Plenary Session IV:
What’s Up at WICHE? Updates from the Policy Analysis and Research Unit

This session will focus on current activities in the Policy Analysis and Research unit, including a project on serving adults who stopped out of college just shy of earning enough credits for a degree or certificate; an effort seeking to help states develop linked longitudinal data systems; and WICHE’s College Access Challenge Grant Consortium and Network.

The rise of the globalized knowledge economy has made it clear that the nation’s future prosperity depends on a well-educated population, and with President Obama’s call for the nation to return to its position as the world’s leader in degree attainment, states and institutions are under increased pressure to produce more graduates at all levels. This necessitates a hard look at how higher education can better serve adult students. With funding from Lumina Foundation for Education, WICHE has been engaged in a comprehensive effort with five states to guide policy and practice changes that result in increased degree completion for ready adults.

Meanwhile, it is apparent that the existing capacity for research and analysis within most states is insufficient to the task of informing improved public policies related to educational attainment. Recognition of the need for better longitudinal data systems linking K-12 education, higher education, and the workforce has resulted in massive new federal investments in building such systems over the last several years. The pace of these efforts accelerated dramatically with the inclusion of a $250 million set-aside for data systems in the stimulus package, along with the requirement that states assure their intent to build and use longitudinal data. The intensity of the simultaneous activity in this arena may result in efforts that are hurried and uncoordinated, with states independently designing and implementing incompatible systems. WICHE’s Policy Analysis and Research unit, with support from the Gates Foundation, is working to develop a multistate data exchange with the capacity to analyze the development and distribution of human capital with four member states (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Hawaii). Finally, for the last year, WICHE has administered and managed the College Access Challenge Grant Consortium and Network, both of which are aimed at increasing the capacity of the Western states to utilize their federal grants to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education.

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 Benchmarks 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.