WICHE Annual Report

FY 2020





Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Since 1953, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) has been strengthening higher education, workforce development, and behavioral health throughout the region. As an interstate compact, WICHE partners with states, territories, and postsecondary institutions to share knowledge, create resources, and develop innovative solutions that address some of our society's most pressing needs. From promoting high-quality, affordable postsecondary education to helping states get the most from their technology investments and addressing behavioral health challenges, WICHE improves lives across the West through innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy.

WICHE is a trusted partner that incubates innovations to solve problems. Uniquely positioned to serve as a laboratory of ideas, WICHE leverages its power as an interstate compact to promote information sharing, network building, and peerto-peer learning across the higher education, workforce development, and the behavioral health fields.



WICHE

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

3035 Center Green Drive Boulder, CO 80301-2204 303.541.0200 www.wiche.edu © 2020 the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Publication number 1b60

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Letter from the President and the Chair of the WICHE Commission

For more than six decades, WICHE has been strengthening higher education, workforce development, and behavioral health throughout the region. As an interstate compact, WICHE partners with states, territories, and postsecondary institutions to share knowledge, create resources, and develop innovative solutions that address some of our society's most pressing needs.



WICHE

One of the most direct ways we advance our mission is through our three long-standing student access programs – Western Undergraduate Exchange, Western Regional Graduate Program, and the Professional Student Exchange Program. This past year alone, over 45,000 students across the region relied on WICHE for access to more affordable educational opportunities.

Beyond our student access programs, we are proud of the many important and meaningful ways that WICHE serves the region, and we hope you enjoy reading about them. This annual report, however, is different than previous iterations you may have seen. Not only are we unveiling a new format, but this year was one like no other, and the organization was forced to adapt and change quickly. During this past fiscal year, WICHE continued to lead and have a positive impact through a variety of ongoing activities from our Interstate Passport to Veteran suicide prevention, while simultaneously pivoting to address the impacts of COVID-19.

As we all know, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created a unique set of challenges for not only higher education, but for society and for us as individuals, both professionally and personally. Higher education's shift, almost overnight, to remote learning and work, revealed that our industry can respond to a crisis quickly and efficiently, but it also revealed the effects of longstanding inequities through the disparate impacts of the pandemic on certain populations of students and our society.

WICHE remains more committed than ever – through work such as Every Learner Everywhere, the Native Serving Institutions Initiative, and other efforts – to creating a postsecondary system that more effectively serves students of color, low-income students, and those struggling with access to critical learning technologies and supports. It is our responsibility and our opportunity, as we emerge from this pandemic, to work together to lead in the recovery, address inequities among our student populations, and reimagine higher education's role in the region's social, economic, and civic life. Moving forward – in a much different world in 2021 – we are optimistic about the resiliency and innovation shown by those in our region and beyond. May you stay healthy and keep doing great things!

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Demarée K. Michelau President, WICHE

Camille Preus Chair, WICHE Commission

Mission

WICHE and its states and territories work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life.

Workplan

Each May, WICHE's 48-member commission develops and approves the organization's annual Workplan. This Workplan outlines the diverse set of activities, projects, and initiatives that the WICHE Commission prioritized for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2019, all of which are intended to advance WICHE's mission.

WICHE's five key focus areas guide the work of the organization:

Finance: supporting aligned appropriations, tuition, and financial aid policy and practice at the institutional, state, and federal levels to promote affordability.

Access & Success: improving student access to, and success in higher education, especially for those who are traditionally underserved.

Workforce & Society: ensuring the region's territories, states, and postsecondary institutions meet workforce and societal needs.

Technology and Innovation: developing and supporting innovations in technology and beyond that improve the quality of higher education and reduce costs.

Accountability: striving to ensure that students gain a valuable education and that government is receiving a strong return on its investment.

WICHE's work is grounded in these focus areas that are reflected throughout everything we do, but it is impossible to not acknowledge the significant disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. And although the first six months of 2020 brought uncertaintly, they also brought opportunity, as we hope you will see in the annual report.

WICHE was founded on the principles of regional collaboration, resource sharing, innovation, and sound public policy. Those principles are perhaps more important today than ever. And as we continue – amidst the uncertain future of the COVID-19 pandemic – WICHE is committed to strengthening what states and territories do to improve the social, economic, and civic life of the West. To that end, this report is categorized across four key "theme" pillars of work – access, affordability, and opportunity; research and policy; leadership in digital learning; and optimal behavioral healthcare.

2020 by the numbers ...



saved with Student Access Programs WUE * WRGP * PSEP Veterans served through suicide prevention program



Approximate number of organizations benefitting from joint purchasing initiatives



Students served through Student Access Programs



Members representing all **50** states

800+ Institutions in the State Authorization Network (SAN)



Institutions representing **17** states



Institutions representing 13 states in W-SARA







Highlights from WICHE's Response to COVID-19

- In March, WICHE began sending out weekly emails that contained useful resources developed by WICHE and partner organizations in an effort to support higher education leaders, policymakers, and others navigating the pandemic.
- WICHE hosted a series of peer-to-peer video conferences with state higher education executive officers (SHEEOs), chief academic officers, and communications staff to share information, facilitate collaboration, and identify areas of regional need. WICHE staff also facilitated a call with Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC) members at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic to share legislative approaches and responses to the outbreak with a focus on higher education. Connecting with peers in other states provided a platform through which there has been documented collaboration and problem-solving, and WICHE staff identified numerous areas in which the organization can provide support.
- WICHE organized webinars to help states and institutions respond quickly and effectively to key issues including supporting the mental health and wellness needs of students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, in response to concerns about how to hold graduation ceremonies in the midst of a pandemic, WICHE drew on the expertise of leaders at colleges with a long history of hosting virtual commencements to convene a webinar highlighting successful strategies. The event drew broad participation

To inform and facilitate the region's response to COVID-19, WICHE compiled a set of useful and up-to-date resources.

www.wiche.edu/covid-19-resources

from across the region and was even cited in news reports detailing the components of a successful virtual graduation.

- WCET the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies posted on its website curated resources to assist faculty and staff in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, and produced a collection of policy briefs to assist administrators in navigating the U.S. Department of Education's myriad regulatoryrelief actions. WCET also published several blog posts on open educational resources (OER), emerging promising practices, and analysis of fall 2020 and spring 2021 institutional educational plans – all designed to support student success in the midst of the pandemic.
- WCET's COVID-19 work culminated in the publication of a policy playbook, *Pursuing Regulatory Compliance for Digital Instruction in Response to COVID-19*, with support from Every Learner Everywhere and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The playbook is a detailed resource on the impact of the pandemic on federal regulations related to state authorization, accreditation, copyright regulations, and distance education.
- To further assist the higher education community with the transition to remote learning due to the pandemic, Every Learner Everywhere produced several openly available publications, notably:
 - Delivering High-Quality Instruction Online in Response to COVID-19, a faculty-focused playbook
 - Suddenly Online: National Undergraduate Survey, a random-sample survey of more than 1,000 college students whose coursework moved from in-person to completely online in spring 2020
 - ► *Time for Class: COVID-19 Edition*, in which 4,000 faculty members at more than 1,500 postsecondary institutions nationwide shared their experiences dealing with pandemic-associated challenges.

ACCESS • AFFORDABILITY • OPPORTUNITY

WICHE promotes higher education access, affordability, and opportunity in the West

From its signature tuition-savings programs and initiatives to close postsecondary attainment gaps to its groundbreaking Interstate Passport[®] initiative, WICHE works to increase access and success for students in postsecondary education through resource sharing.



Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE)

WUE, the nation's largest tuition-savings program, broadened access to postsecondary education and saved 42,515 students an estimated \$408.6 million in tuition in academic year 2019-20. At 165 public twoand four-year institutions in WICHE's 15 states and two territories, WUE students pay no more than 150 percent of resident tuition, instead of full nonresident rates. While WUE institutions may tailor participation parameters, including admission requirements, eligible majors, and how many discounted seats they will offer, most offer the reduced tuition rate to incoming transfer students as well as to new college enrollees. In addition, students have access to majors that may not be offered by their home state institutions.



WICHE states and territories also benefit by helping their public colleges and universities meet recruitment and enrollment goals. Many graduates end up staying in the state where they studied, a bonus for states seeking to bolster and diversify their college-educated workforce. And for states in which demand for public higher education outstrips supply, WUE is an ideal relief valve, allowing their residents access to a postsecondary education without having to add capacity at home.

WUE enrollment has consistently grown since its inception in 1987. Over the past five years, WUE enrollment increased an average of 4.4 percent annually.

"As a single mom who moved to Idaho to study Medical Assisting, the idea of going back to school was really daunting financially. When I was awarded WUE it significantly lowered the cost. I would have had to take out a much bigger loan without WUE. That's one less stress I have to worry about and I'm really grateful for this program."

> – **Kimberly W.** Alaska resident, College of Southern Idaho



Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP)

WRGP allows WICHE-region students to enroll out of state and pay no more than 150 percent of resident tuition for more than 900 master's, graduate certificate, and doctoral programs at 60 participating public universities. In the 2019-20 academic year, a record 1,907 students saved an estimated \$27.9 million in tuition through WRGP (an enrollment increase of 29 percent over the previous year). The number of graduate programs available through WRGP has dramatically expanded now that participating public universities may make any graduate program eligible at the WRGP tuition rate.

1,907 students served

\$27.9 million in tuition savings

WICHE states and territories benefit from WRGP by attracting a broader and more diverse pool of students to pursue varied disciplines at their public institutions. WRGP remains an important alternative for students pursuing healthcare credentials (such as audiology, speech language pathology, graduate nursing, public health, and psychology) not offered through WICHE's Professional Student Exchange Program. Some WRGP programs are offered online, enabling place-bound and working students the opportunity to grow their educational credentials.

"I am very grateful for WRGP. I have been able to pursue a M.A. in Applied Sociology, with a concentration in environment and sustainability. This journey may not have been possible if it weren't for WRGP. I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to deeply discover and invest in my passion to help people and our environment. WRGP allows me to pursue my goals and strive beyond what I thought was possible."

> **– Sara S.** Colorado resident, Northern Arizona University



Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP)

PSEP provides affordable access to 140 healthcare professional programs at some 60 institutions and in 10 healthcare fields – ranging from optometry to dentistry to veterinary medicine – for students in the Western region. In academic year 2019-20, 611 students received \$14.6 million (reflecting investment by their home legislatures) in tuition benefits through PSEP. Since its inception in 1953, PSEP has supported more than 15,000 students, many of whom return home to fill key healthcare positions.



Thanks to PSEP, a student can save between \$32,600 and \$130,600 in tuition costs over the span of a professional health degree program, depending on the field of study – reducing financial pressures and possibly enabling them to afford to work in rural areas that typically have lower salaries compared to urban areas, or to pursue professional options that are less lucrative but sorely needed. Western states and territories benefit by inspiring and, in some participating states, requiring professionals to return home to practice and strengthen their communities' professional healthcare workforce.

"By subsidizing my loans to an in-state tuition rate, PSEP made it possible for me to study medicine at the institution of my choosing. Programs like PSEP serve the ever-important role of ensuring that students who have earned admission to medical school are allowed the opportunity to pursue their dreams with a reduced financial burden; this is especially important for members of impoverished communities or those without significant financial stability. I will be forever grateful for the opportunities afforded me through this program."



– Andrew H. Montana resident, Oregon Health and Science University

WICHE Online Course Exchange (OCE)

OCE offers consortia the ability to seamlessly enroll students, through their home institutions, in online courses offered by other two- and four-year institutions. The Nursing Education Xchange (NEXus) and New Mexico SunPath consortia contract with WICHE for use of its robust OCE platform, designed to support the exchange of online course enrollments to provide more options for students and optimize use of institutional resources.

Western Academic Leadership Forum (Forum)

The Forum brings together WICHE-region chief academic leaders from four-year institutions and associated systems and state coordinating and governing boards to exchange ideas and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. Though the pandemic forced the cancellation of the Forum's 2020 annual meeting, the keynote speaker, Deborah Santiago, Excelencia in Education's chief executive officer, hosted an interactive webinar, "Educational Opportunities and Success for All Students," in June 2020.

One of the Forum's innovative initiatives, the Western Academic Leadership Academy, concluded its yearlong professional development program with a virtual session in spring 2020 for its fifth cohort, which included 15 participants representing nine WICHE member states. The Academy is designed to expand the pipeline of qualified chief academic leaders for four-year institutions in the West. Its activities focus on understanding the context of academic leadership, setting academic goals and priorities, and developing specific skill sets required of chief academic officers. The Academy's faculty consists of WICHE-region provosts and chief academic officers who are active in the Forum.

> "The Forum offers a place where university leaders can have honest and candid discussions on even the most sensitive topics. The perspective of my peers on these issues is invaluable."

> > - David Shintani 2020-21 Chair Western Academic Leadership Forum



Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders (Alliance)

The Alliance brings together academic leaders at community colleges and technical schools and related systems and state agencies to exchange ideas and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives supporting the two-year higher education sector. In response to COVID-19, the Alliance was forced to cancel its 2020 annual meeting, themed "Redefining College: Becoming the Partner of Choice for Students, Business, and Your Community," but transitioned select meeting content to a virtual format via three engaging webinars.

In spring 2020, the Alliance bestowed its annual Bernice Joseph Award on the Montana University System for developing its American Indian Student Success Dashboard, which serves as a highly visible and credible source of data regarding American Indian educational attainment in the system.

This tool and others can be viewed in the Academic Leaders Toolkit, which is jointly funded by the Alliance and Forum, and provides a peer-reviewed, searchable online repository of decision-making tools contributed by academic leaders.

"The WICHE Alliance is dedicated to the collaboration and advancement of Western community colleges and technical schools. Strong partnerships and resource sharing are foundational aspects of the Alliance that encourage leadership and innovation in rapidly changing environments. The Alliance work, which fosters meaningful, innovative solutions, has not only served my professional growth, but specifically my institution and our students' success."



- Kaylyn Bondy Williston State College, Chair, The Alliance

Native-Serving Institutions Initiative

With the support of a \$990,000, three-year grant from Lumina Foundation, WICHE launched (in 2018) a consortium of NASNTIs aimed at:

- Helping them develop networks
- Speak with a strong and common voice on legislative and policy matters at the state and federal levels
- Tailor strategies to help their students succeed.



As part of the initiative, WICHE has developed a variety of resources to track key data on Native-student enrollments, retention, remediation, and graduation rates; shed light on barriers to success; and identify best practices in serving Native students.

In July 2019, WICHE convened the second annual Native American-Serving, Nontribal (NASNTI) Summit in Denver, attracting 86 higher education and community leaders to discuss, debate, and problemsolve issues unique to 37 Native-Serving colleges and universities, and to the tens of thousands of American Indian and Alaska Native students who attend these off-reservation institutions. Key topics included creating culturally engaging environments on campus; strengthening partnerships and fostering relationships with tribal communities; and federal, state, and tribal educational policy developments. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, planning for a third national summit as well as a series of regional convenings and a variety of campus-based activities was disrupted – and a pressing new issue emerged for WICHE and the consortium: How do we support and retain Native students with limited access to computers and/or the internet?

In April 2020, WICHE coordinated several virtual meetings with NASNTI presidents to discuss the status of delivering instruction during the pandemic, and subsequently made available more than \$100,000 in emergency grants to help keep Native students connected to their campuses and engaged in online classes.

Interstate Passport®

A national network of institutions that enables block transfer of students' lower-division general education credits based on learning outcomes, Interstate Passport experienced notable growth in FY 2020. As of June 2020, the network comprised 59 nonprofit public and private accredited twoand four-year institutions spanning 17 states. Its primary purpose is to benefit students by simplifying transfer and reducing repetition of learning already achieved, thus saving them time and money and fostering successful degree completion.

More than 48,500 Passports have been awarded during the network's four years of operation.



INTERSTAT

In June 2020, the American Council on Education (ACE) announced that it would use the Passport Learning Outcomes as a framework in evaluating and recommending college credit for training, certifications, and exams offered by hundreds of providers and major employers.

RESEARCH AND POLICY

WICHE is a valued and respected research and policy resource to policymakers and higher education leadership, and is well-known for analysis that is authoritative, confidential, and objective.

From data analysis to policy guidance to leadership training, WICHE assists higher-education decision makers in the Western region and beyond in planning wisely, benchmarking their progress, advancing their agendas, and investing their resources strategically.



Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC)

The LAC, created by the WICHE Commission in 1995, works to strengthen higher education policymaking in the West by engaging legislators in the discussion of current and emerging issues and by seeking strategies for interstate collaboration.

The LAC's annual meeting, held in Portland, Oregon, on September 12-13, 2019, brought together legislators from Alaska, Arizona, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Key topics on the agenda:

- States' use of data to refine policy,
- Promising strategies for developing 21st century infrastructure to support higher education, and
- Diverse approaches to addressing food and housing insecurity among postsecondary students.

Distance Education Policy

During the last year, WCET – the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies – was especially active in providing institutions and other stakeholders with information

on emerging policy issues, including the release of several new sets of federal rules and regulations involving distance education, competency-based education, state authorization, and accreditation that will have a profound impact on schools in the West and throughout the nation for years to come.

WCET's thorough analysis of these regulations – in the form of a series of posts on its Frontiers blog – stems from the deep expertise of its staff, including its executive director, Russ Poulin, who served on one of the U.S. Department of Education's subcommittees tasked with drafting the regulations.

WCET's April 2020 Virtual Policy Summit brought together policymakers, accreditors, institutional leaders, and attorneys to help articulate policy implications of the recently-released federal regulations, and provide updates on issues such as:

- Eliminating the distinction between regional and national accrediting agencies,
- Proposed changes to the definition of distance education and the expectations for "regular and substantive interaction,"
- The U.S. Department of Education's focus on learning outcomes over seat time, and
- COVID-19 temporary regulatory waivers including the interest in ensuring interaction in face-to-face courses converted to remote instruction.

State Authorization Network (SAN)

WCET's SAN provides guidance and support for navigating compliance with regulations governing postsecondary institutions' out-of-state activities. Among the key resources SAN provides its member institutions are two new tools created in FY 2020:





- An automated, self-paced tool to educate those new to state authorization regulations, including an online orientation and website tour
- A handbook designed to help institutions comply with new federal regulations requiring them to provide disclosures for programs leading to professional licensure or certification, regardless of whether the program is offered online or on campus

Recognition of Prior Learning



WICHE continued its national leadership in the area of prior learning assessment (PLA) – a process through which students can be granted academic credit for knowledge gained outside the classroom through life experience, military training, self-study, volunteerism, and other avenues.

With the support of Lumina Foundation and the Strada Education Network, WICHE's Policy Analysis and Research unit is completing a national landscape scan of policies and practices focused on better assessing traditionally undervalued facets of learning, and affordably scaling such assessments for the benefit of students, institutions, and states.

In June 2020, WICHE released preliminary results in a policy brief showing how scaled-up PLA policies and practices can help states retrain and upskill workers who have lost jobs as a result of the pandemic-fueled economic downturn.

Task Force on Closing Postsecondary Attainment Gaps

As part of an intensive, two-year process supported by Lumina Foundation, WICHE's Policy Analysis and Research unit is working with a broad array of stakeholders in Arizona and Wyoming to advance efforts to address postsecondary attainment gaps through statewide action. The goal is to develop state-specific action plans and ultimately craft regional policy recommendations for increasing higher education success among underserved students throughout the West. The recommendations will be released in late 2020.

WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA)

WICHE continues to work closely with the 13 state members (encompassing 253 institutions) of W-SARA to support their implementation of the agreement, which aims to make the regulation of interstate postsecondary distance education more effective and efficient for students, institutions, and states.

In FY 2020, the W-SARA Regional Steering Committee – composed of representatives from each of the member states – drafted an inaugural set of bylaws, established a governance structure, and elected new

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officers. In the wake of the pandemic, the steering committee has shifted to a virtual monthly meeting to maintain its momentum in collaboratively addressing issues related to the regulation of distance education.

Knocking at the College Door

In early 2020, WICHE began work on the 10th edition of its quadrennial report, *Knocking at the College Door*, one of the most widely cited sources of comprehensive and reliable data on the future size and composition of the nation's high school graduating classes.

WICHE is working with contacts in state K-12 offices across the country to compile the necessary data – a departure from previous editions that relied on federally reported information that is no longer available. This year's report will also have the unique challenge of speculating on how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact graduation projections.

Regional Data Resources

WICHE has continued to update core data products, including issuing a new annual report and dashboard for *Tuition and Fees in the West*. In addition, it revamped the annual *Benchmarks: WICHE Region* report to include a dynamic higher education finance dashboard that substantially increases the utility for users by allowing examination of state and regional trends.

Cost-Saving Opportunities

Postsecondary institutions, K-12 districts, state and local governments, and education-related nonprofits in the WICHE region continue to benefit from WICHE's collaboration with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) to offer four cost-saving programs:

- MHECare: offers institutions and systems an underwritten student health insurance plan.
- **Master Property Program:** enables public and nonprofit private institutions to purchase affordable property insurance coverage and risk management services.
- **MHEC Cyber Insurance Program:** assesses threats, vulnerabilities, and financial risks, and benchmarks cyber coverage of peer institutions.
- **MHECtech:** provides competitively bid purchasing contracts for an array of hardware, software, and technology services.

In FY 2020, some 1,660 school districts, government agencies, nonprofits, and higher education entities took advantage of MHECtech contracts offered by DELL, HP Enterprise, HP Inc., Info-Tech, Oracle, and VMWare.





LEADERSHIP IN DIGITAL LEARNING

WICHE helps higher education leaders better deploy technology to enhance learning, increase student success, and get the most out of their investments.

WICHE has long been a dynamic force for innovation, excellence, and leadership in digital learning (practice and tools) as a means to improving access to and success in higher education for students of all ages and backgrounds.



WCET – WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies

A national organization within WICHE, WCET is the leader in the practice, policy, and advocacy of technology-enhanced learning in higher education. Its growing membership includes institutions, higher education agencies and systems, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations in all U.S. states and several Canadian provinces. WCET is widely recognized as one of the most informative, reliable, and forward-thinking organizations focused on the role of technology and innovation in higher education. Through its Frontiers blog, convenings, and active online discussions, WCET keeps members informed of the latest in policy change, regulations, and trends in educational technology. WCET also offers a host of resources related to educational technology and faculty support including advice and guidance for institutions on how to transition their face-to-face offerings to emergency online alternatives and how to increase quality in these courses over time.

Every Learner Everywhere

Every Learner Everywhere is a network of 12 organizations committed to helping institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. This network is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and hosted within WCET - the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies.

The network provides two- and four-year institutions with consulting, training, and resources to support the adoption and implementation of adaptive courseware.

Every Learner Everywhere's original focus was on the redesign of "gateway" courses using adaptive and personalized learning platforms. During this period, network partners provided direct, on-the-ground technical assistance to 13 institutions nationally, produced research-based briefs, and created high-quality tools such as Solve – a digital library of implementation resources ranging from toolkits and step-by-step guides to videos and case studies.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Every Learner Everywhere received a supplemental grant of \$1,287,500 from the Gates Foundation to augment and accelerate services provided to colleges and universities, including virtual mentoring circles for faculty peer-to-peer support, technical assistance from some of Every Learner's network partners to guide faculty with effective online teaching practices, and assistance to colleges' institutional research units to better measure the impact of digital learning on equity.

Open Educational Resources (OER)

WCET and WICHE continue to be at the forefront of efforts to reduce the amount students pay for higher education and improving student outcomes through the implementation of OER.

OER comprises teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license. In addition to cost savings for students, the use of OER unlocks the potential to design courses and programs that have proven effective

in supporting positive academic outcomes, particularly for part-time and Pell-eligible students, as well as those traditionally poorly served by higher education.

On behalf of the four regional higher education compacts (WICHE, the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the Midwestern Higher Education Compact), WCET received a planning grant from the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation to cultivate OER within each region.

As a result, the compacts united to create the National Collaborative for Open Educational Resources (NCOER), with a focus on scaling OER policy and practice nationally. WICHE and WCET partnered to organize the planning, create an inter-compact memorandum of understanding, and develop a structure for scaling and sustaining OER work in each region.

Recognizing Excellence and Innovation

Each year, WCET bestows several awards honoring significant contributions to the higher education technology community. In 2019, several honors were awarded to worthy recipients:

Sally M. Johnstone Award

Crystal Falkner, Instructional Technology Support Manager, Austin Peay State University, Tennessee



Faulkner is recognized for her efforts "to elevate the online student experience at her institution" and heighten awareness of the potential of educational technologies among diverse audiences through presentations, case studies, and other activities.

Richard Jonsen Award

Cyndi Rowland, Associate Director, Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities, Utah



Rowland is the founder and longtime director of WebAIM (Accessibility in Mind), which offers workshops, instructional tools, training, and research to help postsecondary institutions improve the accessibility of web courses and resources to individuals with disabilities.

WCET Outstanding Work (WOW) Awards

Recognizing institutions that develop exceptionally creative, technology-based solutions to contemporary challenges in higher education:



The Colorado Department of Higher Education OER Council

... leadership in fostering the adoption of OER policies and practices at postsecondary institutions across the state

Granite State College, Concord, NH

... for development of a distancebased teacher certification program aimed at easing a critical shortage of educators in rural areas of New Hampshire

Rio Salado College, Tempe, AZ

... for creation of the Dynamic Assessment Data Dashboard, which enables moreeffective assessment of soft skills, quicker identification of trends and gaps, and an integrated approach to curricular design across the college

Collaborations to Enhance Impact

In FY 2020, WCET joined forces with the Online Learning Consortium, Quality Matters, and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) to create the National Consortium for Online Education (NCOE), a powerful voice for online and digital education within higher education policy and thought leadership. NCOE kicked off its work by issuing joint statements about proposed federal regulations on distance learning and advice for institutions making academic transitions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past year, WCET has also conducted collaborative work with the four regional higher education compacts, the National Association of State Administrators and Supervisors of Private Schools (NASAPS), the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). WCET has also strengthened its longstanding bonds with entities that serve a digital learning support role within and across higher education systems and, in some cases, states, by initiating invitation-only monthly discussions among leaders of these multi-institution collaborations.

"WCET membership is especially beneficial as academic technology continues to evolve and the role of online learning and digital media expands. The WCET Discussion Board and blogs are incredibly helpful on my campus, providing real answers in real time."

– Dianne F. Harrison President, California State University, Northridge



OPTIMAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

WICHE helps states and territories prepare a qualified behavioral health workforce and optimize their delivery of behavioral healthcare.

WICHE's Behavioral Health Program has a 65-year record of helping states, communities, and institutions develop their capacity to productively address issues ranging from suicide prevention to student mental health and wellness to the acute shortage of behavioral health specialists in rural areas.

Photo: Bigstock

OPTIMAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC)

The WICHE Behavioral Health Program (BHP) co-leads, with the University of North Dakota, the federally-funded MHTTC, which focuses on augmenting the skills and capacity of the behavioral health workforce in rural areas of Region 8 (North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah). Year two of the MHTTC saw a significant increase in outreach activities that included online and in-person trainings, conference presentations, and technical assistance projects.

Highlights of this year included:

- More than 5,610 people attended and participated in various training and technical assistance events.
- Region 8
- The first MHTTC Leadership Academy was held in September 2019 in Boulder, Colorado, allowing emerging leaders from each of the Region 8 states to engage with presenters on leadership models and projects from the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership, the Hogg Foundation, the Alaska Behavioral Health Aide Program, and others.
- MHTTC staff assisted the advocacy group Mental Health Colorado in development of forms and trainings for newly-legislated Psychiatric Advance Directives. The legislation allows adults to communicate their behavioral health history, decisions, and preferences in advance of an event during which that adult lacks the capacity to provide consent to, withdraw from, or refuse behavioral health treatment in the future. A national expert helped guide the development of peer-run training efforts for the state.

The School Mental Health arm of MHTTC provided:

> 20 in-person or online training opportunities 3,528 individuals reached

In addition:

- The program worked with Colorado partners to provide regionwide training and develop a toolkit for trauma-informed schools.
- All school staff in a small, rural Utah elementary school received training to implement a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum. The staff went on to train the rest of the district to implement the SEL program because it had a strong positive impact in the original school.
- With input from a workgroup made up of representatives from 11 postsecondary institutions within the Mountain Plains region, WICHE developed a white paper with recommendations for incorporating mental-health and wellness training into K-12 teacher-preparation programs so that graduates are better equipped to recognize warning signs, manage their classrooms, and take advantage of resources for support and referral.

Finally, numerous MHTTC trainings on suicide prevention reached more than 400 clinicians, administrators, advocates, and school staff in Region 8 states.

Rural Psychology Internship Consortia

The WICHE BHP helped establish and continues to support rural psychology internship consortia in Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Utah, with a new consortium in development in New Mexico. The internship consortia attract well-qualified advanced behavioral health trainees to underserved areas of the states with the goal of providing much-needed services to residents and retaining the trainees in-state once their internships are completed. Currently, the consortia collectively produce an annual total of up to 29 interns, with on average 65 percent staying and working in the states where they completed their internships.

"In 1963 I was a WICHE intern as part of a program designed to recruit undergraduates to careers in the mental health professions [WICHE Summer Work Study Program]. I was a psychology major at Stanford and for that summer was based at Auburn State Hospital. This exposure to the public mental health system cemented my desire to pursue a career in psychology. I earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Northwestern and worked in public and private nonprofit psychiatric hospitals. My last job before I retired was as CEO/Superintendent of a state psychiatric hospital."

> – **Gloria P. Olsen, Ph.D.** Phoenix, AZ



Rural Opioid Response Program

The WICHE BHP continues to be responsible for the coordination and execution of technical assistance and support for the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid Response Program-Technical Assistance Project, with funding of \$522,111 for FY 2020. As a sub-awardee to JBS International, WICHE BHP staff deliver innovative technical assistance to improve prevention, treatment, and recovery services and systems for persons with opioid use and substance use disorders in 26 rural communities across the nation, including in the WICHE states of California, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington, and Utah.

Suicide Prevention

Through the Together With Veterans (TWV) Rural Veteran Suicide Prevention Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, WICHE BHP helps veterans lead public health planning efforts in their own communities using suicide-prevention best practices. TWV sites conduct community needs assessments and develop and implement local suicide prevention action plans that include:

- Providing or coordinating access to suicide prevention training
- Conducting public information campaigns about veteran suicide prevention and to build awareness of services available to veterans

- Strengthening relationships across veteran-serving programs
- Distributing educational materials to primary care and behavioral health providers about veteran health and suicide risks, protocols for suicide risk screening, and risk assessment and safety planning tools

Since the program's inception in 2015, 10 TWV sites have been launched, and FY 2020 accomplishments include:



In addition, the WICHE BHP was tapped by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services to train tribal primary care and behavioral healthcare providers in helping to prevent suicide in their communities.

Using the newly-developed "American Indian Addendum" to the "Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Primary Care Practices," the WICHE BHP helped 51 providers at four tribal clinics establish suicide prevention protocols and clinical interventions to treat community members and impact rising suicide rates.

Research and Evaluation

In Fall 2019, the WICHE BHP conducted a Wyoming Needs Assessment that included an assessment of gaps across the state's behavioral health system and a review of the state's data system. WICHE BHP staff presented assessment findings to the Joint Labor, Health, and Social Services Committee of the Wyoming Legislature and answered follow-up questions as the committee began consideration of implementing recommendations.

In support of quality evidence-based treatment, WICHE conducts fidelity reviews of Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) in Arizona and South Dakota, and recently added Montana. These reviews assess the degree to which behavioral health services delivered to some of the most vulnerable residents meet national standards. In all three states, training and technical assistance are provided to address areas for improvement identified in the reviews.

Hawai'i's Early Intervention Section sought WICHE BHP's assistance in completing a pair of studies focused on optimizing the availability of critical early intervention treatments and supports for Hawaii's infants and toddlers. The studies provided data on comparative rates for services across the nation and on earlyintervention contracting models and best practices.

Campus Mental Health

WICHE engaged higher education leaders in supporting the mental wellness of their students, faculty, and staff through:

- MHTTC hosting of Alison Malmon, CEO of Active Minds, a nationally-recognized leader in mental health advocacy for college students, in three webinars for more than 3,600 college mental health providers, faculty, and administrators
- Presentation to the Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders on community partnerships and other strategies for supporting student mental health
- Presentation to the Western Academic Leadership Forum on supporting college student mental health during the pandemic
- Contributions to the WCET webcast *Coping with Stress and Anxiety During an Emergency*



WICHE Financial Snapshot

WICHE has an annual operating budget of approximately \$31.5 million in total revenue. Roughly half of this amount (approximately \$16 million) consists of Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) tuition payments – which are paid first by WICHE states to WICHE, then directly transmitted to institutions that enroll students through PSEP. The effect of these PSEP tuition payments on WICHE's operating budget is neutral.



WICHE Funders

WICHE is grateful for the grant and/or contract partnerships we have had with these entities in FY 2020:

Active Minds

Alaska Division of Behavioral Health Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Boston College/National Institutes of Health Building Hope Summit County Cengage Center for Alaska Native Health Research College Board Colorado Office of Behavioral Health Community College League of California CourseTune Hawai'i Department of Health Hawai'i Department of Public Safety Idaho State Board of Higher Education Innovative Educators **IBS** International Lumina Foundation Mercy Care Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Addictive & Mental Disorders Division National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health Oregon Health Authority Pragya systems Quottly South Dakota Division of Behavioral Health Strada Education Network TurnItIn U.S. Department of Education U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs University of North Dakota University of Texas at El Paso Utah Department of Human Services Utah Medical Education Council Washington State Health Care Authority West Virginia University Wiley Education Services William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Wyoming Department of Health, Behavioral Health Division



WICHE Partners

Thank you to these sponsors and partners who supported WICHE meetings and initiatives this past year:

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MindEdge Learning MindWires NameCoach National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Research Institute National Student Clearinghouse Odigia PeopleGrove Portfolium Proctorio Realizeit Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center Schoology Smart Sparrow Stars Training Academy StraighterLine TBI TIAA Top Hat Tutor.com VitalSource Western Governors University Wiley Education Services Wyzant YOU at College



WICHE Commission

WICHE is governed by three gubernatorially-appointed commissioners from each state and territory. The WICHE Commission has fiduciary responsibility, stewards the organization's mission, and sets its priorities.

Alaska

Susan Anderson (WICHE Vice Chair), President/CEO, The CIRI Foundation James Johnsen, Lecturer, School of Management, University of Alaska Fairbanks Donn Liston, Commissioner, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education

Arizona

John Arnold, Executive Director, Arizona Board of Regents

Rita Cheng, President, Northern Arizona University

Kathleen Goeppinger, President and CEO, Midwestern University

California

Christopher Cabaldon, Professor, Sacramento State University; Mayor, City of West Sacramento

Dianne Harrison, President, California State University Northridge

Francisco Rodriguez, Chancellor, Los Angeles Community College District

Colorado

Jim Chavez, Executive Director, Latin American Educational Foundation (LAEF)

Antwan Jefferson, Clinical Associate Professor, University of Colorado Denver, School of Education & Human Development

Angie Paccione, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Higher Education

Hawai'i

David Lassner, President, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu

Carol Mon Lee, Attorney and Retired Associate Dean, University of Hawai'i Richardson School of Law

Colleen Sathre, Vice President Emeritus, Policy and Planning, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu

Idaho

Rick Aman, President, College of Eastern Idaho

Matt Freeman, Executive Director, Idaho State Board of Education Dave Lent, Senator, Idaho State Legislature

Montana

Laurie Bishop, Representative, Montana State Legislature

Clayton Christian, Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University System Sheila Stearns, Past President, University of Montana

Nevada

Gillian Barclay, Academic Health Specialist, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Fred Lokken, Professor, Truckee Meadows

Community College

Thom Reilly, Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education

New Mexico

Barbara Damron, Chief Government Relations Officer, University of New Mexico Mark Moores, Senator, New Mexico State Senate

Patricia Sullivan, Associate Dean for Outreach & Recruiting, College of Engineering, New Mexico State University

North Dakota

Mark Hagerott, Chancellor, North Dakota University System

Ray Holmberg (WICHE Immediate Past Chair), Senator, North Dakota State Senate Jill Louters, Superintendent, New Rockford-Sheyenne School District

Oregon

Ben Cannon, Executive Director, Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission Camille Preus (WICHE Chair), Executive Director, Oregon Community College Association Hilda Rosselli, Educational Policy Consultant

South Dakota

James Hansen, Former Regent, South Dakota Board of Regents Larry Tidemann, Former Senator, South Dakota State Senate Vacancy

U.S. Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States

Frankie Eliptico, Interim President, Northern Marianas College, CNMI

Jude Hofschneider, Senator, Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature, CNMI Rodney Jacob, Attorney, Calvo Fisher & Jacob LLD, Guam

Utah

Patricia Jones, CEO, Women's Leadership Institute and Member, Utah Board of Regents Ann Millner, Senator, Utah State Senate David Woolstenhulme, Commissioner of Higher Education, Utah System of Higher Education

Washington

Don Bennett, Deputy Director, Washington Student Achievement Council Gerry Pollet, Representative, Washington

House of Representatives **Thomas L. (Les) Purce**, President Emeritus, The Evergreen State College

Wyoming

Fred Baldwin, Senator, Wyoming State Senate Kimberly Dale, President, Western Wyoming Community College

David Jones, Dean and Professor, College of Health Sciences, University of Wyoming

As of June 30, 2020

WICHE Legislative Advisory Committee

Alaska

Senator Gary Stevens Representative Andi Story

Arizona

Senator Heather Carter Representative Aaron Lieberman Senator Tony Navarrete Representative Michelle Udall

California

Vacancy - 2

Colorado

Vacancy - 2

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

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Guam

Senator Tina Rose Muña Barnes Senator Amanda Shelton

Hawai'i

Representative Aaron Ling Johanson Senator Michelle Kidani Senator Donna Mercado Kim Representative Justin Woodson

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Montana

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Assemblywoman Teresa Benitez-Thompson Senator Joseph Hardy Assemblywoman Robin Titus

New Mexico

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Representative Sue Duckworth Senator Keith Grover Representative Michael McKell *Senator Ann Millner

Washington

*Representative Gerry Pollet

Wyoming

*Senator Fred Baldwin Representative Mark Kinner Representative Sue Wilson

(*WICHE commissioner)

WICHE Structure

WICHE has four operational units that conceptualize and manage a vast array of programs, projects, and initiatives – developing valuable resources that address the needs of member states and territories. When appropriate, some initiatives extend beyond the WICHE region, and all are supported by some core administrative staff.

Expands access to higher education through three regional Supports better-informed decision-making and serves Student Access Programs (the Western Undergraduate as expert resources on higher education issues including Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, finance, state and federal financial aid, articulation and and the Western Regional Graduate Program) and national transfer, strategic planning, and student demographics. programs such as the *Online Course Exchange* and *Interstate* Leads projects and collaborations on topics including pc. POLICY ANALYSIS & RESEARCH Passport[®]. Staff also foster higher education collab-& GAMS& SERVICES oration and resource-sharing to enhance students' educational success and institutional effectiveness by developing and coordinating regional initiatives such as the Western Alliance of Community College Academic and staff undertake long-Leaders and the Western term grant-funded projects, Academic Forum, and the WICHE collaborate with regional Forum's Western Academic and national partners, Western Interstate Commission Leadership Academy. and provide short-term for Higher Education technical assistance. **President's Office** The leader in the Provides technical assis-

BEHAUIORAL HEALTH tance, education, consulting, and research services to improve and strengthen behavioral health care in the West. Initiatives focus on the analysis and growth of the behavioral health workforce, as well as overall improvements of the public mental health system. The program also has a long history of providing mental health services in rural areas and providing training to support prevention, treatment and recovery efforts throughout our region.

Human Resources **IT Services** Finance Communications

practice, policy, and advocacy of technologyenhanced learning in higher education. Its growing membership includes institutions, higher education agencies and systems, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations in all U.S. states and several Canadian provinces. WCET is widely recognized as

one of the most informative, reliable, and forwardthinking organizations focused on the role of technology and innovation in higher education.

WCET

postsecondary completion, closing attainment gaps, adult learners, and multistate data-sharing to support educational planning and workforce development. Publications, including the WICHE Insights series, explore significant policy issues,

Our Team

President's Office

Demarée Michelau, President Laura Ewing, Executive Assistant to the President and to the Commission Jeanette Porter, Senior Administrative Coordinator

Programs and Services

Jere Mock, Vice President Suzanne Benally, Director, Native-Serving Institutions Initiative Margo Colalancia, Director of Student Access Programs Cherie Curtin, Administrative Assistant III Anna Galas, Director of Academic Leadership Initiatives Kay Hulstrom, Manager, Institution Services Angela Rochat, Data, Policy, and Evaluation Coordinator Kate Springsteen, Coordinator of Student Access Programs, and Member Services Coordinator of Interstate Passport[®] Emma Tilson, Administrative Coordinator (½)

Policy Analysis and Research

Patrick Lane, Vice President Peace Bransberger, Senior Research Analyst Colleen Falkenstern, Research Analyst Sarah Leibrandt, Senior Research Analyst Shelley Plutto, Project Coordinator, W-SARA Melissa Sanders, Administrative Assistant III Christina Sedney, Director of Policy Initiatives and State Authorization

Liliana Diaz Solodukhin, Policy Analyst

Behavioral Health Program

Dennis Mohatt, Vice President, Behavioral Health and Co-Director, Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC) Genevieve Berry, Project Manager, MHTTC Erin Briley, Research and Technical Assistance Associate Gina Brimner, Director of Veterans Initiatives Janell Daly, Administrative Assistant III John Gomez, Director of Operations Vanessa Gonzalez, Rural Opioid Technical Assistance Coordinator Andie Hancock, Budget Coordinator Rebecca Helfand, Director of Evaluation and Analytics Annette Robertson, Fidelity Reviewer Gretchen Stage, Together With Veterans Program

Manager Ivory Tubbs, Technical Expert Lead, Rural Communities Opioid Response Project

Liza Tupa, Director for Education and Research

Karen Voyer-Caravona, Fidelity Reviewer Darlene Williams, Administrative Assistant III Stefanie Winfield, MHTTC Research and Technical Assistance Associate

WCET - WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies

Russell Poulin, Executive Director, WCET, and Vice President for Technology-Enhanced Education Rosa Calabrese, Manager, Digital Design Cheryl Dowd, Director, State Authorization Network Laura DaVinci, Associate Director, Every Learner Everywhere Lindsey Downs, Assistant Director, Communications and Community Sherri Artz Gilbert, Senior Director of Operations and Membership Administration Norma Hollebeke, Manager of Network Programs and Services, Every Learner Everywhere Joyce Holliday, Administrative Assistant III Mollie McGill, Deputy Director Kim Nawrocki, Events and Programs Coordinator Robert Perez, Senior Manager of Business Operations and Strategic Initiatives, Every Learner Everywhere Megan Raymond, Senior Director of Membership and Programs Daniel Silverman, Assistant Director, State Authorization Network Tanya Spilovoy, Director, Open Policy Jessica Williams, Director, Every Learner Everywhere Network

Accounting Services

Craig Milburn, Chief Financial Officer Drew Elkshoulder, Accounting Specialist Alicia Jones, Accountant I

Communications

Jasmine Leonas, Communications Manager Candy Allen, Senior Graphic Designer Emma Tilson, Administrative Coordinator (½)

Human Resources

Deirdre Coulter, Director of Human Resources Georgia Frazer, Human Resources Assistant

IT Services

Dave Clark, Chief of Digital Services Andy Mills, Systems Administrator



University of Guam Nursing Students

University of Guam nursing students presented on preventing the spread of germs during the university's annual Charter Day celebration in March 2020. Photo courtesy of the University of Guam.



Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education