Plenary Session III:
What’s Up in the West?
Highlights from the 2012
Legislative Session

Tuesday, May 22, 2012
10:30 am – noon
Ballroom North
Plenary Session III:
What’s Up in the West?
Highlights from the 2012 Legislative Session

What an interesting legislative session 2012 has been (at least for the states with legislative sessions – Montana, Nevada, and North Dakota have biennial legislative sessions, and this was their off-year). Though a couple of states are still in session (Arizona’s legislative session is slated to end June 22 and California’s on August 31), this year fits well the old Chinese proverb (or curse): May you live in interesting times.

Most of the Western states actually experienced increases in general fund revenue this year, compared to the last couple of years. But this was of little solace for many because they continued to face budget deficits, in some cases quite significant deficits, despite the increase in revenues. In part this was due to funding gaps resulting from the absence of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) largess that had buoyed states’ coffers for the previous two years. In other cases it was simply a function of increasing demands for public services, such as healthcare (Medicaid), corrections, transportation, and education. On the other side of the ledger, many states ended their legislative session somewhat better than they entered it: revenue projections in most states have indeed been looking up. In sum, the story on funding for higher education is a mixed bag; it could have been worse but could have been better – and it’s still far from what it used to be. And for institutions the “new normal” is to rely much more heavily on tuition revenue than on state revenue.

All state policy is not about finance, however, and a number of trends in policy occurred in the West during this session. Governance remained front and center in Oregon and Washington, with both states refining the governance restructuring that they initially adopted in 2011. The West has clearly caught performance-funding fever, with New Mexico, Nevada, and probably Arizona joining Colorado, Oregon, and Washington with legislative directives or requirements to develop such schemes. (Other WICHE states, like South Dakota, also have performance-funding initiatives, though they were not legislatively initiated.) On much the same theme, many of the states that have joined the Complete College America initiative have legislatively adopted state goals and metrics for higher education completion. Another national initiative, the Common Core for Mathematics and English Language Arts, has is being debated in many legislatures and adopted by some (and intentionally not adopted by others). Other issues have also been addressed legislatively with differing results, including guns on campus, executive compensation, voter ID, and the biggie – the naming or (unnaming) of college mascots.
Julie Davis Bell of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) will discuss this recent legislative session from NCSL’s perspective and lead a discussion with the commission on perspectives from the different states.

**Speaker:** Julie Davis Bell, director, NCSL Education Program

**Facilitated Discussion on the 2012 Legislative Sessions**

**Facilitator:** David Longanecker, president, WICHE

**Biographical Information on the Speaker and Facilitator**

**Julie Davis Bell** is the director of the Education Program of the National Conference of State Legislatures. She has been with NCSL for 20 years and has directed the Education Program for 18 years. In that capacity she oversees a 12-person staff and is responsible for setting program priorities, responding to constituent needs and requests, developing new education projects, and interfacing with other national education policy organizations. She also serves as the program policy specialist for higher education issues. She speaks and writes regularly about education and legislative issues. Davis Bell received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Davis. Prior to joining NCSL she was a policy associate with the Center for Policy Research in Denver and taught political science courses at the University of Colorado.

**David A. Longanecker** has served as the president of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in Boulder since 1999. WICHE is a regional compact between 15 Western states created to assure access and excellence in higher education through collaboration and resource sharing among the higher education systems of the West. Previously, Longanecker served for six years as the assistant secretary for postsecondary education at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to that he was the state higher education executive officer in Colorado and Minnesota. He was also the principal analyst for higher education for the Congressional Budget Office. Longanecker has served on numerous boards and commissions. He has written extensively on a range of higher education issues. His primary interests in higher education are: expanding access to successful completion for students within all sectors of higher education, promoting student and institutional performance, assuring efficient and effective finance and financial aid strategies, and fostering effective use of educational technologies, all for the purpose of sustaining the nation’s strength in the world and increasing quality of life for all Americans, particularly those who have traditionally been left out in the past. He holds an Ed.D. from Stanford University, an M.A. in student personnel work from George Washington University, and a B.A. in sociology from Washington State University.