Since 1953 Arizona has been a member of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), a 16-member commission working to boost access to higher education for students in the West and, as importantly, to ensure their success.

In the six decades since Arizona joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of essential ways.

- Tens of thousands of students from Arizona have attended undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in other Western states through WICHE’s Student Exchange Program, saving millions of dollars, thanks to reduced tuition rates. In just one of the programs, the Western Undergraduate Exchange, Arizona students and their families have saved some $74.6 million since 1998, when Arizona began using the program. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for Arizona’s return on investment.)
- Arizona has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- Arizona has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

WICHE and Arizona have shared a remarkably fruitful history. But their prospects for the future are even more exciting.

**Doing the Math: Arizona’s Return on Investment**

In 2013-14 Arizona, its institutions, and its students saved $16.9 million through WICHE and spent $131,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 129-fold return on investment.

In the last 5 years, Arizona students’ savings from WUE alone have added up to $42.1 million, yielding a 67-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.

**WICHE’s Student Exchange & Related Programs**

**State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA).** A new initiative, SARA addresses the critical topic of postsecondary distance education regulation. Funded by a $2.3 million Lumina Foundation grant, SARA is a national initiative spearheaded by the National Council for SARA, the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board, and WICHE. In an era when students can take online courses from institutions based all over the country, states have been faced with the challenging task of authorizing all out-of-state institutions offering online courses to their students, while institutions have often had to pay substantial fees to the many states in which they operate. SARA offers a cost-effective, efficient, straightforward framework for authorization that institutions, states, and students can trust. The National SARA Council, housed at WICHE, coordinates SARA’s work across the four regional compacts.

Arizona is active in all three WICHE Student Exchange Programs: the Western Undergraduate Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2013-14 Arizona’s students and families saved over $14.2 million. Arizona saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

**Western Undergraduate Exchange.** Arizona students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Arizona’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1998. In 2013-14, 1,336 students from Arizona are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving more than $9.6 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $7,178. In the last 10 years, students have saved $65.9 million.

Arizona benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Arizona’s institutions can choose how many out-of-state slots to offer and in which areas, allowing them to make the best use of their resources by accepting students in
underenrolled programs. There's a workforce benefit for the state, too, as students often stay in Arizona after graduating. In 2013-14 Arizona received 6,788 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Arizona has sent 2,452 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in a host of critical fields, including dentistry, occupational therapy, optometry, physician assistant, osteopathic medicine, and veterinary medicine. Historically, 83 percent of PSEP students return to Arizona to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Arizona’s postgraduates also participate in graduate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to over 314 high-quality, distinctive programs (“distinctive” meaning that they’re offered at only four or fewer institutions in the WICHE region) at 56 institutions in all WICHE states. WRGP programs run the gamut, but emerging social, environmental, and resource-management fields are particular strengths, as are innovative interdisciplinary programs. In 2013-14 Arizona sent 56 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 274.

**Internet Course Exchange (ICE).** Northern Arizona University is a member of WICHE ICE, an alliance of member institutions and systems with a set of policies, procedures, and support systems for sharing distance-delivered courses among two- and four-year institutions in the WICHE region.

**WICHE’s Added Value**

Arizona gains added value from WICHE’s programs in policy, workforce development, technology, mental health, and other areas.

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Arizona has been an active participant in projects to support better-informed decision making at the state level. WICHE initiatives have been sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and others. Teams of policymakers and educational leaders from Arizona participate each year in regional policy forums and meetings hosted by WICHE. WICHE has also worked closely with Arizona decision makers in a number of key areas, including performance funding, the alignment of college education with workforce demand, and financial aid.

WICHE’s Lumina-funded *Getting What You Pay For: Understanding Higher Education Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid* project promoted informed decision making and the alignment of higher education appropriations, tuition, and financial aid policy by state legislators, to improve student access and success. WICHE sent copies of the project’s eight policy briefs to all members of the Arizona Legislature.

Arizona also participated in another Lumina project, *Best Practices in Statewide Articulation and Transfer Systems*, which seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how states coordinate their articulation and transfer programs for students who move from two-year to four-year institutions, focusing strategies that increase access to and success in higher education.

Arizona participated in a Gates-funded meeting that brought together the stewards of the data systems in 14 WICHE states for discussions around linking data internally and with other states. A central topic was how to address the challenges to data sharing presented by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. State representatives also attended the Western Summit on Workforce Certification and Higher Education for policymakers in the West, held in response to the national demand for more highly skilled workers in a host of fields, from healthcare to high tech. Participants explored how states might use a workforce certification system – which would allow business and higher education to communicate with a common language about workforce demand and supply – to improve their ability to prepare individuals for productive careers and enhance the health of their economies.

Additionally, the Arizona Board of Regents and the University of Arizona participate in the Western Academic Leadership Forum, whose members address regional higher education issues and engage in cooperative resource sharing. The Western Alliance for Community College Academic Leaders brings academic leaders of community colleges and technical schools and systems together with state governing and coordinating boards associated with two-year institutions to exchange ideas and information, share

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**Figure 1. Arizona Savings and Revenues through WICHE Programs in 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$9,590,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEP</td>
<td>$3,889,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$784,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$14,263,708</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Revenue to AZ Institutions (PSEP) | $2,599,559 |
|****TOTAL****                     | **$16,863,267** |
resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. The Maricopa Community Colleges and all its institutions are members, as are Eastern Arizona College, and Yavapai College. The Forum and the Alliance held their 2012 annual meetings in Phoenix, and the Alliance returns to Tempe in 2014.

**Technology.** Several Arizona colleges and universities are active participants in the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), a national membership cooperative that accelerates the adoption of effective practices and policies to advance excellence in technology-enhanced teaching and learning in higher education. Institutional members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies and exemplars of successful adoption of learning technology innovation in practice.

Key WCET activities include an annual meeting, leadership summits, national webcasts, and listserv-based discussions among members. Major focus areas include state authorization, academic integrity and student authentication, competency-based education and alternative credentials, analytics in higher education, and emerging technologies.

Arizona colleges and universities have been recognized for cutting-edge uses of educational technology tools and practices through the WCET Outstanding Work (WOW) award. Rio Salado College, Arizona State University, Cochise College, University of Arizona, and the University of Phoenix have been honored for their effective and innovative uses of technology in education. Rio Salado College is a participant in the Transparency by Design project, a consumer education and accountability strategy benefiting adult students and the online higher education community.

**Mental Health.** A nucleus for researching mental health policy and a provider of technical assistance in such areas as service innovation, system reform, workforce development, and program evaluation, WICHE’s Mental Health Program is another well-used resource. The program did a study for the Arizona State Hospital in Phoenix, making recommendations to improve how the hospital’s security department functioned. WICHE was also asked to recommend ways that interactions between patients, residents, medical staff, visitors, and security personnel at the Arizona State Hospital and Arizona Community Protection and Treatment Center could be bettered. In addition, one Arizona higher education campus participated in a research study, funded by the National Institute for Mental Health, that focused on campus mental health and the effects of mental health first aid training for campus residence life staff.

**Other Initiatives.** Arizona participated in the WICHE-managed State Scholars Initiative (SSI), a national business/education partnership effort working to increase the number of students who take a rigorous curriculum in high school; its program was funded by a grant of $300,000 from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

The Pima County Community College system, with six campuses and four learning and education centers, participates in the Master Property Program (MPP). The program helps institutions in the West reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact in 1994 and expanded to the WICHE region in 2004, the MPP includes 58 member institutions with total insured values of $86.4 billion. WICHE is also partnering with MHEC to offer MHECare, a new health program providing vetted, competitively priced medical benefits for students. Underwritten by UnitedHealthcare StudentResources, MHECare offers a variety of plans.

“I was passionate about becoming an osteopathic physician, but there are no public universities in my home state of Arizona that offer a D.O. degree. The steep cost of attending a private medical school was a harsh reality of pursuing my dreams of a career as a physician. Receiving PSEP support from WICHE will greatly reduce my debt and it allows me to focus on succeeding in medical school. It also reduces the pressure to go into a higher-paying medical specialty in order to pay off immense student loan debt. I look forward to serving the residents of Arizona who are in need of healthcare, and I am so thankful to WICHE for this invaluable program.”

– Rachel, Arizona resident, Class of 2016, Midwestern University, Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine

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– Charlie, Arizona resident, Class of 2014, A. T. Still University, Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health
Arizona & WICHE’s Leadership

Leah Bornstein, president of Coconino College, Flagstaff, is the immediate past chair of the WICHE Commission, whose members mold the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Arizona’s other commissioners are: Chris Bustamante, president, Rio Salado College, Tempe; and Eileen Klein, president, Arizona Board of Regents, Phoenix.

WICHE also seeks assistance and advice from policymakers, educators, administrators and legislators. WICHE’s Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC), composed of legislator-members from each state – including Arizona Representative Jeff Dial and Senator Robert Meza (appointment pending) – has been crucial in this regard. The LAC works to keep the commission’s Executive Committee and staff current on significant legislative issues related to higher education, provides input on WICHE initiatives, and advises staff on a host of issues. WICHE staff also serves the LAC, informing its members about emerging policy issues in the West.

"The WICHE PSEP program has helped me tremendously in achieving my educational and career goals. WICHE not only helped me gain admission to dental school, but also helps keep my student loans at a reasonable level. I am unsure if I would be able to realize my dreams of opening a dental practice without the financial assistance of Arizona through WICHE’s PSEP. I hope that all WICHE member states will continue to fund the program and enable their students to achieve their goals."

– Christopher, Arizona resident, Class of 2016, University of Colorado, School of Dental Medicine

WICHE Commission & Staff

The WICHE Commission’s 16 members include representatives from 15 Western states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate). Members work collaboratively to provide educational access and excellence for all citizens.

WICHE and its staff are headquartered in Boulder, CO, and operate out of the State Higher Education Policy Center, which WICHE owns with the State Higher Education Executive Officers association and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

Staff leadership includes:

David Longanecker, president
Erin Barber, executive assistant to the president and to the commission
Mollie McGill, interim co-director, WCET
Jere Mock, vice president, Programs and Services
Dennis Mohatt, vice president, behavioral health
Russell Poulin, interim co-director, WCET

How can I find out more about WICHE?

Visit our website at www.wiche.edu or contact President David Longanecker at 303.541.0201.

February 2014