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Higher Education: The Engine of Economic Opportunity

2009
WICHE
Workplan

Higher Education: The Engine of Economic Opportunity

From its beginning over a half century ago, WICHE has viewed higher education as a powerful driver of economic opportunity – for individuals, communities, states, and the region. Its original initiative, the Professional Student Exchange Program, was created to provide students with better access to medical, dental, and veterinary programs and to boost the number of working professionals in Western communities.

For the West and its citizens to prosper in today's global economy, we need an educational "engine" that's more powerful, more efficient – and much more effective. According to "The Missing Middle: Aligning Education and the Knowledge Economy," a report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, if we don't improve educational opportunity for all students, shortages of workers with postsecondary training could range as high as 12 million by 2020.

To meet the now and future needs of our country and our economy, we need to get our students off to a strong start, not just by improving access to college but by making sure they're prepared to succeed once they get there. While WICHE's high school graduates report, *Knocking at the College Door*, shows that U.S. graduation numbers are peaking this year and next, many of those students aren't ready for college or work. In addition, not enough of them even make it to graduation: a 2007 study published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed that the U.S. high school graduation rate is one of the lowest in the OECD – 76 percent, compared to 82 percent for OECD nations overall and 87 percent for the EU.

In fiscal 2009 WICHE and its four units – Public Policy and Research, Programs and Services, WCET, and Mental Health – will work to build a better educational engine via our efforts in our five areas: finance, access and success, workforce and social issues, technology and innovation, and accountability.

Finance

At a time when tuition and fees are skyrocketing, making it hard for students and their families to cover the college bill, WICHE's four **Student Exchange Programs** (SEP), managed by the Programs and Services unit, offer college students in the West affordable access to an array of postsecondary offerings. Students enroll in participating institutions in the region at reduced costs, ranging from resident tuition to 150 percent of that rate. The West's colleges and universities also benefit, as SEP allows them to fill undersubscribed programs and reduce duplication of programs. In 2007-08 some 23,000 students – a record number – saved almost \$138 million in reduced tuition by enrolling at institutions through the Western Undergraduate Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, the Western Regional Graduate Program, and the WICHE Internet Course Exchange (WICHE ICE), our newest offering. WICHE's Programs and Services staff will continue to work with our member states to broaden student participation in each program in fiscal 2009 (for more on student exchange, see the access section).

WICHE will continue to offer the **Master Property Program** (MPP), a cost-saving initiative, to Western institutions, in collaboration with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC). MPP members in the WICHE and MHEC regions purchase property insurance as a group and benefit from comprehensive property coverage tailored to higher education needs. The MPP also provides engineering and loss control strategies that help institutions protect their assets while saving on their premium costs. Since 1994 the MPP has generated more than \$40 million in savings for participating institutions. MPP members also have the opportunity to earn dividends based on annual loss ratios. There are currently 47 members of the MPP, including 100 campuses with total insured values of nearly \$58.2 billion. In 2004 the Nevada System of Higher Education was the first system in the WICHE region to participate in the Master Property Program. Since July 2007 an additional six institutions have joined: Lewis & Clark College, Pima Community College, Seattle Pacific University, University of Northern Colorado, Westminster College, and Willamette University.

Programs and Services

The Programs and Services unit oversees WICHE's original mission: improving access to higher education for students in the West via student exchange. In 2007-08 the WICHE Student Exchange Programs – the Professional Student Exchange Program, Western Regional Graduate Program, and Western Undergraduate Exchange, and our newest program, the WICHE Internet Course Exchange (WICHE ICE) – enrolled more than 23,000 students. Through WUE alone, students and their families saved nearly \$138 million last year.

But Programs and Services' work has expanded beyond these exchanges to include a number of other projects that improve access for students, help states and institutions to better manage resources, and inform policymakers in the West. Our programs include:

- ◆ State Scholars Initiative (programs in 20 states)
- ◆ Northwest Academic Forum
- ◆ Western Rural Health Care Initiatives
- ◆ Western Consortium for Rural Social Work
- ◆ Master Property Program (insurance and risk management consortium)
- ◆ Communications activities: *NewsCap*, SSI reports and newsletter, factsheets, websites, annual reports, state briefings, commission agenda books, WICHE annual workplan
- ◆ Workforce briefs (by state and profession)
- ◆ Bridges to the Professoriate

For smaller institutions (those with enrollments averaging around 7,500 students), the **Property and Casualty Program** (P&CP), introduced in 2004, offers a package program and lower deductibles. During fiscal year 2009, WICHE will inform more institutions in our region about both MPP and P&CP. We are currently working with institutions in Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, New Mexico, and Wyoming to determine if participation in either of these programs can help them to reduce their insurance costs, while broadening their coverage and improving their asset protection strategies.

Access & Success

WICHE's four Student Exchange Programs serve a growing number of students each year. More than 22,000 students are enrolled in public two- and four-year institutions in the West through WICHE's **Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE)**. Out-of-state WUE students pay 150 percent of resident tuition, enabling them to save an estimated \$137.7 million in tuition costs in 2007-08. WUE, celebrating its 20th year of operation, is now the largest program of its kind in the nation, with students from all 15 WICHE states eligible to participate. In all, more than 140 campuses have opened their doors to WUE students; colleges and universities can tailor their participation (including admission requirements and available programs of study) to their individual campus needs. Last year WUE welcomed California State University East Bay into the network and several other CSU campuses are preparing to sign on. As of January 2008, residents of Hawaii are now eligible to enroll at two-year WUE institutions. In 2009 WICHE staff will continue to encourage more institutions to join WUE and will increase their outreach efforts with high school counselors by presenting at regional and national meetings and through professional discussion lists, so that more students and their families are aware of this valuable program.

The **Professional Student Exchange Program** (PSEP) broadens access in 10 professional healthcare fields to students in 12 WICHE states. In 2007-08 almost 780 students were enrolled in programs in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, physical therapy, occupational therapy, optometry, podiatry, osteopathic medicine, physician assistant, and pharmacy in some 58 public and private institutions. Participating states determine the fields and the numbers of students they will support.

The **Western Regional Graduate Program** (WRGP) enables students to enroll in more than 200 distinctive graduate programs and pay resident tuition. Twenty-eight new programs joined the exchange in May 2008, following a regional peer review process. In addition to the distinctive programs offered in a wide range of fields, WRGP now caters to future health professionals, offering several master's and a doctorate of public health program, as well as some two dozen specialized graduate degrees in nursing, including psychiatric nursing and healthcare informatics, as

well as a doctorate in nursing practice. Other new, cutting-edge graduate programs offered through the network focus on nanoscience, integrative genomics, forensic science, and applied geography with a focus on geospatial intelligence. Over 40 institutions in 14 WICHE states participate. California students cannot enroll via WRGP because no institutions in the state are reciprocating by offering their programs through WRGP. We hope to attract programs from California in the future so that California residents may also benefit.

Another way Programs and Services is working to increase access to higher education is through the **WICHE Internet Course Exchange (ICE)**, which fosters partnerships among institutions to expand the availability of certain online courses, graduate certificates, and degree programs (for more information, see the section on innovation and information technology).

The **State Scholars Initiative (SSI)** brings business leaders into middle and high schools and motivates students to complete a rigorous course of study to meet the demands of the global economy. In 2005 WICHE was selected through a national competition to direct SSI, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. State Scholars Initiative funding totals \$6.6 million. WICHE has successfully completed year two and received a continuation award of \$600,000 for year three. For fiscal 2009 WICHE has received an additional continuation award, through March 2009.

In 2009 SSI will work with up to 20 state-level business/education partnerships and some 400 school districts to support the next generation of student Scholars. Four WICHE states – Arizona, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming – are currently participating in SSI, and two others – New Mexico and Washington – have completed projects. Also currently participating in SSI are: Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Two additional states – Nebraska and New Jersey – were previously funded and created and completed SSI projects.

Over the past three years, WICHE has worked to produce SSI data that are defensible, comparable across states, and understandable to experts and lay

people alike. In 2009 WICHE will continue to work with SSI states and school districts to collect data to determine the impact of State Scholars on student course-taking patterns and achievement. In addition, WICHE will disseminate these results at state and national conferences throughout the year. WICHE will also disseminate the findings and recommendations from SSI's National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance (held on April 29-30, 2008). Finally, WICHE will pursue sustainability options designed to expand the national network and transition SSI from a federally funded initiative to a privately funded program.

WICHE's Public Policy and Research unit manages several projects related to access and success. One of the most exciting initiatives on the unit's agenda for this coming year is the new **Non-traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners**. Funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, the project will stimulate and guide policy and practice changes to create a more navigable path to degree attainment for ready adults – those who are just shy of having enough credits to obtain a degree but have not yet returned to college. Through a competitive process, WICHE selected three states – Arkansas, Colorado, and Nevada – to participate in a comprehensive effort focused on data, academic policies, financial aid and financing, student support services, and communications, including marketing and information sharing, designed to reach out to the "ready adult" population. This project, which has taken much staff time in development, is set to launch in the states in May. There also exists a possibility of gaining more funding to include more states in a separate cohort.

Another of the unit's endeavors that relates to access and success is its work with the **Pathways to College Network**, an alliance of private and corporate foundations, nonprofits, educational institutions, and the U.S. Department of Education. Pathways, which includes a vast array of researchers, policy analysts, educators, K-12 administrators, and representatives from government, business, foundations, and community organizations, is committed to using research-based knowledge to improve postsecondary education access and success for the nation's underserved students. These include underrepresented minorities, low-income students, those who are the first in their families to go to college, and students

Public Policy and Research

What's in a name?

Earlier this fiscal year, the WICHE commissioners approved a name change of this unit. The name change was not mere semantics; we wanted the name to reflect an *active* group of strategic thinkers who identify problems and solutions in policy at the state and sometimes federal level. We didn't want to be seen as passive analysts, holed up in our offices, making statements about policy in the real world without having the real world experience and context to do so.

Consequently, the vice president purposefully empowered the policy and research analyst staff to lead, to make decisions, to attend conferences, and to contribute to the discussion of education public policy at many different tables. This is a new way of operating, but one that maximizes the abilities and the impact of middle-level staff in the unit. The ultimate goal is to groom the staff to be leaders across the entire education continuum, contributing their unique skills and abilities. The senior policy and research analysts in the unit have excelled within this new approach and will continue to do so.

The work we do and plan to do is always *strategic*. There must be a reason for our work, or it will no longer be a function of the unit. With a small but highly talented staff, we have to perform triage on the multiple opportunities we receive in a given year to participate/help, support/lead, or partner in. When it comes to seeking funding, we can't and don't just chase money because it's there; we must seek funding that makes sense for policy and research priorities in the West. We aim to be as cutting edge and as modern as possible in our new projects; we also continue to maintain projects that are historical in nature and serve a policy purpose for some, though they may not be seen by outsiders as cutting edge. However, even with historical projects, we are working with new partners and having discussions with funders to make the work we do contemporary. This requires some core investment as well, if the services are valued. And we think they are. Once modernized, some of the unit's core functions and activities can help the West – and even the nation as a whole – to be better informed and better supported, as well as to create excellent education leadership in the states.

So the general theme of our work is to be strategic, while identifying tactics that will be high yield with as little effort as possible because of the small size of the unit. We have a great wealth of public policy knowledge, skills, and abilities in the unit and daily share that wealth with others. That, we believe, is what our unit is charged to do and what we do best. No work plan can adequately convey the immense time and effort put forth by the staff in the Public Policy and Research unit.

Having said that, we will articulate the work we do as briefly as possible. The unit contributes a great deal to support the overall goals for WICHE, offering policy analy-

sis, research, and support to constituents on issues related to college access and success, finance and financial aid, accountability, workforce development, and information technology. Current projects include the following:*

- ◆ Pathways to College Network
- ◆ Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education
- ◆ Tuition and Fees in Public Education in the West
- ◆ The WICHE Factbook: Policy Indicators for Higher Education
- ◆ Benchmarks: The WICHE Region
- ◆ SPIDO (State Policy Inventory Database Online)
- ◆ Policy Publications Clearinghouse
- ◆ College Access Challenge Grant Program
- ◆ State-specific projects and activities
- ◆ Workforce certification feasibility
- ◆ Non-traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners
- ◆ Getting What You Pay For: Seeking the Truth about Higher Education Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid
- ◆ Examination of college-level learning measurements and costs
- ◆ Policy Insights – short reports on major policy issues
- ◆ Exchanges – bulletin on unit activities and initiatives
- ◆ Legislative Advisory Committee – complete support and staffing
- ◆ *Workforce Briefs*
- ◆ Policy Alerts and Stat Alerts
- ◆ Numerous public speaking engagements and presentations on high school graduates, how to talk to legislators, how to use the Educational Planning and Assessment System to its fullest, and many other topics.

* Additional staff efforts, roles, and responsibilities include: member, ACT Education Advisory Board (Mize); work with the U.S. Education Department, Technical Working Group on Dual Enrollment (Mize); supportive partner, Access and Success Initiative, with the National Association of System Heads as lead organization (Longanecker, Mize); advisory commissioner, National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (Mize); Policy Committee, Pathways to College Network (Michelau); Strategic Communications Committee, Pathways to College Network (Mize); work with Data Quality Campaign (Mize); work on IPEDS with State Higher Education Executive Officers (Prescott); work on the Making Opportunity Affordable Initiative, Jobs for the Future (Longanecker, Mize); work with the Colorado ACT Council (Mize).

with disabilities. The unit's senior policy analyst helps direct the Pathways to College policy component through representation on its policy committee. And the unit's vice president contributes to the network's reach nationally through representation on the strategic communications committee.

A third Public Policy and Research project, **Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education**, funded by the Ford Foundation, is helping member states make thoughtful and strategic investments in time and resources in order to encourage and support underrepresented students to attend and succeed in college. One of the animating themes of the project is "first dollar for access," which attempts to remind state policymakers to prioritize this agenda even as they face competing demands for scarce resources such as Medicaid and corrections. Recently, the project supported a meeting in Oregon to help that state implement its new financial aid program (WICHE also provided consulting services through a separate contract that helped lead to the adoption of the redesigned program) through effective marketing, data sharing, research and evaluation, and balancing interests in the political process. More intensive technical assistance work with several states has kept the issue of improved access for underrepresented students and adults front and center by proposing innovative funding strategies, accountability metrics, and marketing efforts.

The Public Policy and Research unit has also proposed working with several Western states on the federal government's new **College Access Challenge Grant** (CACG) Program, which is designed to foster partnerships among federal, state, and local governments and philanthropic organizations through matching challenge grants aimed at increasing the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Building on its extensive experience in convening federally funded consortia, such as the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities, WICHE will use a regional approach in which four states will come together to apply for grant funds and to implement the program. While the goals and involvement of participating states may vary, WICHE will assist states in all grant management functions, including the drafting of proposals, budgeting, evaluation, and reporting. As the administrative agency, WICHE will help to alleviate some of the

pressures of grant implementation and at the same time provide states with a network of colleagues through which they could share ideas and strategies for success. WICHE is also preparing a second level of engagement, in which more WICHE states can participate in the networking benefits of WICHE's leadership on this grant program. Ultimately, WICHE would like to engage all WICHE states in some level of the consortium.

Finally, the success of the *Changing Direction* project, which was funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, continues. The Public Policy and Research unit is partnering with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to promote informed decision making and the alignment of higher education appropriations, tuition, and financial aid by educating state legislators, news media (especially state house and higher education reporters), and others about these issues in an effort to increase student access and success. This project, called **Getting What You Pay For: Seeking the Truth about Higher Education Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid**, will occur in two phases, with the first phase beginning this summer. First, WICHE and NCSL will collaborate with the Hechinger Institute to produce policy briefs about important issues related to policy integration, targeting them to state legislators and journalists. The second phase will include creating policy briefs for broader audiences, along with an interactive website that will feature links to webinars, presentations, news feeds, relevant reports, blogs, and resource experts. Through the entire project, staff will be seeking opportunities to present the lessons learned from *Changing Direction* to audiences nationwide.

The 7th edition of **Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity** was released nationally in March 2008 at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. This publication is widely used by politicians and policymakers; librarians; researchers; the media; businesses; state agencies (including SHEEO offices and education departments); postsecondary institutions; school districts, and individual public and private schools. In the new edition, the Public Policy and Research unit made some changes that will allow WICHE to update these projections more regularly and conduct additional analyses concerning gender, major metropolitan areas, and income (the income projections from the 6th

edition could not be replicated for the 7th, due to data limitations). Additionally, the Public Policy and Research unit expects to continue to seek funding for a project to examine the methodology behind these projections, which has changed little since WICHE put out its first edition of the projections in 1979. We have also sought funding to help modernize and contemporize the content and delivery of the data and have already had interest from one of our partners to help develop the web-based capabilities to allow users to develop meaningful, real-time reports for their state needs.

WICHE's Mental Health Program also works to improve access, in this case in the area of behavioral health training as well as in service to rural and frontier communities. (For more on this, see the box on p. 8.)

Technology and Innovation

Nearly a decade ago, WCET began conducting research in best practices in student services online. In fiscal 2009 it will continue to collaborate with institutions and other partners to provide consulting services, workshops, and access to valuable resources through the **Center for Transforming Student Services (CENTSS)**.

The highly successful model for providing comparative reviews of various e-learning products called **EduTools** is being redesigned to take advantage of more contemporary Web 2.0 models and practices. The new EduTools website, which will launch in 2009, will make it easier for higher education administrators and faculty to obtain good information on many of the emerging educational technologies and ideas on they can be used in teaching and learning.

In partnership with Kansas State University's Institute for Academic Alliances, WCET is creating a website to collect resources (policies, studies, articles) to support those creating and operating **academic collaborations** – where institutions partner to share access to technology-mediated courses. Several college and university system-level entities in the U.S. and Canada are active participants in this new project.

To respond to the ongoing needs for professional development by its membership, WCET will launch the WCET Academy for Professional Development this summer. This new initiative will help ensure that the

WCET

WCET is a cooperative network of member institutions and organizations that provides a leading source of critical thinking and expertise on the evolving role of technology in higher education. WCET's membership includes many of the top technology innovators from colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, and companies around the country – and the world. WCET develops research projects that focus on integrating technology into the teaching and learning processes, consults with higher education institutions, holds professional development conferences for practitioners, and supports its members in the planning and implementation of e-learning. Some of WCET's new and ongoing projects include:

- ◆ Transparency by Design
- ◆ WCET Academy for Professional Development
- ◆ New Web 2.0 EduTools
- ◆ Center for Transforming Student Services
- ◆ Best practices for academic integrity in online learning
- ◆ International programs and uses of open educational resources

individuals affiliated with WCET member organizations at every level continue to expand their knowledge and skills. The ultimate mission of the academy is to transform higher education in ways that provide all participants with the highest quality and most engaging learning environments while ensuring that sound policies and practices guide the enterprise toward a bright future increasingly defined by the effective use and integration of new technologies. The academy will use several formats to reach its audience. Some offerings will be free while others will be presented at a discount to WCET members. During its first year, the academy will focus on developing and implementing the following: a leadership institute to train a cohort of new e-learning leaders; a virtual learning program, a series of webcasts, podcasts, and vodcasts (video podcasts) focusing on a wide range of topics for different niche audiences; a book club to discuss current releases and other books with an important relationship to the field and WCET activities; a forum for advanced e-learning leaders to share perspectives on current and future challenges and

Mental Health

The WICHE Mental Health Program seeks to enhance the public systems of care for persons with mental illnesses, children with serious emotional disturbances, and their families. The program approaches this mission through partnerships with state mental health authorities, advocacy and consumer groups, federal agencies, and higher education institutions. Activities focus upon direct technical assistance to state and local agencies, policy analysis and research, support of state mental health agency data analysis, and liaison activities with higher education to enhance workforce development. Current projects include the following.

WICHE Center for Rural Mental Health Research.

This federally funded research institute conducts studies that help inform health policy at multiple levels of decision making. Focused upon rural mental health, the center is one of seven rural health research centers in the United States funded by the Office of Rural Health Policy of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Since most rural Americans obtain their mental health care through primary care providers, rather than specialty mental health providers, the focus of the research seeks to expand knowledge around supporting adoption of evidence-based practices in primary care and the potential impact of such adoption on health outcomes for the consumer.

Western States Decision Support Group (WSDSG).

Through a partnership in funding between the federal Center for Mental Health Services and 15 WICHE states, the Mental Health Program coordinates a regional effort to enhance and coordinate program evaluation and data-driven decision support in the public mental health systems of the WICHE West. WSDSG meets face to face three times yearly to focus on regional issues related to enhancing accountability through sound data management to support quality improvement, policy formation, and administration.

Workforce Development. The Mental Health Program is engaged in an array of activities to improve the preparation and continuing education of the public mental health workforce in the WICHE West.

- ◆ The Mental Health Program continues its work with Alaska, Nevada, Hawaii, California, New Mexico, South Dakota, and North Dakota to improve collaboration in training between state mental health systems and higher education training programs.

- ◆ The program produces Rural Mental Health Grand Rounds Webcasts, funded by the federal Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). These webcasts enable rural professionals to obtain training on current issues in mental health practice and continuing education credit. In the early years of the series, the WICHE Mental Health Program developed three sessions on a number of key topics related to rural mental health services.
- ◆ The program continues to work on improving the behavioral health workforce of the rural West in regards to deaf and hard-of hearing populations.
- ◆ The Mental Health Program is routinely called upon by member states and others to offer state-specific technical assistance, facilitating activities focused upon system improvement, planning, and needs assessment.
- ◆ The program is working with Alaska to identify key competencies for behavioral health workers across the career ladder. Additionally, we are leading an effort to establish a new internship consortium in Alaska for doctoral internships in psychology.
- ◆ The program has an ongoing project in South Dakota related to supporting the development of systems of care for children and families, and is providing technical assistance conducting surveys of consumers.
- ◆ Mental Health Program staff members are currently the evaluators for two federally funded suicide prevention grants – one in Wyoming and one in South Dakota – as well as working with Colorado in updating its suicide prevention plan.
- ◆ Staff members frequently work with states across the region in areas of needs assessment and gap analysis. An epidemiologist has updated the model estimating the prevalence of serious disorders. New estimates are based on the National Comorbidity Survey Replication Study and include estimates of individuals with serious emotional disturbances, serious mental illness, and substance use disorders. Eight Western states have contracted with WICHE for state-specific synthetic estimates of serious disorders at the county level.

opportunities. Members of the academy's advisory board include Hae Okimoto, University of Hawaii (chair); Myk Garn, Southern Regional Education Board; Janet Kendall, Washington State University; David Kendrick, University of Northern Colorado; Darcy Hardy, UT Telecampus; Ritchie Boyd, Montana State University; Deborah Major, Laramie County Community College; and Pat Shea (staff).

Access and connectivity to leading-edge research and education networks are significant challenges for minority-serving institutions, of which there are over 200 in the West. In 2007 WICHE published the white paper, "Can You Hear Us Now? Connecting Minority-Serving Institutions in the West to U.S. Advanced Cyberinfrastructure," which includes recommendations to raise awareness of the critical importance of cyberinfrastructure for the future of research, education and healthcare. In 2009 we'll continue to foster discussion on this critical issue at the state, regional, and national levels.

WCET, the Institute for Academic Alliances, and WICHE's Public Policy and Research unit collaborated on the research and analysis that was the basis for "The Funding of Academic Collaborations: A Policy Brief," which summarized and analyzed findings from a survey of the funding mechanisms for multi-institution distance-learning consortia. This work was the initial focus of WCET's newly formed **Academic Collaboration Common Interest Group** and will serve as the basis of its work in sharing advances in policies and practices in 2009.

In fiscal 2009 WICHE will continue to provide staff support to the 11-state **Northwest Academic Forum** (NWAf) on initiatives related to technology and improving postsecondary education. NWAf – a regional consortium of 32 master's and doctoral-level institutions, represented by their provosts, vice presidents of academic affairs, and state academic officers – fosters interstate and interinstitutional cooperation and advocates technology-based solutions (it helped create WCET, the Northwest Academic Computing Consortium, and NorthWestNet, for instance). Globalization and internationalization, accountability for higher education, and course redesign are some of NWAf's current concerns. These issues were the focus of this year's annual meeting, held in Boise in April and themed "Local to Global: Partnerships and Strategies for Improvement."

During fiscal 2009 WICHE will continue to develop the **WICHE Internet Course Exchange (WICHE ICE)**, which evolved from the WICHE-NWAf initiative NEON (Northwest Educational Outreach Network). Currently, 14 higher education institutions and university systems in the West are members (and several others will join in July 2008), offering their students increased access to online courses and programs at other institutions while they're enrolled at their home campus. A recent officers' grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation will enable WICHE to market the online course exchange to additional institutions.

In addition to providing increased offerings for students, WICHE ICE members have the ability to fill courses with students from other institutions in a coordinated and reliable way and to respond more quickly to workforce demands and offer increased access to higher education. Faculty members have new opportunities for collaboration and course offerings in their areas of expertise. Program exchanges are often offered in specialized disciplines and allow institutions to offer a degree or certificate program with requirements that are met, at least in part, by WICHE ICE member institutions. Current program exchanges in social work, engineering, nursing, and math and science education show the potential for collaboration among WICHE ICE institutions. Additional program exchanges will be developed in fiscal year 2009, based on the needs of WICHE ICE institutions. Also in fiscal year 2009, WICHE staff will continue to support and develop WICHE ICE by recruiting additional members and increasing student participation in course and program exchanges.

WICHE ICE provides ongoing support to two partnerships developed as part of NEON – in supply chain management and Ph.D.-level nursing courses. The fully online supply chain management graduate certificate is jointly offered by the University of Alaska Anchorage and Boise State University. In the area of nursing, WICHE ICE and WCET collaborate with the Western Institute of Nursing to support the **NEXus (Nursing Education Xchange)** partnership among four colleges and schools of nursing, which allows students to share seats in nursing Ph.D. courses, using the WICHE ICE database.

The WICHE Mental Health Program taps technology to provide consultation and facilitated workshops on models of distance learning in behavioral health.

In addition, it offers webcasts that allow rural professionals to obtain training on current issues in mental health practice via distance learning technology. (For a full review of Mental Health's work, see box on p. 8.)

Workforce & Society

WICHE's Professional Student Exchange Program has enabled WICHE states affordably to "grow their own" healthcare practitioners since the program's inception in the early 1950s. PSEP has served WICHE states well over the years, but persistent labor force shortages across the West continue to affect rural and underserved areas. The West's demographics and its wide expanse of rural counties makes attracting healthcare professionals to rural and underserved areas all the more challenging. Even with tuition assistance to reduce initial student debt load, low Medicare reimbursement rates and lower salaries in many underserved and rural areas are major deterrents for professionals, as are the lack of employment opportunities for spouses.

In 2009, under a multipronged **Healthcare Workforce Issues and the West's Rural Needs** initiative, WICHE will continue to explore partnerships with federal and state agencies and private funders, seeking regional strategies to alleviate these critical healthcare workforce shortages. As a first step toward a better understanding of the recruitment tools currently used throughout our region, staff completed the *Inventory of Rural Health Practice Incentives in the Western WICHE States*. We'll extend this idea in 2009: to build awareness of our region's need to develop programs designed to support rural practice, WICHE staff will develop an inventory of the PSEP cooperating medical schools' rural track programs. The inventory will describe, among other things, how schools recruit rural candidates and the number of students who participate in the rural-focused elements of a curriculum; the mentoring and socialization components; how schools partner to create rotations and residencies in rural areas; and how the programs are funded. Staff will also take a national look at other models and outline promising practices for rural-focused healthcare education for students in the West. WICHE is also looking at the feasibility of developing an inventory of pipeline programs in the Western region.

WICHE is also working with select PSEP schools to develop an enhanced PSEP program in medicine and dentistry designed to **bring students back to their home states** for rotations and residencies. We anticipate this program will also have a strong rural focus to better meet our member states' needs. Related to this, WICHE also plans to convene the residency directors and medical school deans of its cooperating programs to encourage them to put a greater emphasis on rural curriculum and rural rotations and residencies, as well as to examine faculty development issues related to rural residencies.

WICHE continues to work on plans to convene a **Western Health Professionals Advisory Council**, which will include institutional representatives, practicing health professionals, legislators, and state and federal government representatives of programs with a shared vision. The council is modeled after WICHE's Veterinary Medicine Advisory Council, which has been very worthwhile in developing regional partnerships and promoting cooperation in veterinary education. The goal of the new council will be to develop regional strategies related to pipeline issues, curriculum development, and attracting professionals to underserved and rural communities.

WICHE staff continues to evaluate the effectiveness of the **Professional Student Exchange Program's workforce support to our states**. States supporting students through PSEP recently updated the return rates of their PSEP graduates: the overall return rate for returning graduates from 2001 through 2005 was 59 percent, but states that use PSEP as a loan forgiveness program had a 74 percent return rate. One recommendation of this study was that more states consider using PSEP as a loan forgiveness program. To help states evaluate this option, WICHE is analyzing the costs of loan forgiveness program administration via a regionwide survey. The final report, available in fiscal 2009, will outline various state-administered options, as well as assess the feasibility of offering a centralized loan forgiveness administrative resource at WICHE.

The **Escalating Engagement project** also has a workforce component: "preparing your own workforce." Under this theme, the project has sought to help member states see the value of and adjust or enact appropriate policies that better link the activities of their higher education systems to meet

state workforce and economic development goals. In collaboration with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, WICHE selected several member states to receive in-depth technical assistance through a competitive process. These activities have culminated in statewide meetings at which WICHE's analysis of state needs and priorities and its informed, balanced perspective have enabled broad-based and meaningful dialogues among key state leaders. In 2009 this work will continue in North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington (it has been completed in Alaska, Hawaii, and South Dakota).

In 2009 WICHE will continue working closely with the **Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC)**, a group of state legislators from the West whose purposes are to inform the WICHE Commission's Executive Committee and staff about significant legislative issues related to higher education; provide input on WICHE initiatives; and advise staff on program and participant considerations related to WICHE's policy forums. Staff serves the LAC by informing members about emerging policy issues in the West. Once again, the Public Policy and Research unit will convene an annual meeting of the LAC to discuss the access, preparation, and fiscal challenges states are facing throughout the region, as well as other important higher education issues.

Accountability

WCET has joined a group of 12 adult-serving higher education institutions in an important initiative, called **Transparency by Design**, to collect and share extensive data on student engagement and performance. WCET will serve as a neutral repository and display of outcomes data from the participating institutions. This work will require that WCET create a website for the display of outcomes data of importance to prospective adult students as they choose or seek to better understand their higher education provider. The website will offer context, guidance, and tools for the prospective adult student users. It is also intended to provide comparisons among the participating institutions, context about the differences in the institutions, and research related to the Transparency by Design initiative.

In anticipation of reauthorization legislation of the Higher Education Act, WCET is spearheading a study

of pedagogical practices and technology systems that can address concerns of **academic integrity and student verification in online learning**. The proposed federal legislation is targeted at accrediting agencies and would apply to distance education program providers.

The Public Policy and Research staff will continue its ongoing support for state accountability efforts, providing assistance as needed and requested by states. Specific efforts in 2009 will include an updating of **SPIDO (State Policy Inventory Database Online)**, at www.wiche.edu/Policy/SPIDO/index.asp. With support from the Pathway to College Network and Jobs for the Future, WICHE will modernize the nation's only online searchable database of higher education policies to make it more user friendly. SPIDO now includes direct links to states' policies according to users' search parameters. Over the next year, as we contemporize this historical WICHE project, SPIDO will adopt a new look, incorporate blogging capabilities, links to current policy publications, video instructional applications, and even more useful resources related to the sites 12 policy domains. In addition, staff will conduct presentations of the new SPIDO features in national meetings to highlight how the database can be used to support accountability efforts in states.

Public Policy and Research will also launch a new project to mine federal databases as well as databases from the EdTrust and others to create Western-specific research and policy briefs on timely and relevant topics. In addition, to complement its *Policy Insights* series (see the information resources sidebar on p. 12), the unit is launching a new **Research Insights** series for education and policy researchers, covering topics that are more technical in nature.

Information Resources

Serving as an informational hub for decision makers is part of WICHE's mission. In addition to launching new info-resources in 2009 (see main text), WICHE will continue to provide the following resources on our website (www.wiche.edu), in print, and via email.

Workforce reports make the connection between education and work clear. The Programs and Services unit's new workforce-brief series, *A Closer Look at Healthcare Workforce Needs in the West*, informs policymakers and higher education decision makers in the Western states about the education and employment trends (the primary care physician workforce and health information technology were two recent topics). In 2009 the briefs will evaluate the regional workforce needs in oral healthcare, midlevel primary care, and veterinary medicine; additional issues are planned for public health, the allied health professions, optometry, and podiatry. In addition to providing much-needed information, these briefs will help WICHE determine if other fields with significant workforce shortages should be added to PSEP or WRGP. This next year will bring a new look to WICHE's *Workforce Briefs*. Published annually by the Public Policy and Research unit, the briefs will highlight the West's workforce environment, needs, and challenges as well as strategies to address them.

Tuition and Fees in Public Higher Education in the West is an annual survey produced by the Public Policy and Research unit with detailed data on tuition and fees at all public institutions in the West. While the data collected for this publication go back in some cases to the mid-1980s, in recent years the unit has sought to improve the reliability of the data through additional accuracy checks

and through improved survey instructions and definitions. This past year the unit also queried respondents about the degree to which public institutions in the West employ tuition differentiation policies and practices, the first such attempt to gather this information at the institutional level. This annual project supports the development of a *Policy Insight* on tuition and fees and also provides the vital information on tuition that the exchange programs run by WICHE's Programs and Services unit needs.

Regional Fact Book for Higher Education in the West, updated annually by the Public Policy and Research unit, provides a wealth of data on access, affordability, finance, faculty, technology, and workforce issues.

Policy Publications Clearinghouse (<http://www.wiche.edu/policy/Clearinghouse>), maintained by the Public Policy and Research unit, is a database of policy publications, offered in a continuing effort to provide those in the West with access to the latest studies, reports, surveys, and policy briefs published by various research and public policy organizations.

Policy Insights, our short report series, covers numerous higher education topics. (The new *Research Insights* will cover more technical topics.)

Policy Alerts and **Stat Alerts** offer weekly e-mail notices of new policy- and data-related reports. *Policy Alerts* will be expanded to include resources related to workforce issues.

Other publications and services: Our website (www.wiche.edu) posts a slew of reports and newsletters (such as *NewsCap* and the SSI newsletter), as well as hosting the WCET Online Community and archiving a host of resources, including the Mental Health Grand Rounds Webcasts.

WICHE WORKPLAN 2009

EXISTING ACTIVITIES

Finance

- Annual *Tuition and Fees* report (GF)
- *Non-Traditional No More*: the first cohort of states – Arkansas, Colorado, and Nevada – will spend the year creating a comprehensive strategy for identifying “ready adults” and promoting their college success
- Property insurance and risk consortium (self-funding)
- Performance measurement improvement in the Western states public mental health programs
- *Making Opportunity Affordable* (national partnership led by Jobs for the Future and funded by Lumina)
- Legislative Advisory Committee: revamping the committee, examining the membership, stimulating attendance by members, and convening an annual meeting
- SPIDO: upgrading and updating the comprehensive database of state-level higher education policies (GF, Lumina, Jobs for the Future, Pathways)

Access & Success

- Student Exchange Programs: Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP); Western Regional Exchange Program (WRGP); Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) (state-funded)
- Internet Course Exchange (ICE) (Sloan Foundation and membership dues)
- State Scholars Initiative (OVAE)
- Bridges to the Professoriate (NSF)
- Multiyear policy project on higher ed finance and financial aid – an extension of the *Changing Direction* initiative (Lumina Foundation, in partnership with NCSL and the Hechinger Institute)
- *Knocking at the College Door*, publication dissemination (ACT, the College Board, and GF)
- *Knocking at the College Door*, local, state, regional, and national presentations
- *Non-Traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners* (Lumina Foundation, matched by first cohort of states: Nevada, Arkansas, and Colorado)
- College access marketing (single-state support as needed; collaboration with Pathways; embedded in the *Non-Traditional No More* program for adult students)
- Children’s mental health improvement projects in Wyoming and South Dakota
- Education Advisory Board for ACT
- Advisory commissioner for National Community and Education Partnerships
- Colorado ACT Council
- Pathways to College Strategic Communications Subcommittee
- Pathways to College Policy Committee
- U.S. Department of Education Technical Working Group, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Supportive participation in the Access and Success Initiative, National Association of System Heads
- College Access Challenge Grant Program Network (support for Western states applying for and implementing plans for the federal grant program; additional support through Western network)
- Projecting financial aid program funding to increase access for low-income students (single-state support, as requested; existing efforts in Oregon and Arizona, in partnership with National Center for Higher Education Management Systems)
- Annual *Tuition and Fees* report (GF)

Technology & Innovation

- Development of best practices in online student services, audits of institutions' online student services via CENTSS (Center for Transforming Student Services), and related consulting services (WCET)
- EduTools: Provides comparisons of electronic-learning software and online course evaluations (WCET)
- Development and production of annual conference, this year celebrating WCET's 20th anniversary (WCET)
- Northwest Academic Forum (membership dues)
- *Non-Traditional No More* program will involve distance-learning education policies and practices with respect to providing access to e-learning for adult learners (Lumina)
- Policy analysis on the funding of academic collaborations in technology

Workforce

- Development of Student Exchange Program responses to critical workforce shortages, especially in rural and underserved areas
- Regional Veterinary Medicine Advisory Council
- Western Consortium for Rural Social Work
- *Escalating Engagement* (Ford) – will propose a next phase of this program to support ongoing state activities following the June 2008 summit on workforce certification systems
- Reformatting the *Workforce Briefs*, to be published electronically by the Policy unit and to focus more on workforce education and policy "big picture" issues, employment, and education data (GF)
- State technical assistance associated with the Legislative Engagement project (Alaska, Oregon, North Dakota, and Washington)
- Mental health student exchange
- Building partnerships for competency: public mental health workforce development
- Rural mental health training initiatives

Accountability

- Regional benchmarks (GF)
- *Electronic Regional Fact Book: Policy Indicators for Higher Education* (GF)
- *Policy Insights* on a range of higher education issues (GF)
- Data quality campaign (national partnership)
- *Electronic Policy Alerts* and *Stat Alerts* (GF)
- Policy Publications Clearinghouse (GF)
- State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)-IPEDS data collaborative (funded by SHEEO)
- SPIDO (GF, Lumina, Jobs for the Future, Pathways)
- Technical and policy assistance for North Dakota's higher education legislative committee and reauthorization of the North Dakota Roundtable (GF).
- Follow-up initiatives responding to the National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education's report cards and the National Commission on Higher Education's report
- ACT Education Advisory Board
- *Making Opportunity Affordable* (national partnership funded by Lumina and led by Jobs for the Future)
- Establishing a knowledge base of existing research and best practices about academic integrity and student verification in online learning in anticipation of Congressional reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (WCET)
- Facilitation of the Western States Decision Support Group for Public Mental Health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

NEW DIRECTIONS

(proposals approved by the commission)

Finance

- Multiyear policy project on higher ed finance and financial aid: an extension of the *Changing Direction* initiative (Lumina Foundation for Education, in partnership with National Conference of State Legislatures and the Hechinger Institute)

Access & Success

- Initiatives to expand educational equity for underrepresented ethnic students
- College Access Challenge Grant Program Network
- Expand access to cyber-infrastructure, research and education networks, and applications for geographically remote and/or under served institutions, including minority-serving institutions in the West (Technology and Innovation)

Technology & Innovation

- Transition EduTools to a new model focused on community contributions of knowledge (WCET)
- Expand utilization of Web 2.0 social networking and new breed of web-based communications tools, serving as a prototype for other WICHE programs (WCET)
- In partnership with Kansas State University's Institute for Academic Alliance, create Academic Collaboration policy website for multi-institution e-learning consortia (WCET)
- Facilitate Internet2 connectivity throughout the West (Technology and Innovation)
- Expand the availability and use of research and education networks (state, regional, and national) for health and mental health services and related educational outreach (Technology and Innovation, and Mental Health)
- Launch of the WCET Academy to provide professional development
- Developing a regional learning center for State Higher Education Policy Center (SHEPC)
- Expansion of ICE (Sloan)

Workforce

- Expanding professional advisory councils (health professions)
- Establishing a rural health care advisory council
- Surveying PSEP medical and dental schools' rural track and pipeline programs to identify best practices
- Regional social work consortium
- Development of an R-34 research proposal focused on evidence-based practice in rural mental health with the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center
- Assessment of Mental Health Program distance-learning opportunities for California's small and frontier counties (Mental Health and WCET)

Accountability

- Collaboration with National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the State Higher Education Executive Officers on three-phase plan to create pre-K–workforce data systems (proposal sent to Gates Foundation)
- Contemporize the *Knocking at the College Door* publication to include web-based state information and information on major MSAs, income, and gender, as well as to update the data more often (proposal sent to Gates Foundation)
- *Transparency by Design*: collaboration with the President's Forum to develop outcome and quality measures for leading online education institutions (WCET)

ON THE HORIZON

(proposals not yet submitted to the commission or past proposals that are being recast)

Finance

Access & Success

- Expanding adult degree completion through online education via ICE
- Expansion of the State Scholars Initiative with private funding
- Student mobility
- Portable financial aid
- Public Policy and Research unit plans to bid for the federal GEAR UP program national evaluation contract (expected announcement in 2009 fiscal year)
- Project with National Council for Community and Education Partnerships and NCSL to examine the impact of college access programs on state policy (project in development)

Technology & Innovation

- Research on strategies and best practices that promote use of open educational resources in higher education (WCET)

Workforce

- Collaboration with Colorado Department of Labor to expand access to online education via WICHE ICE in four-state demonstration project (Sloan Foundation)
- Assisting states in identifying academic program development needs
- Health and allied health workforce development and policy
- Workforce credentialing systems
- Forging collaborations between Western higher education agencies and institutions and state departments of labor and workforce development
- Policy and Mental Health collaboration on recidivism reduction in the prison population

Accountability

- Creation of *Research Insights* series for education and policy researchers
- Presentations on the new SPIDO features in national meetings (GF, Lumina, Jobs for the Future, Pathways)
- Mine federal databases, databases from the EdTrust, and other national-level databases to create Western state-specific research and policy briefs on timely and relevant topics.

WICHE COMMISSION

WICHE's 45 commissioners are appointed by their governors from among State Higher Education Executive Officers, college and university presidents, legislators, and business leaders from the 15 Western states. This regional commission provides governance and guidance to WICHE's staff in Boulder, CO. Roy T. Ogawa, attorney at law at Oliver, Lau, Lawhn, Ogawa & Nakamura, is the 2008 chair of the WICHE Commission; Jane Nichols, vice chancellor for academic and student affairs at the Nevada System of Higher Education, is vice chair.

ALASKA

*Diane M. Barrans (WICHE Chair, 2005), Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education
Patricia Brown Heller, retired State Director, U.S. Senate
Marshall L. Lind, former Chancellor of Higher Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks

ARIZONA

John Haeger, President, Northern Arizona University
David Lorenz, retired Vice President of Administration and Finance, Northern Arizona University
*Joel Sideman, Executive Director, Arizona Board of Regents

CALIFORNIA

Appointments pending.

COLORADO

Joseph Garcia, President, Colorado State University–Pueblo
Kaye Howe, Executive Director, National Science Digital Library
*David E. Skaggs, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Higher Education

HAWAII

*Roy T. Ogawa (WICHE Chair), Attorney at Law, Oliver, Lau, Lawhn, Ogawa & Nakamura
Roberta M. Richards, State Officer, Hawaii Department of Education
*Helene I. Sokugawa, Institutional Analyst, University of Hawaii, Manoa

IDAHO

*Robert W. Kustra, President, Boise State University
Michael Rush, Interim Executive Director, Idaho State Board of Education
Arthur Vailas, President, Idaho State University

MONTANA

Dan W. Harrington, State Senator
*Ed Jasmin, Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education
Mary Sheehy Moe, Dean, Montana State University–Great Falls College of Technology

NEVADA

Warren Hardy, State Senator
*Jane A. Nichols (WICHE Vice Chair), Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education
*Carl Shaff, Educational Consultant

NEW MEXICO

Reed Dasenbrock, Secretary, New Mexico Higher Education Department, Santa Fe
Dede Feldman, State Senator
*Patricia Sullivan, Assistant Dean, College of Engineering, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces

NORTH DAKOTA

Bill Goetz, Chancellor, North Dakota University System
Pamela J. Kostelecky, Member, State Board of Higher Education
*David E. Nething (WICHE Chair, 2006), State Senator

OREGON

Ryan P. Deckert, President, Oregon Business Association
*Camille Preus (Immediate Past Chair), Commissioner, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development
*James K. Sager, Senior Education Policy Advisor, Education and Workforce Policy Office

SOUTH DAKOTA

Robert Burns, Distinguished Professor, Political Science Department, South Dakota State University, and Dean, SDSU Honors College
James O. Hansen, Regent, South Dakota Board of Regents
*Robert T. (Tad) Perry (WICHE Chair, 2002), Executive Director, South Dakota Board of Regents

UTAH

Bonnie Jean Beesley, Member, Utah Board of Regents
*David Buhler, Interim Commissioner of Higher Education
Peter C. Knudson, State Senator

WASHINGTON

*Ann Daley, Executive Director, Higher Education Coordinating Board
Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, State Representative
Jeanne Kohl-Welles, State Senator

WYOMING

*Thomas Buchanan, President, University of Wyoming
Debbie Hammons, State Representative
Klaus Hanson, Emeritus Professor of German, University of Wyoming

*Executive Committee member

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