Issue Analysis and Research Committee Meeting

Monday, October 31, 2011
10:15 - 11:45 am
Aloha Center 155/165
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Issue Analysis and Research Committee Meeting

Robert Burns (SD), chair
Jeanne Kohl-Welles (WA), vice chair
Tom Buchanan (WY), ex officio
Joe Garcia (CO), ex officio

Susan Anderson (AK)
David Lorenz (AZ)
Christopher Cabaldon (CA)
D. Rico Munn (CO)
Steven Wheelwright (HI)
Duane Nellis (ID)
Kim Gillan (MT)
Jane Nichols (NV)
José Garcia (NM)
Bill Goetz (ND)
Ryan Deckert (OR)
Committee chair (SD)
William Sederburg (UT)
Committee vice chair (WA)
Position vacant (WY)

Agenda

Presiding: Robert Burns (SD), chair
Staff: Brian Prescott, director of policy research
Cheryl Graves, administrative assistant

Action Item
Approval of the Issue Analysis and Research Committee meeting minutes of May 17, 2011 5-3

Action Item
Approval of a project on teacher preparation and professional development related to the Common Core State Standards 5-6

Action Item
Approval of a project on building capacity to support state college completion goals 5-7

Information Items:

Unit update:
Research analyst

Project on Colorado’s College Opportunity Fund (response to RFP from state auditor’s office)
Project on Washington’s Opportunity Scholarship Program

Discussion Items:
Annual update to Benchmarks: WICHE Region 2011

Tuition and Fees in Public Higher Education in the West: 2011-2012

Update on Knocking at the College Door
• Methodological review
• Publication content and timeline

Update on Policy Insights related to undocumented students

Proposed project to implement a state authorization reciprocity program [Tab 4, pg 24]

Progress toward FY 2012 workplan (highlights):
• Facilitating Development of a Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange project
• Educational Equity and Postsecondary Student Success: A Center for Urban Education and WICHE Partnership for Policy Research and Analysis project
• Adult College Completion Network
• College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Consortium and Network
• WICHE’s Higher Education Policy Database and Policy Publications Clearinghouse

Other business

Adjournment
ACTION ITEM
Issue Analysis and Research Committee Minutes
Monday, May 17, 2011

Committee Members Present
Robert Burns (SD), chair
Susan Anderson (AK)
David Lorenz (AZ)
Christopher Cabaldon (CA)
D. Rico Munn (CO)
Duane Nellis (ID)
Kim Gillan (MT)
William Goetz (ND)
Debbie Hammons (WY)

Committee Members Absent
Steven Wheelwright (HI)
Jane Nichols (NV)
José Garcia (NM)
Ryan Deckert (OR)
William Sederburg (UT)
Jeanne Kohl-Welles (WA), vice chair

Staff Present
Patrick Lane, project coordinator, Policy Analysis and Research
David Longanecker, president
Demarée Michelau, director of policy analysis, Policy Analysis and Research
Russell Poulin, deputy director, research and analysis, WCET
Brian Prescott, director of policy research, Policy Analysis and Research

Guests Present
Jimmy Clark, HCM Strategists

Chair Burns convened the Issue Analysis and Research Committee on May 17, 2011; roll was called, and a quorum was established.

ACTION ITEM
Approval of the November 9, 2010, Issue Analysis and Research Committee Meeting Minutes

Chair Burns asked members to review the minutes from the November 9, 2010, committee meeting. Commissioner Hammons motioned TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 9, 2010, ISSUE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING. Commissioner Cabaldon seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

ACTION ITEM
Approval of the FY 2012 Workplan Relating to the Policy Analysis and Research Unit

Chair Burns asked members to review the proposed FY 2012 workplan items that relate to the Issue Analysis and Research Committee and asked staff to provide relevant background information.

Michelau asked committee members for feedback on the issue of campus safety and security. She said that a commissioner has asked staff to investigate how WICHE may be able to help institutions develop campus safety and security response plans. She noted that the Issue Analysis and Research Committee and the Programs and Services Committee are both reviewing whether and how they could address the issue and asked committee members which unit they felt could best address the issue. Commissioner Munn asked for a clarification of the differences between the Policy Analysis and Research unit and the Programs and Services unit. Michelau responded that the Policy Analysis and Research unit tends to focus on policy levers, while Programs and Services manages programs that actually deliver services, although there can be some overlap.

Commissioner Nellis said that the issue of guns on campus is an important one. Commissioner Hammons suggested that this is a difficult and controversial issue, and in many states WICHE’s input, as an outside organization, may not be well received. Commissioner Nellis said that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) works closely with institutions to audit their emergency response plans. Although these audits and plans are not public documents, the
review is thorough and the partnership between campuses and DHS may fill the needs in question. He said that it may be beneficial to inform other commissioners about this process.

Commissioner Gillan echoed Commissioner Hammons’ point that guns are a highly contentious issue, and WICHE’s involvement would not likely change any minds. She suggested that it may be more beneficial for Policy Analysis and Research to provide background on the range of policies in place in other states.

Commissioner Munn noted that this type of resource may already be available. Commissioner Cabaldon asked about the process for setting priorities and whether this issue was important for the unit to address. Chair Burns noted that DHS seems to have addressed the broader issue of campus safety and security, and Commissioner Munn suggested that a cursory examination of the available resources related to guns on campus would not take significant time and could meet the needs of commissioners.

Michelau then presented a draft outline of a data and policy brief on the challenges policymakers face in addressing issues related to undocumented students. Commissioner Munn suggested that the Policy Analysis and Research unit could focus on the demographics of the issue and how policies toward undocumented students may impact the West in the future, compared to other regions. He also suggested that staff examine whether broadening the analysis beyond undocumented Latino students is worthwhile or whether other groups of undocumented students are large enough to affect the policy landscape.

Longanecker and Poulin arrived to provide a description of the state authorization regulations and WICHE’s activities in relation to it. Chair Burns asked Longanecker and Poulin to provide background for committee members on the issue of state authorization of distance education providers. Longanecker reviewed a letter from the Western Academic Leadership Forum to commissioners and outlined his proposed response. He said that WICHE is continuing to work on the issue with partners, including the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) and the Southern Regional Education Board. Poulin noted that there is some relief in that the U.S. Department of Education will not take enforcement actions until 2014 against institutions that have not obtained authorization. Committee members agreed with the proposed response. Commissioner Cabaldon asked that Longanecker and Poulin keep commissioners apprised of developments before the next commission meeting.

Chair Burns informed committee members that due to grant regulations, the unit could not pursue the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities (WCALO) project, as proposed in the workplan because of limitations regarding WICHE’s ability to subgrant to states. Commissioner Goetz motioned TO STRIKE THE WCALO PROJECT FROM THE WORKPLAN. Commissioner Cabaldon seconded the motion. The committee unanimously voted to strike the WCALO project from the workplan.

Commissioner Munn noted that the completion agenda is on the workplan in both the “Existing Activities” and “On the Horizon” sections. Commissioner Anderson motioned TO STRIKE THE COMPLETION AGENDA FROM THE “ON THE HORIZON” SECTION. Commissioner Lorenz seconded the motion. The committee unanimously voted to strike the completion agenda item from the “On the Horizon” section.

Commissioners Munn and Cabaldon asked that staff review how information about projects is presented to the committee. Commissioner Munn asked that in the future, they receive more information on the scope and timeline for proposed projects. He said this would be useful, particularly in cases where committee members are asked to approve new projects. Commissioner Cabaldon asked for more information about the unit’s priorities. Commissioner Gillan agreed, saying it would be useful to have a better idea of what are major and minor activities. They both proposed staff investigate using some fairly objective measure of priority and provide more information on projects.

Commissioner Nellis noted that the soldiers and students project would be helpful for Idaho institutions and asked about the status. Michelau reported that the unit is still seeking funding for the effort and is planning to approach the Walmart Foundation.

Commissioner Cabaldon motioned TO APPROVE THE WORKPLAN SECTIONS RELATED TO THE ISSUE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH COMMITTEE, AS AMENDED. Commissioner Nellis seconded the motion. The committee unanimously voted to approve of the Issue Analysis and Research workplan as amended.
INFORMATION ITEM
Unit Staffing

Prescott informed commissioners that staff will begin the process of hiring a new member for the unit to replace Brandi Van Horn, who recently left to pursue another opportunity. Additionally, the unit has hired Dustin Weeden as an intern for the summer.

DISCUSSION ITEMS
Additional Unit Updates

Prescott informed committee members that the unit is carrying out a review of the methodology for developing the *Knocking at the College Door* demographic projections. The unit has found a consultant to write a white paper that will inform discussions within a technical advisory panel and a panel of end users, both of which have yet to be appointed.

Prescott then advised the committee that there has been growing interest among National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and SHEEO to find a single solution to making policy-relevant higher education data available online. Progress in these talks has been slow, but they are still moving forward. In the meantime the online data resources are being updated.

Prescott next reported that WICHE’s bid to partner with the University of Pennsylvania in the competition for a National Center for Postsecondary Education and Employment was not selected for funding.

Michelau then provided very brief updates on additional current projects.

Chair Burns adjourned the meeting at 9:30 am.
ACTION ITEM
Proposed Project:
Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Related to the Common Core State Standards

WICHE proposes a project that will work with Western states to prepare preservice and veteran teachers to teach to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English/language arts and mathematics.

Relationship to WICHE Mission
This project will assist interested states in the WICHE region to prepare teachers at varying stages in their careers to teach to the CCSS in an effort to prepare all students for college and careers.

Background
Created through an initiative led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the CCSS in English/language arts and mathematics align college and work expectations through the rigorous content and the application of knowledge via the demonstration of higher-order skills. In September 2010 the U.S. Department of Education awarded significant grants to two consortia of states – the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) – to develop K-12 assessments to measure student progress toward the CCSS. Through a small grant ($42,000) from Carnegie Corporation of New York, WICHE, in partnership with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), hosted two meetings on the implications of the CCSS on higher education in the West. Three primary themes emerged from these two meetings, as well as a discussion with state higher education executive officers from the WICHE region.

1. There is work to be done in the West for higher education to accept the CCSS as an indicator of college readiness.
2. States and institutions need assistance in developing a curricular response to the CCSS.
3. WICHE states face the dual challenge of preparing preservice and in-service teachers to teach to the newly adopted standards.

Project Description
Obvious from our work to date, one of the significant challenges to the success of the CCSS will be the capability of teachers to know and understand the standards and how to most effectively use the newly developed assessment tools for “just in time” curricular adjustments. WICHE, as a regional resource, is in a unique position to assist institutions and inexpensively transition these changes into their teacher education curriculum for both preservice and in-service teachers. The intent is to work with interested states in pooling teacher preparation and professional development resources, including collaborative training and curriculum as well as effective professional development tools. WICHE staff will consult with the assessment consortia and recognized teacher education leaders to develop a solid curriculum for teacher education and professional development training that states may use during this transitional period.

Staff and Fiscal Impact
The total budget of the proposed project is unknown at this point. The possible intended funding sources are Carnegie Corporation of New York and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. As the Policy staff more firmly conceptualizes the work involved, it will update the commission.

Action Requested
Approval to seek funding to support WICHE’s leadership of this project.
ACTION ITEM
Proposed Project:
Building Capacity to Support State College Completion Plans

WICHE proposes to continue work it has been doing over the last two years in partnership with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California. WICHE will serve as a subcontractor on a project to progress the equity agenda in state-level policymaking and its implementation at the campus level. It will enable the two organizations to work collaboratively to make racial/ethnic equity more transparent in states’ policy and programmatic efforts to increase degree completion. The project will familiarize state leaders with tools and techniques to enable them to better monitor the state of equity in college completion, create a cohort of professionals with these capabilities, and strengthen the development and use of benchmarks and metrics for assessing and tracking equity in college completion.

Relationship to WICHE Mission
This project directly supports WICHE’s mission to promote access and success in postsecondary education of underrepresented populations.

Background
WICHE has been a partner on a Ford Foundation project entitled Educational Equity and Postsecondary Student Success: A CUE and WICHE Partnership for Policy Research and Analysis since October 2009. During this project WICHE worked with data from Nevada to prepare analyses of how students in Nevada’s public institutions progressed through milestones and success points, disaggregated by race/ethnicity. CUE and WICHE subsequently worked with staff at the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) to disseminate the findings to campuses, regents, and others and to facilitate dialogues about how to use the findings in improving policy and practice for the purpose of reducing equity gaps and enhancing overall performance.

As this project is winding down, CUE has received interest from the Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation, which are interested in supporting additional work consistent with these goals and extending CUE’s and WICHE’s involvement in closing educational gaps in more states. CUE expects to submit a proposal by the end of September.

Project Description
Just as the nation and the individual states focus greater attention to the goal of expanding educational attainment as a necessary ingredient for economic prosperity and security, the fastest-growing populations are those which have persistently lower levels of educational attainment. Shrinking that gap has become ever more important as a result, and to do so states and postsecondary institutions could benefit from more intentional, equity-based structures, processes, and tools.

The primary goal of this new project is to collaborate with CUE in order to support policy and programmatic efforts targeted at degree completion by working with states and institutions to build capacity for equity-minded analysis, encourage and sustain purposeful interrogation of relevant data and information, and foster critical inquiry that can build on the strengths of academic values. This project will also incorporate and capitalize on similar national initiatives already occurring in many states, including efforts such as Complete College America. Ultimately, the project aims to identify and scale up strategies that have worked to reduce equity gaps at smaller scales and to focus on reducing those gaps with cost-effective strategies.

Staff and Fiscal Impact
The project is expected to defray at least a portion of the personnel and related costs of one staff member in the Policy Analysis and Research unit, as well as a smaller share of the personnel costs of WICHE’s president. It is expected that the contract will also cover travel and other expenses related to WICHE’s involvement in the grant.

Action Requested
Approval to receive and expend funds to support WICHE’s involvement as a partner in this project.
Existing Activities

**Adult College Completion Network.** WICHE manages a learning network to support Lumina’s Adult Degree Completion Initiative called the Adult College Completion (ACC) Network. The ACC Network unites organizations and agencies working to increase college completion by adults with prior college credits but no degree. Key components include: 1) an interactive website (www.adultcollegecompletion.org); 2) meetings and conferences for grantees and others invited to participate in network activities; 3) webinars to highlight effective strategies for serving adults; 4) briefs and reports on lessons learned; 5) a repository of higher education policies related to adult learners; 6) a listserv to expedite network communications; 7) presentations at regional/national meetings; 8) social and communications media use to engage grantees and other stakeholders in discussions about adult degree completion; and 9) activities to be determined as the network develops in consultation with Lumina Foundation (e.g., hosted “lab” visits to best-practice locations and leveraging activities with programs such as the College Access Challenge Grant Consortium and Network).

**Annual Tuition and Fees report.** WICHE’s Policy Analysis and Research unit annually produces a report detailing tuition and fees charges for every public institution in the West. The report includes charges for resident and nonresident graduate and undergraduate students in a number of tables, allowing for easy comparisons and some historical information. The unit has made several changes over the years to ensure a higher quality of data and is always looking for ways to make the report more usable and effective. The 2010-11 edition incorporated a number of changes designed to: reduce the number of tables overall and reduce duplication, add enrollment-weighted averages to state and institution-type tables to ensure that the report could better reflect the prices typical students face, and make the data publicly available in an Excel format online.

**Non-traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners.** With funding from Lumina Foundation for Education, *Non-traditional No More* has worked with Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, and South Dakota 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. The project employs two strategies: 1) identifying ready adults; and 2) building a path to college success. The first strategy is designed to help states and institutions identify their ready adults. This work includes mining state data systems and engaging partnerships with other public or private data system partners to identify each state’s ready adults. The second strategy focuses on academic policies, financial aid/financing, student support services, and communications (marketing and information strategies designed to reach out to the ready adult population). Work continues with North Dakota on this project.

**Legislative Advisory Committee.** WICHE created the Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC) in 1995 to inform the WICHE Commission and staff about significant legislative issues related to higher education and provide input on WICHE initiatives. In addition, WICHE staff serves the LAC by informing members about emerging policy issues in the West. The LAC meets annually, and members are invited to various WICHE activities, such as regional and national policy forums.

**State Policy Inventory Database Online.** The State Policy Inventory Database Online (SPIDO), the nation’s only online searchable database of higher education policies, provides state and national policymakers, education leaders, practitioners, and education consumers with an inventory of state-level policies and resources in key policy issue areas related to access and success in higher education. WICHE staff is in the process of rebuilding and retooling this resource, which will be called WICHE’s Higher Education Policy Database and launched in December 2011.

**Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity methodology review and expansion.** *Knocking* is widely used throughout the nation by postsecondary institutions, state agencies, legislatures, governors’ offices, K-12 schools, media, libraries, businesses, and others interested in the future size and composition of enrollment demand for higher education. In the wake of the most recent edition’s publication in March 2008, Policy Analysis and Research unit staff have made numerous presentations on its findings (and related demographic information) and continue to respond to media and other inquiries. With support from its traditional partners, ACT and the College Board, the unit has begun a project to
review the methodology, examine how its analyses could be extended to be of greater use to the education and policy communities that use it, and prepare the next edition of the publication.

**College Access Challenge Grant Consortium and Network.** The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) is a federally funded formula grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education. In 2010 Congress passed the Student Financial Aid and Responsibility Act, which increased annual funding for the CACG program from $66 million to $150 million, boosted the minimum annual grant award to $1.5 million, and extended the program through FY 2014. States can participate in WICHE’s activities through the consortium, which involves WICHE administering the state program, or through the network, which is a collaborative council composed of designated staff from each of the states. While the level of WICHE-related services differ, both options allow CACG states the opportunity to learn from each other, share best practices and lessons learned, and examine current evidence-based research. The CACG Consortium is composed of Alaska and Idaho, and the CACG Network is made up of the consortium states plus Nevada, North Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. States are still welcome to join the consortium or network.

**Facilitating Development of a Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange.** The principal objective of this project is to pilot a data exchange among several states, allowing for more comprehensive analyses of the production, stock, and flows of human capital through a regional, multistate approach. Working initially with four member states – Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Hawai’i – WICHE is coordinating efforts to develop the necessary architecture for the exchange of data, effectively govern the exchange, produce standard reports, and ensure the protection of privacy. This project complements the many efforts underway, stimulated by the infusion of $400 million in federal grants over the last several years and many more millions in philanthropic support, to develop statewide longitudinal data systems. Specifically, it will focus on answering two principal policy questions with evidence drawn from the participating states: 1) How are former high school students from participating states performing in postsecondary education and the workforce in participating states? and 2) How are former postsecondary students from participating states performing in the workforce in participating states? In doing so the multistate data exchange will provide rich information about the stock and flow of skills and abilities (represented by education and training) of various populations within a given state; gaps in attainment and employment between population groups based on demography and socioeconomic status; and the mobility of the U.S. population across state borders.

**Exploration of issues related to undocumented students.** WICHE staff is preparing a policy brief examining data, policies, and issues related to undocumented students and how they are shaping the landscape of education and workforce in the West. Given the keen interest in this topic, the Policy unit will continue to monitor and track how the policy landscape shifts over time.

**Benchmarks: WICHE Region.** This annual document tracks 15 indicators of progress toward improving access and success, affordability, and higher education finance from a regional perspective.

**Electronic Fact Book: Policy Indicators for Higher Education.** This online repository of data relevant to higher education policy is regularly updated. Its domains include access, affordability, demographics, economic indicators, faculty, finance, preparation, progression, and workforce. Data are provided at the state level for all WICHE states.

**Policy Insights.** Policy Insights is a short report series covering a wide array of timely higher education policy issues.

**Electronic Policy Alerts and Stat Alerts.** Policy and Stat Alerts are WICHE’s periodic e-mail notices of new policy and data-related reports.

**Policy Publications Clearinghouse.** The Policy unit maintains a database of policy publications in a continuing effort to serve as a clearinghouse for the WICHE states. The documents include studies, reports, surveys and policy briefs published by various research and public policy organizations.

**Western Policy Exchanges.** Reports on the meetings and discussions among the West’s key leaders in higher education policy issues.
New Directions

Technical assistance with state financial aid program design and funding (single-state support, as requested). The Policy Analysis and Research unit has become recognized as an expert on the “shared responsibility” model for distributing need-based financial aid, as well as other state grant aid funding approaches. We occasionally receive requests to assist states with rethinking their program design. Such projects are typically done on a contract basis, depending on how well they fit in with existing workload.

Support for Washington’s Opportunity Scholarship Program. In 2010 Washington enacted a new financial aid program that uniquely intermingles public and private funds and oversight in order to incentivize students from low- and middle-income families to pursue baccalaureate degrees in a STEM field. Working with NCHEMS, WICHE expects to provide an assessment framework for the state and its partners (principally Microsoft and Boeing) to evaluate the success of the program, as well as to consult on how to most effectively implement the design under the constraints of the statute.

On the Horizon

Teacher preparation and professional development related to the Common Core State Standards. WICHE is proposing a project that will work with Western states to prepare preservice and veteran teachers to teach to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English/language arts and mathematics. This project will assist interested states in the WICHE region to prepare teachers at varying stages in their careers to teach to the CCSS in an effort to be prepare all students for college and careers.

Serving Student Soldiers of the West: Policy and Practice Solutions. With many veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq, states and postsecondary institutions are faced with how to best serve them at a time of increased demand for higher education and tight fiscal budgets. WICHE is proposing a project that will work to increase access to and success in higher education for military students and their families in the Western region. Specifically, the project aims to increase awareness of state and institutional policymakers about the demographics, needs, and challenges of the military population in higher education; identify state and institutional policies that create barriers to or enhance access and success for military students and their families; and assist states and institutions in developing clear, seamless degree pathways for military personnel, veterans, and their families.

Research and analysis of outcome-based funding approaches. Increasingly, states are recognizing that enrollment-based funding formulas do not create particularly powerful incentives for institutions to prioritize degree/certificate completion. Several states are making adjustments (or are considering doing so) in their financing strategies to reward institutions for retaining and graduating students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. The Policy Analysis and Research unit is interested in researching how such policies have impacted educational attainment, as data allow.

Exploring strategies for improving the delivery of remedial and developmental education. Remedial education is currently very expensive for states and institutions, and the results are unsatisfactory. WICHE intends to develop a project that would build on current emerging practices in the field to help states more effectively and efficiently target remedial education to students, particularly adult learners.

Building capacity to support state college completion plans. Continuing a partnership with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California, WICHE is planning a new project to help states and postsecondary institutions focus attention on how to shrink educational attainment gaps. This proposed project will build off a prior effort supported by the Ford Foundation, under which the two organizations worked collaboratively with the state of Nevada and its higher education data to identify where along educational pathways students from underrepresented populations were more likely to leak out and to use that information to spark conversations about policies and practices that held the promise of closing such gaps. The new project will extend that work to additional WICHE states.

Identifying the most effective college persistence and success projects and working to bring them to scale. As the United States responds to the current economic crisis and the increased demand for a more educated workforce, many are looking to postsecondary education and training for solutions. For the last several years, multiple
Developing more effective web portals. WICHE and WCET have examined state web portals designed to help students navigate the transfer process. Future work will build on this effort.

Policy and Mental Health Program collaboration on recidivism reduction in the prison population. State corrections policy has endured significant changes in the past 25 years. While historically based in a belief that those who are incarcerated should be rehabilitated if possible, the 1980s brought a significant shift in philosophy to one that focused more on punishment than on rehabilitation. State policymakers heeded the call to be “tough on crime” and passed much more punitive legislation, including mandatory sentencing and “three strikes, you’re out” laws, which over time have resulted in increased pressure on state budgets. In 2001, however, there was yet another shift in public opinion. The 9/11 attacks propelled terrorism onto the forefront of the public’s mind. Public Agenda reports that in 2006, 80 percent of Americans felt that defending the U.S. against terrorism should be a top priority for Congress, while 62 percent felt that reducing crime should be. With corrections making up a larger share of state budgets and the public no longer focused as much on crime, the time might right for state policymakers to revisit their stance on the issue. WICHE is exploring a project related to reducing recidivism through higher education in an effort to develop more effective and sustainable policy resulting in reduced pressure on state budgets, less crime, and in some cases, maybe even economic development strategies.

Workforce credentialing systems. ACT has been pushing a National Workforce Readiness Certificate based on its WorkKeys assessments (and there exist similar initiatives). The Policy Analysis and Research unit has been trying to stay abreast of such developments and would be interested both in helping states forge stronger ties between postsecondary education and the business community through the development of a common language surrounding competency that this activity helps promote, as well as in conducting research on the efficacy of such efforts.

Forging collaborations between Western higher education agencies and institutions and state department of labor and workforce development. The Policy Analysis and Research unit has in the past worked with states to highlight higher education’s workforce development mission. It has also sought to help states strengthen the connection between the activities of their higher education institutions and their workforce development training programs. We hope to build upon that body of work by promoting a more explicit focus on how state workforce needs can be met specifically through better service to racial/ethnic minorities and other underrepresented populations. It is apparent that in many states, failure to adequately prepare these fast-growing populations in high-demand fields (not just get them a degree) could severely impair their economic prosperity in the long run. At the same time, the fast-growing, traditionally underrepresented populations present an opportunity to meet workforce demands, if only states could find scalable models of particular effectiveness. Additionally, there are too few resources available to states to help them understand not only how to dismantle silos to their respective workforce development and higher education but also how state-level and federal policies related to the two areas can be made to be complementary. The Policy Analysis and Research unit is interested in pursuing the capacity to build upon its expertise in these areas as part of the project targeting underrepresented populations.

Expanding the Rocky Mountain Collaborative to Transform the Health Professions Workforce initiative. Building off a successful meeting in April 2009 of representatives from six WICHE states, this effort is aimed at helping states expand the pipeline of underrepresented populations into health professions fields. Pending our ability to secure additional funding, WICHE would be interested in replicating the meeting, including lessons learned, in other member states.

Assessing the landscape for state policy on student-learning outcomes. International benchmarking is an increasingly valuable source of information in a globally competitive marketplace, as shown by the visibility and perceived relevance of the educational attainment figures released by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Likewise, the public is demanding to know what they are getting out of higher education, increasingly in terms of learning outcomes. And with heightened attention to increasing graduation rates and numbers, concern has risen about whether such pressures could lead to reductions in the quality of education offered and received. While the current efforts to enhance state-level student record databases will provide much better information on the quantity of higher education’s output, these efforts will do little to address issues of quality. Yet it will be just as
important for states, institutions, and students themselves to know whether students are learning what they need to know and to be able to do. The next wave of policy will almost certainly focus on issues of measuring and improving student learning.