CALIFORNIA & WICHE
Working Together
for Over a Half Century

Since 1955 California 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 five-plus decades since California joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of essential ways.

- Tens of thousands of students from California 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, California students and their families have saved over $532 million since 1997, when the state began participating. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for California’s return on investment.)
- California has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- California has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

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

**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.

California is active in two of the three WICHE Student Exchange Programs: the Western Undergraduate Exchange, and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2013-14 California’s students and families saved over $126.7 million. California saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

**Western Undergraduate Exchange.** California students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond California’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1997. In 2013-14, 13,992 students from California are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving over $122.2 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $8,731. Since California began participating in the exchange, students have saved $532.4 million.

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

In 2013-14 California, its institutions, and its students saved or brought in some $128.2 million through WICHE and spent $131,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 971-fold return on investment.

In the last 5 years, California students’ savings from WUE alone have totaled $418.5 million, yielding a 674-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.
California benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. California’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 California after graduating. In 2013-14 California received 901 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** California receives professional students through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). In 2013-14 it received 78 PSEP students and $1.45 million in support fees.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** California’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 California sent 330 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 15.

**Internet Course Exchange (ICE).** WICHE ICE is 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.

**Figure 1. California Savings and Revenues through WICHE in 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$122,170,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$4,621,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$126,791,563</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue to CA</td>
<td>$1,449,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions (PSEP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$128,241,467</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WICHE’s Added Value**

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

**Policy & Workforce Development.** California has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision making at the state level. WICHE initiatives have been sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, the U.S. Department of Education, and others. In addition, WICHE policy experts often visit the state to present or consult on a number of vital issues, including workforce needs and balancing the financial aid portfolio.

WICHE was asked by the California Legislative Analyst’s Office for its counsel on how to help the state address proposed cuts to financial aid programs. Staff also served as an expert resource at a Public Policy Institute of California meeting, addressing the changes necessary in the wake of Governor Brown’s decision to defund the California Postsecondary Education Commission, with the goal of ensuring that CPEC’s data collection was not lost. Staff discussed how to move California’s efforts to link data statewide and across segments forward and provided a brief report of what other states are doing in terms of statewide data governance. In addition, WICHE President David Longanecker worked with the Legislative Analyst’s Office on state governance and testified before legislators on university presidents’ compensation systems.

WICHE’s Lumina-funded project Getting What You Pay For: Understanding Higher Education Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid 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 California Legislature. In addition, WICHE President David Longanecker did a presentation on student aid based on this research, addressing the state’s Special Committee on Postsecondary Education Reform. Longanecker delineated six principles of good public policy on student aid, provided examples of

— Jonathan, California resident, Class of 2014, University of Arizona, Master’s of Public Health - Epidemiology
how California measures up on each principle, and presented particularly strong evidence that California policies result in substantial federal benefits being left on the table.

California is partnering with the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California on the second phase of project that examines student progression and graduation rates, looking at differences by race/ethnicity in the achievement of milestones en route to postsecondary success (completion of remediation, 15 credits, 30 credits, postsecondary credential, etc.). The state also participated in the Lumina project Best Practices in Statewide Articulation and Transfer Systems, which sought 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 on strategies that increase access to and success in higher education.

California is one of five partner states participating in the Interstate Passport Initiative, which seeks to improve graduation rates, shorten time to degree, and save students money by addressing the two-year to four-year institution transfer problem at an interstate level. The two-year pilot project will focus on forging general education core transfer agreements based on learning outcomes between 28 institutions, including California State University, Sacramento and Sacramento City College.

California participated in 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 California State University System and University of California, San Diego are members of the Western Academic Leadership Forum, whose members address regional higher education issues and engage in resource sharing. Another WICHE initiative, 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 resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office and Modesto Junior College are members.

**Technology.** Several California 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. The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education was awarded the prestigious WCET WOW award in 2012 for NROC Developmental Math, a free, open program designed to increase the number of financially disadvantaged students who pass developmental math as a bridge to a college education.

WCET members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and exemplars of successful 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.

**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, program evaluation, and

“**My decision on where to attend graduate school came down to the University of Montana and another state school in the South. Montana was a better fit and the school I really wanted to attend but the other school was offering me more money. WRGP leveled the playing field and allowed me to make a decision based on my career aspirations instead of my wallet. Now I’m studying what I want, where I want, and I haven’t looked back.”**

Kevin, California resident, Class of 2015, University of Montana, Environmental Science & Natural Resource Journalism

“I was not going to attend a university because tuition and fees were just too expensive. WUE program gave me access to a less expensive education and an experience that I will always take with me. I am a first-generation college student and my family is proud. Thank you WUE!”

– Tara, California resident, Class of 2013, Northern Arizona University, Psychology
other areas, WICHE’s **Mental Health Program** is another well-used resource. Staff provided technical assistance to five California-based sites through the federal integrated care grant program of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Health Resources Services Administration. Three California higher education campuses 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 residence life staff.

**Other Initiatives.** The Master Property Program (MPP) helps institutions reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) and expanded to the WICHE region, 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.

**California & WICHE’s Leadership**

Dianne Harrison, president of California State University, Northridge, is the chair of the **WICHE Commission**, whose members mold the organization’s mission and set its priorities. California’s other commissioners are Christopher Cabaldon, principal, Capitol Impact, and mayor, City of West Sacramento; and Linda Thor, chancellor, Foothill-De Anza Community College District, Sunnyvale.

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 California Senator Ricardo Lara and Senator Carol Liu, 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.

**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-executive director, WCET
- **Jere Mock**, vice president, Programs and Services
- **Dennis Mohatt**, vice president, behavioral health
- **Russell Poulin**, interim co-executive 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.