Plenary Session II: What’s Up in the West? Where the Western States Are on Setting College Completion Goals

The “completion agenda” – the term within higher education circles that describes the movement toward increased degree attainment – has dominated public policy discussions and driven policy actions at the federal, state, institutional (and in some places, municipal) levels over the past several years. This broad agenda has been defined by national leaders such as President Obama; certain philanthropic organizations, including Lumina Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and others who have established a variety of specific national targets that the country should aim to meet within a designated timeframe. In part as a response to this movement, many states have set their own individual goals through participation in initiatives like Complete College America and Complete to Compete (the National Governors Association’s effort, launched in 2010 through a chair’s initiative) or by adopting state strategic or master plans. In this fast-paced world of higher education policy, the discussion and action surrounding the completion agenda continues to develop and change. First, the targets set by the different states in the region differ widely: some have set extremely ambitious goals, while others have not set any goals whatsoever. And what began almost entirely as a discussion about associate and baccalaureate degrees has evolved into a productive, necessary dialogue about alternative credentials, including high-value certificates, even though these are still in the early stages of being defined and broadly understood. Further, the manner in which states use these targets as a deliberate means to drive policy is not necessarily consistent across states. What is constant everywhere, however, is that the completion agenda is spurring discussion about innovation, new approaches to accomplish intended objectives, and even new ways to implement old strategies, all of which are designed to increase the completion of postsecondary credentials. This session will outline the goals that the WICHE states and territories have identified, examine progress toward those targets, and set the context for an interactive discussion about where WICHE as a region hopes to be in the future.

Speaker and Facilitator:
Demaree K. Michelau, director of policy analysis, WICHE

Facilitated Discussion on: What’s Up in the West? Where the Western States Are on Setting College Completion Goals

Biographical Information on the Speaker/Facilitator

Demarée K. Michelau is the director of policy analysis at WICHE. In this role, she comanages WICHE’s Policy Analysis and Research unit and directs
externally funded projects related to adult learners and college access and success. The author of numerous reports and policy briefs, she also has experience in a variety of higher education policy issues, including the Common Core State Standards, articulation and transfer, accelerated-learning options, college affordability, 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 and Ph.D. in political science from the University of Colorado at Boulder.