Plenary Session I:
What’s Up in the West? Updates on State Budgets and New State Legislation

Typical of recent economic downturns, evidence of job growth and recovery of tax revenues continue to lag other signs that the economy may finally be improving from the 2008 recession. As a result states are still facing daunting fiscal challenges for FY 2010 and beyond. After imposing severe cuts on state services, including higher education, in the past year, states are hardly out of the woods. In fact, the federal stimulus package shielded many states from feeling the full brunt of the cuts they did make. Without stimulus funding to bail them out, many WICHE states will struggle mightily to balance budgets while preserving quality and access to higher education. Already, cuts are impacting capacity and leading to tuition hikes, all at a time when the relative lack of jobs is driving more students to seek postsecondary education. This session will provide information about WICHE states’ efforts to balance their budgets while cushioning the impact of the continuing fiscal distress on access, success, and quality in higher education. In addition, it will provide an overview of other higher education legislative trends, followed by an opportunity for the WICHE Commission to discuss the overall legislative landscape.

Speakers: Demarée Michelau, director of policy analysis, WICHE; Brian Prescott, director of policy research, WICHE

Biographical Information on the Speakers

Demarée K. Michelau is the director of policy analysis at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. The author of numerous education reports, policy briefs, and magazine articles, she has experience in higher education policy on issues such as accelerated learning options, adult learners, college affordability and access, articulation and transfer, and K-16 reform. Previously, she worked for the National Conference of State Legislatures as a policy specialist. Michelau received her bachelor’s degree in public law from Northern Illinois University and her master’s degree in political science from the University of Colorado at Boulder, where she is currently a Ph.D. candidate.

Brian T. Prescott is the director of policy research in the Policy Analysis and Research unit at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. In this role he has primary responsibility for obtaining and analyzing quantitative data with public policy relevance. He is the author of the 7th edition of Knocking at the College Door, WICHE’s widely used projections of high school graduates by state and race/ethnicity. Additionally, he oversees an annual report on tuition and fees
charges at public higher education institutions in the West, annually prepares the regional Benchmark report, maintains a Web-based statistical Fact Book, and authors occasional policy briefs and chapters. Prescott also has experience working with states on issues of access, success, affordability, accountability, workforce development, and accelerated-learning options. Prior to joining WICHE in 2004, Prescott worked in the Office of State Governmental Relations at the University of Virginia, where he also earned a Ph.D. in higher education. He also holds degrees from the University of Iowa and the College of William and Mary.