

WICHE



Western Interstate Commission
for Higher Education

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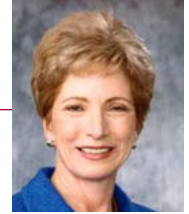
3035 Center Green Drive, Suite 200
Boulder, CO 80301
T 303.541.0200 F 303.541.0227

www.wiche.edu

Higher Education: The Engine of Economic Opportunity

The West's Challenges—and Solutions

A Message from WICHE Chair Jane Nichols, Vice Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education



A year ago, as we started fiscal 2009, the U.S. was experiencing the first symptoms of economic unrest – a sharp spike in fuel prices, rising costs and rising debt, and a jump in foreclosures. Between May and June 2008, unemployment rose a half-point to 5.5 percent and 49,000 jobs were lost.

That was then. In June national unemployment reached 9.5 percent – but our region has been hit much harder. The West has seen a 10.2 percent drop in employment, with the Pacific states (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington) logging 11.2 percent. California alone lost 66,500 jobs.

All but a few of the Western states experienced dramatic tax revenue declines in early 2009: the first quarter was the worst on record for most. Nevada is among those facing the biggest challenges. It is dealing with heavy unemployment – 12 percent – along with a multibillion-dollar budget shortfall, thanks in part to a tax structure that leans heavily on one industry, casinos, whose revenues shrank by 8 percent over the last year. Nevada has also seen record population growth in recent years – it was

the fastest-growing state in 2007. And it's one of the nation's most diverse states: according to WICHE's *Knocking at the College Door*, Nevada's high school graduate population is already majority-minority and will become even more diverse in the years ahead.

Nevada has many hurdles to clear – but its challenges are the same ones that our region faces, and the way it's responding to them has much to teach us. At WICHE's May meeting in Las Vegas, commissioners visited Nevada State College in Henderson, a four-year institution launched in 2002 that's a model for cost-effective higher education. Nevada is also focusing on its low-income students: as a member of WICHE's federally funded College Access Challenge Grant Consortium, it's striving to increase their numbers and their success in postsecondary education. In addition, Nevada is looking at ways to educate and train its adult population – crucial in a time of high unemployment. It's one of five states participating in WICHE's Non-traditional No More project, whose goal is to get adults who came close to finishing college to return to school and earn their degree.

WICHE's programs are designed to help states handle the challenges they're facing today. Over the last year, WICHE's Programs and Services unit, Student Exchange Programs, Policy Analysis and Research unit, WCET, and Mental Health Program have done just that. Underlying all those programs is the work of the WICHE Commission, which brings together three representatives from each of our 15 member states – legislators, higher education faculty and administrators, and community leaders – to talk about the problems we're facing today and to examine ways in which WICHE can help find solutions that will sustain higher education, not just through the current crisis but over the long haul. Bringing those stakeholders together, along with national leaders and experts who can help to inform and inspire them, is one of the things that gives WICHE its strength – and that puts it in a unique position to make a real difference.

Higher Education: Is the Engine Sputtering?

A Message from WICHE President David A. Longanecker



“Higher Education: The Engine of Economic Opportunity” – it’s a heck of a theme for 2008-2009, the year in which the economy took the largest downturn since the Great Depression. And it makes one ask: If higher education does in fact drive economic opportunity, did “the engine” fail in the last year?

The answer is no. We know what brought on the current economic debacle: individual and corporate greed. Yet there are some sobering truths about higher education’s complicity. It was the greed of well-educated people that led to our economic problems. It was the reticence of well-educated people to step up to the plate like their less well-educated parents did and pay the level of taxes necessary to advance civilized society that contributed to this mess. And higher education’s insatiable appetite for more resources without doubt contributed to the economic squeeze play in which we currently find ourselves.

Still, higher education does indeed serve as a powerful engine of economic opportunity. How has this been actualized in the West over the past year, and how can higher education contribute in the future? We know that higher education pays off for the person who receives it and for the society that invests in it. According to an April report from the U.S. Census,

bachelor’s degree holders reported earning \$26,000 more, on average, than high school graduates last year: \$57,181, compared to \$31,286. In addition, despite the raw rhetoric of some pundits (most of whom, incidentally have high levels of education and the luxury of jobs that allow them to spout fact-free pontifications), all the evidence indicates that individuals who receive more education earn more, live healthier, happier lives, and contribute more to society than people who earn less.

Similarly, all the evidence suggests that the return on investment to societies that educate their citizenry is exceptionally high. The rest of the world recognizes this: many other developed and developing economies are increasing their investments in education today. Indeed, 10 countries exceed the U.S. in the share of their young adult population (aged 25 to 34) that has a college education. A decade ago only one fared better.

Over the past year WICHE has dedicated substantial resources to helping its 15 member states recognize the increased importance of higher education to regional economic development, as well as to figure out how to progress positive public policy to advance economic development via investment

in education. Through the continuing support of the states, grants from various federal agencies, and the generous support of foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, WICHE has worked with state governments, higher education governing boards, and individual institutions to help ensure that access to high-quality postsecondary education, at all levels, remains available in these difficult times.

Many states have seen notable progress over this past year. Oregon adopted a modern approach to state need-based financial aid, which led to a 17 percent increase in enrollments. Four Western states – Arizona, California, Colorado, and Montana – were selected to pursue a “big change” in the way they do business as part of Lumina Foundation’s Making Opportunity Affordable project. Utah is using the Bologna “tuning” process to better align transfer and articulation processes amongst all its institutions. And the list goes on. Both WICHE and its member states have been actively demonstrating that higher education is the economic engine of the West.

But we still have much to do, especially in the West. Contributing to the United States’ poor global position in terms of education levels are 16 states that have seen a decline in the percentage of their young adults with a college education. Ten of those 16 states are in the West. Furthermore, the West

faces unique challenges due to its changing demographics: the nation’s fastest-growing states are here, and the greatest growth is occurring among groups that we have traditionally not served well, particularly low-income and Hispanic populations.

These are difficult issues, and difficult times. But as Rahm Emanuel, President Obama’s chief of staff, has said, “A crisis is a terrible thing to waste.” The years to come will likely be tough for all of us – individuals, businesses, institutions, cities, and states. But for those of us in higher education, they offer a unique opportunity to think hard about how we can fundamentally change our business model and expand access to quality education at a lower cost. We simply no longer have the opportunity to let our justifiable pride in our past accomplishments prevent us from finding a better way to do business.

American higher education has been on a collision course with financial reality for more than 25 years. This unprecedented economic downturn gives us a chance to finally find new models that will preserve quality and access, but within a less expensive paradigm. We can hope that these difficult times will also help our well-educated polity to better understand that investing in public goods enhances the public good – and that we all benefit when we assist those who most need our help to enjoy all the economic opportunities that come with a good education.

Programs and Services

WICHE's original access initiative, created in the early 1950s, was the **Student Exchange Program**, which now includes the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), and the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). These three programs allow students to attend out-of-state institutions in the region at reduced costs and also help the West's higher education institutions to fill enrollment gaps, avoid unnecessary duplication of programs in the region, and better manage their increasingly limited resources.

The **Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE)** was founded in 1987 and is now the largest program of its kind in the nation, with students from all 15 WICHE states eligible to participate. Through WUE students pay 150 percent of resident tuition. Last year WUE enrolled more than 23,600 students in over 140 public two- and four-year institutions in the West, saving students and their families \$151.1 million. WICHE continues to encourage more institutions to join WUE and has expanded its outreach efforts by working with Western regional associations of high school counselors. 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,

Sacramento, and Arizona State University's West Campus in Glendale and Polytechnic Campus/College of Technology and Innovation in Mesa into the WUE network.

The **Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP)** helps students enrolling in some 230 distinctive master's, professional science master's, Ph.D., and graduate certificate programs, where they pay resident tuition. In academic year 2008-09, some 400 graduate students saved an estimated \$3.9 million by enrolling through WRGP. Some 40 institutions in 15 WICHE states participate. Until this year no institutions in California had reciprocated by offering their programs through WRGP, so California students were not able to enroll at out-of-state institutions at the discounted WRGP rate. California State University, East Bay, has broken new ground for the state, nominating two programs to the network, both of which were WICHE peer-approved. California residents are now eligible to enroll through WRGP, beginning in the 2010-11 academic year. WRGP offers an expanding menu of more than 50 programs for future health professionals, including some 30 specialized graduate degrees in nursing; degrees in public health, audiology, speech pathology, mental health counseling, and social work; a master's of science in dental hygiene to train future faculty; and other healthcare-related programs. The network also offers cutting-edge graduate programs in biological and biomedical sciences, natural resources and

conservation, engineering, the physical and social sciences, and several other academic areas.

The **Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP)** broadens access in 10 professional healthcare fields to students in 12 WICHE states. In 2008-09 some 760 students were enrolled in programs in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, physical therapy, occupational therapy, optometry, podiatry, osteopathic medicine, physician assistant, and pharmacy at more than 50 public and private institutions. This represented an investment of \$14.5 million across the WICHE region. Participating states determine the fields and the numbers of students they will support.

WICHE ICE (Internet Course Exchange), founded in 2007, seeks to provide broader access to specific higher education opportunities and programs by facilitating the sharing of electronically delivered courses throughout the WICHE region and beyond. In fiscal year 2009, 13 institutions and four consortia were ICE members. The ICE annual meeting was held on March 30-April 1 in Boulder, CO.

With funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, members developed a new business plan and added new functionality to the ICE database that better supports the exchange. A white paper, "The Time Is Right for the Internet Course

Exchange" (www2.wiche.edu/info/publications/TimelsRight-ICE.pdf), points out ways that ICE can be used to keep online courses in specialty areas financially viable and even broaden an institution's scope of online offerings during this time of shrinking resources.

A consortium of ICE members has been seeking funding to develop new online courses in math and science for teachers and to research the most effective pedagogical strategies for these courses. ICE members also focused on social work, conducting a workshop this spring for faculty who teach the subject online. They also began planning a jointly offered certificate program to train social workers employed in the K-12 environment.

An additional ICE thrust was in workforce development. With funding from the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment and the U.S. Department of Labor, ICE institutions participated in a pilot to connect Colorado citizens with online courses in information technology, which will prepare them to advance in their current employment positions or seek new ones. This two-year project will conclude next year.

The **State Scholars Initiative (SSI)** has a twofold purpose: to motivate students to complete a rigorous course of study to meet the demands of the global economy; and to bring

business leaders into middle and high schools to help students in this endeavor. In September 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 three and received a continuation award through September 30, 2009, for year four, the final year of the program.

In 2009 WICHE continued work with SSI states and school districts to collect data to determine the impact of State Scholars on student course-taking patterns and stakeholder perceptions. Over the last year, WICHE continued to produce SSI data that are defensible, comparable across states, and understandable to experts and laypeople alike. WICHE disseminated these results at state and national meetings throughout the year. WICHE also disseminated findings and recommendations from SSI's National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance (held on April 29-30, 2008). Finally, WICHE pursued sustainability options designed to expand the national network and transition SSI from a federally funded initiative to a privately funded program.

In 2009 SSI worked with some 20 state-level business/education partnerships and about 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 their programs. Also currently participating in SSI are: Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Three additional states – Nebraska, New Jersey, and Rhode Island – were previously funded and created and completed SSI projects.

The West's rural areas have been hardest hit by persistent and growing labor shortages in the healthcare professions. WICHE is exploring a **pilot initiative to train primary care physicians committed to working in rural areas**. Students of the program will be exposed to rural practice opportunities and will benefit from an enhanced rural curriculum with a strong mental health component through a partnership with WICHE's Mental Health Program. They could also participate in preceptorships and rotations with mentors in their home state; and home state residencies would be available to them. This could be coupled with host community retention efforts, designed to increase the graduate's likelihood of returning to a rural area in the home state to serve. On April 6, 2009, state officials from Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming met and toured the University of Colorado Denver's School of Medicine and discussed the development of this "PSEP Plus" initiative, to be coordinated

through WICHE. The U.C. Denver School of Medicine launched its Rural Track Program in 2005. Student interest in the program has more than doubled, and early outcomes have been positive: all 12 students of the inaugural cohort have been matched in residencies in fields that are critical to rural practice (family medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, and general surgery). WICHE will continue to work with member states interested in U.C. Denver's Rural Track Program.

The Programs and Services unit's workforce-brief series "[A Closer Look at Healthcare Workforce Needs in the West](http://www.wiche.edu/SEP/PSEP)" (www.wiche.edu/SEP/PSEP) informs policymakers and higher education decision makers in the Western states about education and employment trends. In fiscal 2009 the series looked at the following topics:

- Oral care and the supply and demand for providers (both dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants), as well as the maldistribution of providers and contributing factors, especially the degree to which debt load discourages service to rural communities. The brief also discusses how the dental education system will need to be responsive to community demands for new provider types and engage the practice community in developing new educational models, particularly those which are community-based and have a focus on public health.

- Veterinary medicine at both the D.V.M. and veterinary technician levels, with an emphasis on the tremendous need for veterinarians who are willing to serve in critical areas, such as public health, food safety, biosecurity, and food/animal practices.

In December WICHE's Northwest Academic Forum expanded its scope to include all WICHE states and changed its name to the [Western Academic Leadership Forum \(WALF\)](#). WALF currently has 40 members – provosts and chief academic officers from master's and doctoral-level institutions and academic leaders from systems and state agencies. These representatives come together to share expertise as they collaborate on solutions to common problems and address higher education issues unique to the West.

The 2009 WALF annual meeting, cohosted by the University of Alaska Anchorage, was held April 22-24 in Anchorage with the theme "Taking Stock: Strategic Leadership in Changing Times." Speakers from the American Council on Education, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, and the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education provided overviews of some of the economic challenges members are facing and resources available to them. Panel presentations and in-depth discussions by the members focused on student success and retention and faculty work-life models.

The **Center for Transforming Student Services (CENTSS)** staff uses an audit tool developed by WICHE staff and others to perform audits for institutions interested in improving student services delivered via the Web. This work, produced on a contract basis, informs institutions about their strengths and weaknesses and provides recommendations for improvements. As budgets tighten finding the best ways to automate and provide effective services over the Web is critical to student success and retention.

WICHE is a partner in the **GOALS** (Gaining Online Accessible Learning through Self-Study) project, supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Completing the second of its three years, the project centers on the development, evaluation, and dissemination of materials and processes in Web accessibility that institutions and accrediting bodies can use in their efforts to ensure that online content is accessible to all users. Accomplishments this year included publishing an action paper, “Leading the Charge: Ensuring Your Institution’s Web Presence Works for Everyone” (<http://ncdae.org/goals/actionpaper.cfm>), and developing the indicators, benchmarks, and evidence that will provide institutions with the tools to measure their success. These tools are being loaded into a Web-based application (being tested this summer), which will allow institutions to benchmark their level each year so they can chart their progress and compare their status to other institutions.

WICHE offers participation in the Midwestern Higher Education Compact’s **Master Property Program (MPP)** to colleges and universities in the West. Institutional members benefit from comprehensive property insurance coverage tailored to higher education needs while improving their risk management and asset protection strategies. Members also have the opportunity to earn annual dividends, based on the consortium’s comprehensive loss ratios. Currently, MPP institutions have total insured values of \$63.5 billion. WICHE and MHEC members together have achieved savings of approximately \$51.5 million in premiums and dividends (\$11.5 million in savings estimated for 2008-09). The MHEC program was created in 1994; WICHE has partnered with MHEC in offering the program since 2004. The program is currently underwritten by Lexington AIG and is jointly administered by Marsh, Inc., and Captive Resources, Inc. under the direction of a leadership committee representative of the insured institutions. Six institutions and two systems in the WICHE region are members of the Master Property Program: Lewis and Clark College (OR); Nevada System of Higher Education (including the Community College of Southern Nevada, Desert Research Institute, Great Basin College, Nevada State College at Henderson, Truckee Meadows Community College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, University of Nevada, Reno, and Western Nevada Community College), Pima County Community College system (AZ, with six campuses and four learning and education centers), Reed College (OR), Seattle

Pacific University (WA), University of Northern Colorado, Westminster College (UT), and Willamette University (OR). WICHE staff continues to work with our program administrators to provide information on the MHEC/WICHE insurance programs to interested institutions.

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact invited WICHE to participate in a three-year **contract with Xerox Corp. for printing equipment and document management services**, with four possible one-year renewals. Under the contract all government agencies and institutions or systems of higher education in the MHEC and WICHE regions can use Xerox for their office printing needs at a discount. The contract also includes production-level printing services. MHEC first began working with Xerox in 2003, to provide costs savings and printing product improvements to colleges and universities in its region; it later conducted a national RFP process and negotiated a second contract with Xerox that takes advantage of the power of collective purchasing. In addition to hardware – including multifunction devices, laser printers, copiers, and fax machines – the contract covers Xerox services, such as productivity assessments and document advisories to help manage and streamline records and administrative documents.

The full range of Xerox Global Services' offerings will also be available, including Xerox Office Productivity Assessments

that will examine copy, print and fax volumes across an entire organization, and identify opportunities to save money by consolidating equipment. Members can also utilize Xerox's Document Advisor Services to help manage the information overload of student records and administrative documents schools continually face. An administrative fee will be assessed on all purchases resulting from the MHEC/WICHE contracts. The fees are 2 percent on gross sales on equipment purchases under the small printer contract and 1 percent of gross sales on equipment purchases under the large printer contract. Revenues from the fees will be split evenly between MHEC and WICHE.

Policy Analysis and Research

In fiscal 2009 the Policy Analysis and Research unit continued its work on the project titled **Getting What You Pay For: Understanding Higher Education Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid**, which is funded by Lumina Foundation for Education. Building upon the work of the Changing Direction project, this effort is designed to promote informed decision making and the alignment of higher education appropriations, tuition, and financial aid policy. The goal is to educate state legislators, news media (especially statehouse and higher education reporters), and others about these issues in an effort to increase student access and success. Together with

the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and in collaboration with the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media, WICHE published eight policy briefs targeted to the state legislative audience, so that they may better understand the importance of policy alignment. These briefs were distributed to every state legislator in the nation, and WICHE members staff are continuing to participate in meetings to disseminate the lessons learned. The unit is also cosponsoring a meeting of NCSL's Legislative Education Staff Network as part of this effort.

Non-traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners – a two-year project funded by Lumina Foundation that provides state and institutional leaders with a unique opportunity to increase access and success for the adult learner population in postsecondary education – had a very successful year. Non-traditional No More worked with Arkansas, Colorado, and Nevada (which were selected through a competitive process) to identify their “ready adult” population – those adults who are close to having enough credits to obtain a degree but have not yet returned to college. With a comprehensive focus on academic affairs, financial aid/financing, student support services, and communications (marketing and information strategies designed to reach out to the ready adult population), participating states identified barriers in both policy and practice that hampered these students from completing their degrees. Now, states are implementing ways to reduce those

barriers and increase degree attainment. During this past year, WICHE convened the second round of meetings in each of the three participating states. In addition Lumina awarded WICHE additional funding (\$412,118) to work with two more states – New Jersey and South Dakota – and to form a network of states interested in increasing access and success among ready adults.

WICHE created and manages the **College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Consortium and Network** in an effort to assist Western states in implementing their CACG programs. CACG is a federal formula-grant initiative designed to foster partnerships among federal, state, and local governments and philanthropic organizations. The program uses matching challenge grants to help increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Members of the consortium – Alaska and Nevada – receive services including grant development and management, program implementation and evaluation, and ongoing expert consultation and guidance. Consortium states are also members of the CACG Network, whose members learn from each other, share best practices and lessons learned, and explore evidence-based research.

In partnership with Hezel Associates and WCET, the Policy unit began work on a project titled **Best Practices in Statewide Articulation and Transfer Systems**. The project, funded by

Lumina Foundation, seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how states coordinate their articulation and transfer programs for students who move from two-year to four-year institutions, focusing on those policies and strategies that have proven effective at increasing access to and success in higher education. In addition to surveying all 50 states and developing in-depth case studies of selected state systems, WICHE, WCET, and Hezel Associates will examine how state colleges and universities use Web portals in the articulation and transfer process to determine the characteristics that make them effective and whether similar models can be used in other states. Upon completion of the initial research and case studies, WICHE and Hezel Associates will distill key findings into a best practices guide, featuring clear policy options for policy and decision makers.

Policy continued 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 that works to boost access to higher education for disadvantaged students and prepare them for college. Pathways, with a network made up of researchers, policy analysts, educators, K-12 administrators, government representatives, businesses, foundations, and community organizations, seeks to identify the best ways of putting disadvantaged students on the path to college. WICHE's work

with Pathways includes annually updating its online searchable policy inventory, SPIDO (State Policy Inventory Database Online). In addition, the Policy unit has a representative on Pathways's policy subcommittee.

In September 2009 the Policy unit completed work on its three-year [Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education](#) project, funded by the Ford Foundation. This effort sought to encourage the investment of state dollars into programs and policies that promote access to higher education and to strengthen the connection between higher education and state workforce development needs. The final few months of the project were focused mostly on finishing up technical assistance activities in Washington and Oregon. In Washington WICHE was engaged with a wide-ranging investigation of stakeholder viewpoints about how well the state's higher education activities were fulfilling its workforce needs, with the results of that review presented to a collection of key state-level leaders and representatives from the business community and other constituent groups. In Oregon the Policy unit facilitated a consultation between the Oregon community college system and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (a partner on the grant) in an effort to promote the development and effective use of a state workforce certification system. The project also produced a well-received report on the need to reduce educational attainment gaps across races and ethnicities,

in order to assure to the nation's continued economic prosperity.

The Policy unit became increasingly involved in the national discussion that is encouraging the development of longitudinal data systems. The unit received WICHE's first grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to host a meeting in December to discuss how to help states more actively include workforce and labor market data in longitudinal data systems and to explore a prototype model for interstate sharing of longitudinal data. That meeting, themed **"Fostering Collaborative State-Level Education and Workforce Database Development"** and hosted in partnership with the Data Quality Campaign, brought together leaders representing the data systems for K-12 education, postsecondary education, and workforce development in 14 of WICHE's member states. One particular focus of the meeting was on reducing the chilling effect that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) has had on data system development and use. The project also funded follow-up conference calls with each state delegation, which showed how quickly WICHE's leadership bore fruit. Many states reported that they were able to use the information they gathered at the meeting to make headway in developing data capacity or in sharing existing resources, in spite of their preoccupation with a particularly difficult legislative session this year. In addition, the Policy unit was able to employ the remaining money from

the Gates grant to facilitate subsequent meetings requested by the state delegations of Alaska and South Dakota, who believed the exposure of a larger audience to the lessons learned at the December meeting could be decisive in helping their states break through barriers. Finally, the grant also enabled the Policy unit to host a meeting involving representatives from Hawaii, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington in an effort to conceptualize a prototype framework for a multistate data exchange spanning the K-12, postsecondary, and workforce sectors.

In May 2009 the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) released an evaluation report on **Colorado's College Opportunity Fund (COF)**, which was prepared by WICHE's Policy unit. COF represents the nation's first and only (to date) attempt by a state to finance its higher education enterprise primarily through a voucher program. WICHE's evaluation was comprehensive: it explored the original intent of the legislation that established COF and related policies through document review and interviews; conducted an exhaustive data analysis of student-level enrollment and voucher usage to examine the policy's impact on access; examined the implementation and institutional burden of the policy through focus groups with institutional and agency leaders, as well as with the student services personnel with direct student contact; and made recommendations for reform. Aside from providing the rationale for higher education to be considered as exempt from

Colorado's constitutional revenue and spending limitations, which was generally agreed to be the central purpose of the policy, the report found that the policy has largely not succeeded in meeting its original goals of promoting access among targeted populations and compelling institutions to adopt more consciously market-based behaviors.

The Policy unit also continued to engage interested states in discussions of **financial aid reform and improvement**. Building on WICHE's success in helping Oregon adopt a "shared responsibility" model for delivering its principal need-based grant program in 2007, WICHE provided technical assistance to Colorado and Kentucky as each considered similar approaches. Colorado's effort stalled when voters failed to approve Amendment 58, which would have provided an estimated \$180 million for grants and scholarships. Kentucky's effort has also been unsuccessful so far, due in part to turnover in leadership at the Council on Postsecondary Education.

WICHE's Policy unit continued to disseminate findings from the 7th edition of *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity*. The unit was invited to give presentations on this topic and other demographic patterns at multiple College Board-sponsored meetings, the National College Access Network, a meeting of higher education and business leaders in Idaho, and elsewhere.

With a focus on maintaining the state commitment to financial aid in times of fiscal constraints, WICHE held the annual meeting of its **Legislative Advisory Committee** in July 2008. It brought together legislators from the WICHE states for a full-day meeting. In addition, as the collapse of the economy left many states facing substantial budget gaps during their 2009 legislative sessions, the Policy unit responded to a number of inquiries about proposed budget cuts to higher education and tuition increases. Our efforts here consumed significant time and energy, given the fluid nature of legislative and governors' proposals and how inconsistently those proposals are reported.

Policy continued to provide valuable resources through its **publications**, including annual reports such as *Tuition and Fees in Public Higher Education in the West* and *Benchmarks*, periodic updates to the *Regional Fact Book for Higher Education in the West*, and weekly Policy Alerts and Stat Alerts. The unit also updated the **Policy Publications Clearinghouse**, an online database of policy publications, in a continuing effort to serve as a source of policy information for Western states. The documents include studies, reports, surveys, and policy briefs published by various research and public policy organizations. In addition, in fiscal 2009 WICHE produced *Policy Insights* on tuition and fees pricing.

Finally, the Policy unit experienced some significant staffing

changes in the last year. Two unit staff, Demi Michelau and Brian Prescott, received promotions and now jointly manage the unit under the president's supervision. The unit also hired three new staff members: Carl Kreuger, Patrick Lane, and Brandi Van Horn.

WCET

WCET is a membership cooperative of institutions and organizations dedicated to advancing access and excellence in higher education through the innovative use of technology. WCET's membership includes many of the top technology innovators from colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, and companies around the country. 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.

WCET has been selected by a group of 14 adult-serving higher education institutions to create a new resource (the College Choices for Adults Website) to educate students to become better-informed consumers of online education. Key to the

initiative, called [Transparency By Design](#), is the collection and sharing of new data about student engagement, alumni opinions, and student learning outcomes for academic programs. WCET is serving as a neutral, third-party organization to uphold the reporting standards of the initiative. Lumina Foundation for Education supplied start-up funding for the College Choices Website and project development. During fiscal year 2009, WCET has provided project direction for this initiative and played an integral role in developing the data items to be included in the Website. WCET also collected and evaluated initial data from each institution for display on the Website, which will go live to the public early in August 2009.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 included several provisions related to distance education and correspondence education. Prior to passage of the legislation, WCET took an active role in keeping the distance education community informed of the proposed requirements and established the [Study Group on Academic Integrity and Student Authentication in Online Learning](#) to create a body of knowledge and shared expertise. The one provision of most significant concern directed accrediting agencies to ensure that institutions have processes in place to authenticate students in distance education courses and programs. Michael Offerman, vice chairman of Capella Education Company, and Muriel Oaks, dean of the Center for Distance and Professional Education at Washington State

University – both nominated by WCET – were appointed to the federal rulemaking committee on accreditation. As the lead negotiators representing distance education, they contributed to a positive resolution of the authentication issue with requirements broad enough so that institutions can adopt compliance measures appropriate to their individual needs. The study group produced several resources to inform member institutions about current practices and policies used by institutions to minimize cheating and promote academic honesty in online education, including a Webcast, podcast, conference presentation, and a briefing paper.

WCET celebrated its **20th anniversary conference** in Phoenix in early November. The conference attracted over 430 higher education professionals from 46 U.S. states, five Canadian provinces, China, and Bermuda, including a record number of first timers who experienced the exceptional program and professional networking opportunities that are the conference's signature. Program highlights included a presentation by Sandra Day O'Connor, former Supreme Court justice and a resident of the Phoenix area, who discussed a new interactive teaching resource aimed at civics education for middle school teachers and students. In his introduction of former Justice O'Connor, WICHE Chair Roy Ogawa noted the great honor felt by all present to hear her remarks about the need to re-instill civics education into public education. In addition, University

of Richmond President Ed Ayers and his colleague Andrew Torget described four digital history projects that engage college students in new ways of discovery. One of their projects, Voting America, received lots of media attention in the recent presidential election. Commissioners Buchanan, Haeger, Howe, and Perry drew a full house for their panel discussion of the politics and policies of e-learning.

Directors of online and distance education asked WCET to provide more professional development programs to help them retain their staff and assist them in transitioning to more advanced managerial and leadership positions within their organizations. In collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board and a planning committee of national leaders in online education, WCET designed **CatalystCAMP**, a program for higher education professionals with one to five years experience in e-learning. CatalystCAMP will be held in conjunction with WCET's 2009 annual conference in Denver.

WCET reinstituted its **Webcast series** as yet another means of providing professional development at a distance. The spring 2009 series addressed both practical and future-oriented topics, including the following.

- How to use Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, vodcasting, mashups, and social networking, to promote authentic,

personalized, lifelong learning, as well as problem solving and critical thinking skills.

- How students perceive plagiarism, especially in an online learning environment, and strategies faculty can use to discourage it.
- How campus CIOs and faculty need to consider mobile wireless technologies as a learning environment to supplement classroom learning.
- Which strategies have been successful in increasing student retention in online courses and programs.
- What lessons can be learned from Hurricane Katrina, the North Dakota floods, and other unexpected disasters to keep campuses “open” using online learning infrastructure.

WCET launched three new **common interest groups (CIGs)** based on recommendations from its member-based governance structure. These member-driven working groups are, like WCET itself, cooperative in nature. Member contributions to specific projects are invaluable and result in work reflecting various perspectives, the pragmatism of the user community, and oftentimes more up-to-date knowledge of the technology. The new CIGs will produce resources, best practices, and other tangible products on these topics: student retention in online learning; evaluation and ownership of learning management systems; and institutional policies and initiatives affecting faculty roles, workload, and other institutional and statewide practices.

The **eLearning Consortia Common Interest Group** (formerly called the Academic Collaboration CIG) consists of interinstitutional organizations that share resources to increase institutional capacity for, sharing of, and access to technology-mediated courses and programs. Together with Kansas State University’s Institute for Academic Alliances, the eLearning Consortia CIG is producing a public Website, including a directory of consortia and a repository of policies and publications from those consortia. The CIG is also working on a list of best practices for consortia and a set of data items for consortia to use for accountability reporting.

This year Russell Poulin, WCET’s associate director, provided **consulting services** to Nexus, the Nursing Education Exchange. Nexus is a consortium of institutions that works to increase the capacity of nursing doctoral programs through sharing existing and creating new distance-accessible courses. Current academic foci include doctoral nursing education, diverse and vulnerable populations, and gerontology and geriatric nursing. Participating institutions include Arizona State University, Oregon Health & Science University, U.C. Denver, University of New Mexico, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, University of Northern Colorado, University of Utah, Loma Linda University, and Washington State University. Poulin helped the organization consider different funding and sustainability models.

In February WCET, the China Open Resources for Education (CORE), and the Seattle Science Foundation cohosted a meeting with representatives from U.S. and Canadian institutions and distinguished U.S. scientists, including Nobel laureate Lee Hartwell, to explore interest and strategies to develop targeted **training programs for the Chinese market utilizing the model of open education courseware**. A segment of the WCET membership is engaged in early exploration of models that support international programs using online and open educational resources.

WCET has also released several new publications over the last year. **“Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education, Version 2.0”** was produced by WCET’s Study Group on Academic Integrity and Student Authentication in response to the Higher Education Opportunity Act provision related to student verification. This document reflects the combined contributions of WCET, the UT TeleCampus of the University of Texas System, and the Instructional Technology Council and is licensed under a Creative Commons license, which allows users to modify the document for noncommercial purposes as long as the original attribution is retained.

“Funding of Academic Collaborations” presents the results of a survey on academic collaborations, which are defined as interinstitutional organizations that share resources to increase

institutional capacity for, sharing of, and access to technology-mediated courses and programs. Findings focus on sources of revenue, amount of funding, and effective funding models. U.S., Canadian, and multistate/province organizations were included in the study.

A white paper, **“Unleashing Waves of Innovation: Transformative Broadband for America’s Future,”** prepared by a national collaboration of higher education organizations, including WICHE, describes the need for a national broadband strategy that begins with U.S. colleges, universities, schools, libraries, and hospitals. The contributing authors and organizations propose a national broadband strategy and rationale that build on higher education’s success and experience with advanced networks and, in particular, their efforts to ensure that high-quality educational programs reach the broadest audiences. The paper was submitted to the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture, shared with White House senior staff, and discussed with the leaders of the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

Another tech-related program focused strongly on broadband is the **WICHE Technology and Innovation initiative**. Access to broadband networks has been identified as a national priority and is slated to receive a significant investment of federal stimulus funds: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

includes \$7.2 billion to extend broadband network connectivity to unserved and underserved communities. Ubiquitous access to broadband will stimulate job creation, knowledge creation, and better educational, health, and mental health services to citizens. WCET's executive director Louis Fox, vice president of WICHE Technology and Innovation, continued to serve as advocate with state and national government entities and a facilitator among the leading advanced research and education networking entities this year. The Technology and Innovation initiative has been an active participant in a national discussion about higher education and the country's broadband future. Fox is strategizing with regional higher education networks and national educational coalitions about pilot projects to compete for federal stimulus funds under grant programs by the Commerce and Agriculture departments.

Through its involvement in national, regional, and state-level networking initiatives, WICHE's Technology and Innovation unit is well-positioned as a broker and facilitator as states, institutions, and communities consider how to get engaged in these new broadband efforts. In 2009 Fox hosted the Northern Tier Networking Consortium and, with WICHE President David Longanecker, met with the Western Governors' Association (WGA) concerning broadband networks and the role of states in national broadband initiatives. WICHE conversations with the WGA and many national higher education and research

organizations (e.g., Internet2, National LambdaRail, the Community Computing Research Association, EDUCAUSE, The Quilt, StateNets, National Science Foundation, EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation, and the Southeastern Universities Research Association) have elevated WICHE to a leadership role in helping the higher education community shape its national broadband agenda.

Mental Health Program

The past year was a busy one for the Mental Health Program (MHP), with projects across the WICHE West and beyond. Mental Health's mission is to ensure that a high-quality mental health workforce is available to support good care to citizens of the West. The program is recognized as a leader in rural mental health policy and research. Program staff conducts research, provides technical assistance, and supports effective public planning. Key program staffers are often invited to participate in federal and state planning and advising activities and routinely serve as speakers at conferences across the nation.

MHP continued to support a range of **workforce development** activities this year. In Alaska the program worked to improve the supply and quality of mental health professionals. During fiscal

2009 these activities have included evaluation and technical assistance services.

MHP, in collaboration with the Annapolis Coalition for the Behavioral Health Workforce, also provided leadership in an effort to **establish a set of core competencies and a related credentialing system** for direct care providers in Alaska. Additionally, staff has led an effort to develop an Alaska Psychology Internship Consortium, to ensure applied training opportunities exist in Alaska for graduates of their doctoral program in clinical-community psychology. Finally, MHP partnered with several organizations, including the Norton Sound Health Corporation, in supporting the Alaska Jobs to Careers Project, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The project works to embed an applied credit-earning curriculum in entry-level health jobs. Over the last year, MHP also completed workforce-planning projects in Hawaii, Nevada, and New Mexico.

MHP provided **technical assistance and consulting services** to a number of other states during fiscal 2009, with staff assisting in planning and system improvement projects. In Idaho staff conducted a complex study of the public behavioral health system and made recommendations to support system redesign and improvement. The report was delivered to the legislature and governor in late 2008 and served as the foundation-

planning document for both legislative action and an executive order to fund and deliver a major system reform effort in Idaho. Alaska contracted with MHP to provide an analysis and recommendation for improvement around services for persons with complex behavioral management issues, who are currently at risk for out-of-state residential treatment placement. MHP continues to support South Dakota in its efforts to develop improved services to children and families. Additionally, Colorado utilized MHP to complete an evaluation of populations in need of public mental health services to better understand gaps in service utilization. MHP continues to provide program evaluation consultation to federally funded efforts in Wyoming and South Dakota. This evaluation support has centered on suicide prevention initiatives and the implementation of treatment for persons with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues.

To support MHP's focus on **rural mental health**, the program hosted the "From the Bench to the Ranch" conference in Denver last March. Rural mental health researchers, providers, policymakers, consumers, and funding agencies joined together to discuss how to adapt current evidence-based practices to, and create new evidence-based practices for, rural and frontier communities. In collaboration with the Health Resources and Services Administration's Office of Rural Health Policy, MHP is working to identify promising practices, best practices, models

that work, and evidence-based practices in rural behavioral health.

Another MHP focus is **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)**, a 12-hour training course designed to give members of the public important skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. The Mental Health Program has five certified MHFA instructors who are available to provide training in interested communities. MHP has been working in collaboration with several partners in Colorado to develop a plan to roll-out MHFA throughout the state.

WICHE Commissioners

Alaska

Diane M. Barrans, executive director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Juneau

Patricia Brown Heller, retired state director, Alaska Governor's Office, Anchorage

Marshall Lind, chancellor emeritus, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Arizona

Leah Bornstein, president, Coconino Community College, Flagstaff

David Lorenz, retired vice president of administration and finance, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

Joel Sideman, executive director, Arizona Board of Regents, Phoenix

California

Appointments pending.

Colorado

Joseph Garcia, president, Colorado State University – Pueblo

Kaye Howe, executive director, National Science Digital Library, Boulder

David Skaggs, executive director, Colorado Department of Higher Education, Denver

Hawaii

Roy Ogawa (immediate past WICHE chair), attorney at law, Ogawa, Lau, Nakamura & Jew, Honolulu

Roberta Richards, principal, Pauoa Elementary School, Honolulu

Helene Sokugawa, former institutional analyst, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Idaho

Robert W. Kustra, president, Boise State University, Boise

Michael Rush, executive director, Idaho State Board of Education, Boise

Arthur Vailas, president, Idaho State University, Pocatello

Montana

Dan Harrington, former state senator, Helena

Kerra Melvin, former student regent, Butte

Mary Sheehy Moe, deputy commissioner for two-year education, Montana University System, Helena

Nevada

Warren Hardy, state senator, Las Vegas

Jane A. Nichols (WICHE chair), vice chancellor for academic and student affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education, Reno

Carl Shaff, educational consultant, Reno

New Mexico

Dede Feldman, state senator, Albuquerque

Patricia Anaya Sullivan, assistant dean, College of Engineering, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces

Peter White, cabinet secretary, New Mexico Department of Higher Education, Santa Fe

North Dakota

Duaine Espegard, member, State Board of Higher Education, Grand Forks

William Goetz, chancellor, North Dakota University System, Bismarck

David E. Nething, state senator, Jamestown

Oregon

Ryan Deckert, president, Oregon Business Association, Tigard

Camille Preus, commissioner, Oregon Dept. of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, Salem

James K. Sager, senior education policy advisor, Education & Workforce Policy Office, Salem

South Dakota

Robert Burns, dean emeritus, SDSU Honors College, and distinguished professor emeritus, Political Science Dept., South Dakota State University, Brookings

James O. Hansen, regent, South Dakota Board of Regents, Pierre

Jack Warner, executive director, South Dakota Board of Regents, Pierre

Utah

Bonnie J. Beesley, vice chair, Utah Board of Regents, Salt Lake City

Peter C. Knudson, state senator, Brigham City

William Sederburg, commissioner, Utah System of Higher Education, Salt Lake City

Washington

Ann Daley, executive director, Higher Education Coordinating Board, Olympia

Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, state representative, Olympia

Jeanne Kohl-Welles, state senator, Olympia

Wyoming

Thomas Buchanan (WICHE vice chair), president, University of Wyoming, Laramie

Deborah Hammons, state representative, Worland

Klaus Hanson, emeritus professor of German, University of Wyoming, and vice mayor, City of Laramie

WICHE Staff

David Longanecker, president

Louis Fox, executive director, WCET, and vice president, Technology and Innovation

Demarée Michelau, director of policy analysis

Jere Mock, vice president, Programs and Services

Dennis Mohatt, director, Mental Health Program, and vice president, Behavioral Health

Brian Prescott, director of policy research

Terese Rainwater, program director, State Scholars Initiative

Pat Shea, program director, WICHE ICE and Western Academic Leadership Forum

Margo Schultz, program coordinator, Student Exchange Programs