second theme that emerged as critical early in WICHE's administration of SSI. An important challenge for WICHE was to build on the strong network of sharing and expertise that had developed among the Group A states. Providing opportunities for new state directors to learn from the experienced directors was emphasized, and this occurred in face-to-face meetings and via the monthly directors' calls. Another challenge for WICHE was communicating the administrative expectations to all participating State-level partnerships and providing the support needed for them to comply with those expectations. A third key aspect of communication was disseminating information about SSI performance and progress to the various stakeholders. This was achieved in the many ways described elsewhere in this report. A fourth major communication component was the feedback that WICHE and OVAE received from the State-level partnerships, some of which was offered directly in progress reports and conference calls, other information provided through the evaluation activities.

Continuity emerged as a third success factor. The change in national program administration for SSI created a significant disjuncture for the existing State-level partnerships. WICHE's swift intervention to establish an effective administrative framework that responded to the issues identified in the OIG audit created a stable foundation upon which the program could proceed. However, the importance of the continuity provided over the remaining four years of the program by the OVAE program officer and the WICHE SSI program management and staff cannot be overstated. The federal expectations of SSI remained high despite the OIG findings, and the new national program administrator and participating states had much to

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accomplish in a relatively short period of time. Additional turnover in key personnel would have slowed progress and momentum when there was little margin for a diminution in either. Most importantly, the experience and knowledge gained early in WICHE's administration of SSI deepened over the years and enabled them to move from a focus on administrative intervention and remediation to a more substantive program focus.

Finding 4: Meaningful evaluation activities and data enhanced WICHE's ability to successfully administer SSI.

After being selected as the national SSI administrator, one of WICHE's first steps was to secure the services of program evaluators. WICHE's decision to divide the evaluation-related work into two components, one focusing on student and perception data and the other on business partnerships and WICHE's administration of SSI, proved fortuitous. Neither OVAE nor WICHE fully appreciated at the outset the level of resources that would be required to collect the needed evaluation data, particularly with respect to working with the myriad district-level student information systems.

Despite the challenges associated with developing and implementing the needed evaluation system, from an administrative perspective the resulting information has proven valuable. In addition to creating a communication structure that ensured monthly opportunities to reflect on progress, formative evaluation activities provided information used by OVAE and WICHE to address emerging challenges and take advantage of potential opportunities. Although WICHE was highly responsive to State-level suggestions for strengthening the technical assistance and support they provided (e.g. by providing the three-day sustainability workshop in December of 2006, redesigning the SSI Web site, and developing the "Why Physics?" brief), other program improvements were either suggested or supported by the SSI evaluation. A particular area of focus in this regard was addressing directors' concerns with the level of administrative oversight. Although constrained by the OIG findings and provisions of the Cooperative Agreement, OVAE and WICHE nonetheless identified opportunities to streamline these processes. Examples of this included eliminating OVAE approval of a number of State-level program materials and moving from a quarterly to a triannual reporting schedule.

Finding 5: WICHE, in partnership with OVAE, was able to attain rigorous administrative oversight while addressing program capacity.

From an administrative standpoint, WICHE restored the SSI program to a high level of accountability and responded to every federal requirement and expectation. However, this

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occurred at some cost to long-term program impact. A concern voiced at the State level throughout the four years of WICHE's administration was that the higher-than-usual levels of reporting and oversight diverted time and resources that might have been better invested in program development, relationship-building, and focusing on long-term sustainability. Although this concern generally diminished over time as WICHE and the State programs became more familiar with program administration and WICHE and OVAE streamlined these requirements to the extent practicable, there is little question that the administrative burden associated with SSI took its toll. Ground lost early in the start-up phase for the B and C states was difficult to recover.

A similar observation may be made regarding the level of effort required by WICHE to document performance and progress. Staff time invested in WICHE's own reporting and compliance activities could have been directed to providing technical assistance to new states or building additional relationships with potential national partners.

Despite the largely non-negotiable aspect of SSI administration that was set by the findings of the OIG audit, OVAE and WICHE streamlined this structure to the extent practicable. In the end, despite the high level of reporting and accountability associated with SSI, an administrative structure was created within which a highly promising educational reform initiative flourished.

IV. Conclusion

WICHE has been highly effective in administering the complex and challenging federal SSI program. Many factors made WICHE's success possible, including an exceptionally qualified staff team, the programmatic infrastructure needed to support SSI, politically sensitive leadership and incisive program guidance, and a rich policy and research capacity. WICHE's ability to excel in administering this project has been supported and facilitated by ED leadership and the OVAE staff managing the SSI project. Based on the relatively small amount of ED funds allocated to SSI, the program has received a disproportionate amount of federal attention and support.

Other critical success factors included a commitment to the success of SSI by the individuals responsible for implementing SSI at all levels, multilateral and multi-modal communication, continuity in project management by WICHE and OVAE, and meaningful evaluation activities and related data. These factors, combined with an unwavering commitment to accountability and thorough program administration, has resulted in every federal requirement and component of the Cooperative Agreement between OVAE and WICHE being met or

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exceeded. In the end, a remarkable balance was attained between administrative accountability and maximizing program impact.

Attachment A

NIU Evaluation Framework for WICHE's Administration of SSI

The Center for Governmental Studies of Northern Illinois University has been contracted by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to serve as an independent third-party evaluator of WICHE's administration of the federally-funded State Scholars Initiative (SSI) project. Two key evaluation questions were identified by WICHE in its proposal to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to describe NIU's evaluation role:

- Has WICHE communicated and disseminated information effectively to meet SSI's goals?
- Has WICHE provided effective oversight to both current and new state projects and provided effective leadership to meet the goals of the initiative?

I. Evaluation Questions

Based on further conversations with WICHE project staff and a review of documents outlining the project scope and expectations, an expanded set of evaluation questions has been developed that address three areas for evaluating WICHE's project administration: communication, project management, and training and technical assistance. These are described below.

A. Communication

1. Communicate at least quarterly with all state directors and national advisory board members on program issues, challenges and progress using communication channels and methods preferred by those audiences
2. Disseminate SSI project results
 - a. Examples of successful state-level implementation
 - b. Research showing the benefits of rigorous course-taking
3. Provide opportunities for the state directors to comment on SSI resources, including the project Web site, and data products generated by WICHE.
4. Maintain frequent communication with ED's Program Officer to facilitate cooperation, including monthly monitoring calls.

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5. Collaborate with ED's Program Officer, subject to the availability of resource, in responding to unanticipated information requests.

B. Project Management

1. Submit appropriate documents to the ED Program Officer sufficiently in advance to allow for review, comment, and/or approval, including:
 - a. draft products, materials, job descriptions, financial documents and reports,
 - b. a detailed annual budget prior to each project period,
 - c. milestones that ensure the timeliness of performance and consult sufficiently in advance of each milestone to allow for approval of any necessary changes, and
 - d. progress reports containing sufficient detail on activities to permit ED to determine whether sufficient progress has been made toward project goals and objectives and adequate compliance occurred, and
 - e. requests by WICHE to:
 - Incur pre-award costs,
 - Make cost transfers among approved budget categories,
 - Exceed management/overhead expenditures by more than 10% of the annual budgeted amount,
 - Extend the project period,
 - Enter into, suspend, cancel, or terminate a partnership contract,
 - Carry funds over from one budget period to the next, and/or
 - Change the scope of work, approved budget, or terms or conditions of the grant award or Cooperative Agreement.
2. Administer contracts with the 14 existing and 8-12 new state-level business education partnerships in a timely manner that is consistent with ED laws and regulations.
 - a. Develop a fair and objective competitive process to select new state-level business-education partnerships to participate in SSI.
 - b. Negotiate and execute contracts with existing and new state partners in a timely manner.
 - c. Review requests for cost reimbursement to ensure that expenditures were necessary, reasonable and fully allocable to the SSI grant.
 - d. Review and respond to requests for transfers among direct cost categories within 30 calendar days of receipt.
 - e. Utilize the provisions in the *Contract between WICHE and the State Partner* for purposes of contract termination and dispute resolution.
3. Administer contracts with third-party evaluators in a timely manner that is consistent with ED laws and regulations.
 - a. Negotiate and execute contracts with project evaluators in a timely manner.

- b. Review requests for cost reimbursement to ensure that expenditures were necessary, reasonable and fully allocable to the SSI grant.
 - c. Review and respond to requests for transfers among direct cost categories within 30 calendar days of receipt.
4. Conduct all contract activities in compliance with applicable federal regulations and statutes.
 - a. Provide required monitoring and oversight of all state contracts.
 - b. Maintain and make available to ED all books, documents, papers, financial and project records, and other evidence of work performed throughout the contract period and for 3 years thereafter.
 - c. Market all products arising from the project on a cost-recovery basis only.
 - d. Clearly identify all reports, articles, books or presentations with the required ED citation or label.
5. Cooperate with ED and independent, third-party evaluators to complete all required evaluation activities.

C. Training and Technical Assistance

Provide the state partners with the training and technical support needed to develop effective, self-sustaining SSI projects, including:

- a. A model that state-level business-education partnerships can use to implement SSI activities,
- b. A project Web site that addresses the state partners' needs for on-line resources and information,
- c. Implementation barriers and suggested solutions,
- d. Developing partnerships with key stakeholders,
- e. Research and policy guidance on formulating SSI core course of study,
- f. Obtaining evaluation data from school districts,*
- g. Completing evaluation activities required under the Cooperative Agreement,*
- h. Obtaining signed MOUs from school districts,*
- i. Developing written materials promoting the SSI core course of study,
- j. Developing a communication strategy,
- k. Developing a strategy for sustaining the SSI after federal resources are no longer available, and

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1. Compliance with federal contract administration, oversight and monitoring requirements.

*These activities will vary depending on whether the state is an existing or a new contractor

II. Methodology

Seven types of data would be used to collect the information needed to respond to the evaluation questions described above.

1. The frequency and content of WICHE written communications with the state directors and the national advisory board.
2. The content provided through the SSI Web site developed and maintained by WICHE.
3. State directors' perceptions regarding WICHE's provision of communication, project management and technical assistance support and services.
4. National advisory board perceptions regarding WICHE's administration of the SSI contract.
5. The ED Program Officer's perceptions regarding WICHE's administration of the SSI contract.
6. Perceptions of the third-party evaluator regarding WICHE's administration of the SSI program evaluation sub-contract.
7. NIU's perceptions of WICHE's administration of its SSI evaluation sub-contract.
8. Direct observation of the technical assistance and support provided by WICHE to state directors.

These data would be collected using five methods on the following schedule:

1. Receiving copies of all written and electronic communication sent by WICHE to state directors - ongoing.
2. Monitoring the content and functionalities of the SSI Web site and the frequency with which it is updated - weekly.
3. Developing an electronic survey to administer to state directors - monthly for the first three months, quarterly thereafter.
4. Developing a basic interview protocol to administer to the ED Program Officer and the two SSI program evaluators (including a set of self-administered questions for NIU) - quarterly.
5. Observing at national SSI meetings and/or conference calls - quarterly or as appropriate.

The chart on the following page summarizes the relationship among the proposed evaluation questions and data methods, sources and frequency of collection.

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III. Deliverables

After agreement has been reached on an evaluation design that is acceptable to WICHE and ED, NIU will provide the following:

- Draft data collection instruments and implementation timelines;
- Monthly feedback via conference call or e-mail regarding progress, issues and opportunities
- Quarterly written progress reports; and
- Annual evaluation reports.

**Summary of Key Evaluation Components
WICHE Administration of SSI Contract**

Evaluation Question	Data	Source	Frequency
Communicate at least quarterly with all state contractors on program issues, challenges and progress.	Frequency and content of WICHE written communications with the state contractors	Copies of all written and electronic communication sent by WICHE to state contractors	Ongoing
Disseminate SSI project results.	Content provided through SSI Web site developed and maintained by WICHE	Monitoring of WICHE-maintained Web site, press releases, other communications	Weekly
Provide opportunities for the state contractors to comment on SSI data products generated by WICHE.	State contractors' perceptions regarding WICHE's provision of support and services	Surveys of state contractors	Monthly for the first 3 months, quarterly thereafter
Maintain frequent communication with ED's Program Officer to facilitate cooperation, including monthly monitoring calls.	ED Program Officer's perceptions regarding WICHE's administration of SSI contract	Interviews with ED Program Officer	Quarterly
Collaborate with ED's Program Officer, subject to the availability of resources, in responding to unanticipated information requests.	ED Program Officer's perceptions regarding WICHE's response to information requests	Interviews with ED Program Officer	Quarterly
Submit appropriate documents to the ED Program Office sufficiently in advance to allow for review, comment, and/or approval.	ED Program Officer's perceptions regarding WICHE's submission of relevant documents	Interviews with ED Program Officer	Quarterly
Administer contracts with	State contractors'	Surveys of state	For state

existing and new state-level business education partnerships in timely manner consistent with laws and regulations.	perceptions regarding WICHE's administration of contract	contractors and interviews with ED Program Officer	contractors, monthly for the first 3 months, quarterly thereafter; quarterly for Program Officer
Administer contracts with third-party evaluators in a timely manner that is consistent with ED laws and regulations.	Third-party evaluators' perceptions regarding WICHE's administration of contract	Surveys of state contractors	Monthly for the first 3 months, quarterly thereafter
Conduct all contract activities in compliance with applicable federal regulations and statutes.	ED Program Officer's perceptions regarding WICHE's compliance with federal regulations and statutes	Interviews with ED Program Officer	Quarterly
Cooperate with ED and independent, third-party evaluators to complete all required evaluation activities.	ED Program Officer's and third-party evaluators' perceptions regarding WICHE cooperation	Interviews with ED Program Officer and third-party evaluators	Quarterly
Provide state contractors with training and technical support needed to develop effective, self-sustaining SSI projects.	State contractors' perceptions regarding WICHE's provision of training and technical assistance	Surveys of state contractors, direct observation of meetings and conference calls	Monthly for the first 3 months, quarterly thereafter

Attachment B

WICHE Activity Corresponding to the Cooperative Agreement

A. Communication

1. **Requirement:** *Communicate at least quarterly with all state contractors and national advisory board members on program issues, challenges, and progress using communication channels and methods preferred by those audiences.*

***Finding:** WICHE used a multi-faceted and effective communication process to exchange SSI program and policy information with state contractors and advisory board members and to identify state partnership needs and prioritize improvement priorities.*

State Contractors. WICHE maintained a multi-faceted communication strategy throughout the four years of its administration that it launched and refined with the state directors in Year One. This included monthly conference calls with directors to share information, discuss progress, and identify shared program issues and opportunities as well as e-mail communication and telephone calls regarding state-specific needs.

A centerpiece of WICHE's communication strategy for SSI was the National Summit on Rigor and Relevance held in April 2008. Feedback from the one-third of the summit attendees completing the evaluation form was very positive. In addition to increasing the participants' understanding of the business role and policy efforts related to SSI in enhancing academic rigor and relevance, the summit produced high-quality written materials and opportunities for State teams to solidify a path forward. A majority of the summit participants completing the evaluation form intended to pursue activities in support of the summit's objectives.

Communication also occurred through the electronic reporting system accessible through the SSI Web site. This system enabled state directors to submit basic financial and programmatic information to WICHE on-line on a quarterly and annual basis. The quarterly progress reports were reviewed jointly by the SSI Program Director and the NIU evaluator and were used by WICHE to respond to state-specific questions or issues, to request clarification or additional information, and to identify topics for the monthly directors' conference calls.

The SSI Web site has been a vehicle for accessing many of the program resources developed by WICHE, including various reporting forms and instructions, key deadlines, the 8th grade and community presentations, the SSI logo and marketing tools, newsletters, policy briefs and reports, research and fundraising updates, and conference call notes. On-line discussion is also available for state directors. Web site statistics were used to monitor utilization of the site and, when new material was developed or a drop-off detected, the content was updated.

State directors had the opportunity for face-to-face meetings in Years One and Two and to network with each other and the SSI state teams at the SSI Summit in Year Three. Other communication vehicles WICHE uses to exchange policy and/or program information with the state partnerships included on-site monitoring visits and attendance at selected SSI events.

Advisory Board. A high-level, 18-member Advisory Board (see Appendix C for a list of members) provided guidance to WICHE on a range of program and policy issues. WICHE convened the Advisory Board in person or via conference call throughout the four-year program period. These meetings were used to seek guidance from the Advisory Board on attracting, maintaining, and strengthening business, school, and community involvement in the SSI states and other program issues. Examples of strategic issues on which the Advisory Board has advised WICHE include long-term sustainability and program alignment with the U.S. Department of Education's strategic goals. WICHE also updated the Advisory Board on key developments via e-mail.

2. Requirement: *Disseminate SSI project results.*

Finding: WICHE has undertaken a variety of activities to document and publicize all aspects of SSI results. In addition to showcasing successful state-level SSI implementation, WICHE has focused on national level products and outcomes. Moreover, the technical assistance support and communication resources that WICHE provided the state-level partnerships have contributed to their effectiveness in disseminating project results.

Over the four years it has administered SSI, WICHE has generated 43 products. These are itemized in Attachment D and include evaluation reports, newsletters, policy briefs, data reports, year in review reports, an online volunteer management database, and numerous marketing materials such as a brochure, fact sheet, postcards, and posters. Activities to disseminate these products have been extensively documented in

WICHE's progress reports to OVAE and included participating or presenting at conferences on SSI, posting research and resource updates on the SSI Web site and in the national SSI newsletters, communicating with key U.S. Department of Education representatives via the distribution of SSI materials and periodic on-site visits to OVAE in Washington, DC, and developing and disseminating an array of SSI material related to the national SSI Summit.

3. **Requirement:** *Provide opportunities for the state contractors to comment on SSI resources, including the project Web site, and data products generated by WICHE.*

Finding: *A standard aspect of WICHE's development process was to solicit ideas from the State directors for improving resources and products that were developed for SSI.*

Despite generally tight production timelines, WICHE consistently incorporated state directors input where feasible and was responsive to improvement suggestions on SSI resources from state directors. WICHE also responded to requests from the State directors for new resources, such as the development of a volunteer management database customized for SSI state- and district-level programs.

4. **Requirement:** *Maintain frequent communication with ED's Program Officer to facilitate cooperation, including monthly monitoring calls.*

Finding: *Clear, timely, and constructive communication between WICHE and OVAE occurred on virtually a daily basis throughout the four year period.*

The solid communication flow established at the outset of WICHE's administration of SSI continued and deepened over the life of the program. WICHE and OVAE exchanged information and progress on almost a daily basis via e-mail, and scheduled telephone calls (in addition to the monthly evaluation conference calls) when issues were time-sensitive or required a more extensive discussion. Face-to-face meetings were also scheduled whenever feasible and included visits by WICHE staff and project evaluators to OVAE's office and on-site monitoring visits by Nancy Brooks to WICHE's Boulder office.

5. **Requirement:** *Collaborate with ED's Program Officer, subject to the availability of resources, in responding to unanticipated information requests.*

***Finding:** WICHE has responded satisfactorily to every ED request for assistance or support that related to SSI.*

From time-to-time OVAE program officer Nancy Brooks requested SSI program information from WICHE. These requests usually related to a particular SSI program or policy issue, a question regarding a specific SSI State partnership, the need to brief a new OVAE senior manager, or an opportunity to inform a larger ED audience about SSI activities. WICHE has responded to every such request in a timely and thorough manner.

B. Project Management

1. ***Requirement:** Submit appropriate documents to the ED Program Officer sufficiently in advance to allow for review, comment, and/or approval.*

***Finding:** Every document requiring ED approval has been reviewed and commented upon by OVAE prior to its release. Both WICHE and ED staff have extended themselves to meet or exceed the review timetable that was mutually established.*

The working relationship and procedures that have developed between WICHE and ED are effective and efficient. As the more complex policy and administrative issues were resolved in Years One and Two, the cycle time for review and comment decreased on average from days to hours.

2. ***Requirement:** Administer contracts with the 14 existing and 8-12 new state-level business education partnerships in a timely manner that is consistent with ED laws and regulations.*

***Finding:** WICHE staff administered all of SSI state-level contracts in accordance with applicable laws and regulations and in a timely manner.*

WICHE's staff, each of whom was well-qualified for their administrative position, only gained in experience and knowledge over the four years that WICHE administered SSI. Contract-related responsibilities successfully administered by WICHE included processing financial reimbursements, budget modifications, and subcontracts and providing review and feedback on performance and financial reporting. As State partnerships spent down their federal funds, contract activities expanded to reconciling and closing out State budgets and programs and processing no-cost extensions for State partnerships with unexpended federal funds.

- 3. Requirement: Administer contracts with third-party evaluators in a timely manner that is consistent with ED laws and regulations.*

Finding: Both the NIU and NCHEMS evaluators were satisfied with WICHE's timeliness and thoroughness in all aspects of contract negotiation and execution.

WICHE exercised all appropriate due diligence in the negotiation and execution of sub-contracts with NIU and NCHEMS. WICHE also ensured that deadlines for evaluation products were either met or adjusted based on mutually acceptable terms.

- 4. Requirement: Conduct all contract activities in compliance with applicable federal regulations and statutes.*

Finding: WICHE has established and maintains the necessary systems to ensure contractual compliance with all federal regulations and statutes.

SSI staff worked closely and cooperatively with WICHE's budget staff in adhering to required accounting and budgetary processes. The success of these efforts is evident in OVAE's monitoring reports which consistently concluded that the systems were in place to ensure the proper management of SSI funds.

- 5. Requirement: Cooperate with ED and independent, third-party evaluators to complete all required evaluation activities.*

Finding: WICHE has either directly provided or facilitated access to all needed information and data for the two evaluators.

In addition to providing the two SSI evaluators with access to all program-related information, WICHE facilitated access to State-level information by encouraging State partnership directors to cooperate with all evaluator requests.

C. Training and Technical Assistance

Requirement: Provide the state partners with the training and technical support needed to develop effective, self-sustaining SSI projects.

Finding: Overall, WICHE provided timely and relevant technical assistance to SSI State-level partnerships for the three groups of states.

Every component identified in the cooperative agreement has been consistently addressed since WICHE's assuming administrative responsibility for SSI. These include:

- a. Providing a program model that State-level business-education partnerships can use to implement SSI activities.
- b. Creating a project Web site that addresses the state partners' needs for on-line resources and information.
- c. Addressing implementation barriers and suggested solutions.
- d. Developing partnerships with key stakeholders.
- e. Providing research and policy guidance on formulating SSI core course of study.
- f. Obtaining evaluation data from school districts.
- g. Completing evaluation activities required under the Cooperative Agreement.
- h. Obtaining signed MOUs from school districts.
- i. Developing written materials promoting the SSI core course of study.
- j. Developing a communication strategy.
- k. Developing a strategy for sustaining the SSI after federal resources are no longer available.
- l. Complying with federal contract administration, oversight, and monitoring requirements.

Turnover in the director position of the State-level partnerships proved to be a particular challenge in terms of providing needed technical assistance. The start dates of new directors rarely coincided with the directors' meetings and other planned training and technical support, which necessitated WICHE scheduling and delivering the needed assistance as soon as was feasible. WICHE developed stand-alone implementation materials intended to orient new State-level program staff to SSI requirements and expectations until a face-to-face individualized training session could take place.

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Attachment C
State Scholars Initiative Advisory Board Members

Rod Chu, Chancellor Emeritus, Ohio Board of Regents

Mike Cohen, President, Achieve

Brian Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Business-Higher Education Forum

Christine Johnson, Special Assistant to the Provost, University of Colorado Denver

Charles Kolb, President, Committee for Economic Development

Leon Lederman, Nobel laureate–Physics, and Resident Scholar, Illinois Math and Science Academy

Marshall L. Lind, Chancellor Emeritus, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and WICHE commissioner

Barry Munitz, chair, California P-16 Council; Former Chancellor, California State University

Jane Nichols, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education, and WICHE commissioner

Raymund A. Paredes, Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Suellen Reed, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Indiana Department of Education

Piedad Robertson, Former President, Education Commission of the States

Arthur J. Rothkopf, Senior Vice President and Counselor to the President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Roger Sampson, President, Education Commission of the States (ECS)

David Spence, President, Southern Regional Education Board

Susan Traiman, Director of Education and Workforce Policy, Business Roundtable

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Deborah Wilds, President and Chief Operating Officer, College Success Foundation

Stephen M. Wing, Director, Government Programs, CVS Pharmacy

Attachment D
SSI Publications and Products by Category
(as of August 5, 2009)

Evaluation Reports

Year Four

1. Goal One of the State Scholars Initiative, August 26, 2008 – March 31, 2009, Annual Evaluation Report, 2009. (Approved, in final design stage)
2. State Scholars Initiative Year Four Final Evaluation Report, 2009. (Goals Two and Three)
3. The State Scholars Initiative: Findings, Lessons Learned, and Promising Practices, 2009.
4. Year Four Evaluation Findings: Administration of the State Scholars Initiative by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, August 26, 2008 – September 30, 2009. (forthcoming)

Year Three

5. Goal One of the State Scholars Initiative, October 1, 2007 – August 25, 2008, Annual Evaluation Report, 2008.
6. State Scholars Initiative Year Three Final Evaluation Report, 2008. (Goals Two and Three)
7. Year Three Evaluation Findings: Administration of the State Scholars Initiative by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, October 1, 2007 – August 25, 2008, 2008.

Year Two

8. Goal One of the State Scholars Initiative, October 1, 2006 – September 30, 2007, Annual Evaluation Report and Preliminary Findings, 2008.
 - a. Business-Education Partnerships: Highlights from the Annual State Scholars Initiative Summary, 2008. (Goal One)
9. State Scholars Initiative Year Two Evaluation Report, Revised, 2008. (Goals Two and Three)
 - a. Student-level Outcome Data: Highlights from the Annual State Scholars Initiative Summary, 2008. (Goal Two)
10. Perception Survey Data: Highlights from the Annual State Scholars Initiative Summary, 2008. (Goal Three)
11. Year Two Evaluation Findings: Administration of the State Scholars Initiative by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, October 1, 2006 - September 30, 2007, 2007.

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Year One

12. Evaluation Report for State Scholars Initiative, October 1, 2005 – November 30, 2006, Final, 2007. (Goals One, Two, Three)

13. Year One Evaluation Findings: Administration of the State Scholars Initiative by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2006.

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Newsletters

14. September 2009 (forthcoming)
15. February 2009
16. September 2008
17. January 2008
18. September 2007
19. May 2007
20. December 2006
21. September 2006

Policy Briefs

22. Education Beyond the Rhetoric: Making Rigor Something Real, 2008.
23. No Longer at Risk: A National in Peril -- Summary of Proceedings, 2008.
24. *Why Foreign Language?* brief, 2008.
25. *Why Physics?* brief, 2007.

Other Products

26. Advisory Board member list
27. *Do the Math* DVD, 2007.
28. State Scholars Initiative Brochure, 2006, 2007, 2008.
29. State Scholars Initiative Business Supporters 2008 (list of business supporters)
30. SSI Fact Sheet, 2008.
31. SSI Postcards, 2007.
32. SSI Posters, 2007.
33. Volunteer Management Database (customized for 17 States), 2008.
34. SSI Web site: <http://www.wiche.edu/statescholars/>

State Data

Year Four

35. Year Four SSI Course Enrollment Data – Aggregate Report
36. Year Four SSI Perception Data – Aggregate Report
37. Student Course Enrollment State and School District Data reports for: LA, MA, MO, NH, SD, UT, VA, WV, WY
38. Perception State and SSI Event Data reports for: AR, LA, MO, SD, UT, VA, WY

Year Three

39. Student Course Enrollment State Data reports for: LA, MA, MO, NE, NH, SD, UT, VA, WV, WY
40. Perception State and SSI Event Data reports for: AR, LA, MA, SD, UT, VA, WV, WY

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Year/Program in Review

41. State Scholars 2007 Year in Review, 2008.
42. State Scholars 2006 Year in Review, 2007.
43. State Scholars Initiative in Review: Promising Practices and Lessons Learned, 2009.