Since 1959 Hawai‘i 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 Hawai‘i joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of essential ways.

- Tens of thousands of students from Hawai‘i 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, Hawai‘i students and their families have saved $175 million since 1988 when the program was founded. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for Hawai‘i’s return on investment.)

- Hawai‘i has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.

- Hawai‘i has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

WICHE and Hawai‘i 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.

Hawai‘i 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 Hawai‘i’s students and families saved $15.5 million in tuition. Hawai‘i saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Hawai‘i students have enrolled in undergraduate programs on the mainland through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2013-14, 1,734 students from Hawai‘i are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving $14 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $8,182. In the last 10 years, students have saved $116.4 million.

Hawai‘i benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Hawai‘i’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 Hawai‘i after graduating. In 2013-14 Hawai‘i received 2,586 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Hawai‘i has sent 1,251 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, physical therapy, and veterinary medicine. Historically, some 67 percent of PSEP students return to Hawai‘i to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Hawai‘i’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 Hawai‘i sent 22 students to out-of-state institutions, receiving 41.

**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.

Hawai‘i is one of four partner states participating in the Interstate Passport Initiative which has developed a new learning-outcomes-based framework for transfer. The goal of the effort is to improve graduation rates, shorten time to degree, and save money for the West’s increasingly mobile students by ensuring that they are not required to repeat learning they have already achieved. The interstate transfer framework is being rolled out in phases. 16 institutions in four states – including Leeward Community College and University of Hawai‘i West Oahu – have agreed to award the Passport to students who achieve its Phase I learning outcomes during the next five years.

**Figure 1. Hawai‘i Student Savings through WICHE in 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$14,187,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEP</td>
<td>$1,006,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$308,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,501,462</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WICHE’s Added Value**

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

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Hawai‘i 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 the state’s workforce needs and balancing the financial aid portfolio between grants, loans, and scholarships, as well as between merit- and need-based aid.

WICHE has assisted in Hawai‘i with its planning around tuition-setting and financial aid policy at the University of Hawai‘i (UH) system. WICHE staff discussed options and shared ideas from other states.

Hawai‘i was one of four states chosen to participate in the Gates-funded *Facilitating Development of a Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange* pilot project (the others were Idaho, Oregon, and Washington). The project attempts to enable a more comprehensive regional view of the creation of human capital and its flow among multiple states by exchanging data across K-12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Hawai‘i is receiving customized technical assistance, including a Hawai‘i-specific report, to aid the state in its examination of the data governance in place for each of those sectors, how data governance might be improved, and how the state can advance its efforts in developing its statewide longitudinal data system to meet state needs and fulfill commitments it made to the federal government as part of its successful Race to the Top application.

“I have been enrolled in the University of Arizona’s distance learning program for three years now. Previously I was living in Virginia and my tuition was paid for by the DoD, but when I moved to Hawaii to start a new job, I was concerned about how I was going to pay for out-of-state tuition. When I learned about WRGP, I was very excited and I immediately enrolled. WRGP has allowed me to continue my education without putting a large financial burden on my household. It’s a great way for non-resident Western students enrolled in distance learning programs to obtain an affordable education.”

– Scott, Hawai‘i resident, Class of 2014, University of Arizona, Optical Sciences
The state also participated in a Gates-funded meeting that brought together the stewards of the data systems in 14 of the WICHE states for discussions around linking data internally and with other states. A central topic of conversation was how to address the challenges to data sharing presented by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Another meeting was 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.

WICHE President David Longanecker has worked with the Governor’s Office and Senate Higher Education Committee to help them develop a state authorization process to certify nonpublic institutions to operate in Hawai’i.

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 Hawai’i Legislature. Hawai’i 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.

Additionally, Hawai’i has participated in 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. Hawai’i Community College, Honolulu Community College, Leeward Community College, Kapi’olani Community College, Kaua’i Community College, University of Hawai’i Maui College, and Windward Community College are members.

WICHE held its 2011 fall meeting in Hawai’i, drawing commissioners from 15 Western states. Brigham Young University-Hawaii in Laie was the site of the meeting.

**Technology.** Several Hawai’i 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. Hae Okimoto, director of academic technologies for the University of Hawai’i System, served as chair of WCET’s Steering Committee, ensuring its programs and services are relevant to the higher education community at large. In addition, Okimoto and her colleague, University of Hawai’i CIO David Lassner, both have received WCET’s highest honor, the Richard Jonsen Award, for their contributions to educational technology developments in higher 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 other areas, WICHE’s Mental Health Program is another well-used resource. Program staff wrote a successful application to receive funding through the Health Resources and Services Administration Network Development Planning Grant to develop a rural psychology internship consortium in Hawai’i. WICHE staff is leading the planning phase with local partners.

“I am so blessed to have the opportunity to study occupational therapy at Pacific University, thanks to Hawai’i’s generosity through WICHE’s Professional Student Exchange Program. It will be an honor to return to Hawaii and give back to the community, in gratitude for the affordable and quality education my home state helped me receive. Thank you, WICHE!”

— Laurie, Hawai’i resident, Class of 2016, Pacific University, Occupational Therapy
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.

Colorado & WICHE’s Leadership
The WICHE Commission, with three commissioners from each state, molds the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Hawai’i’s commissioners are Francisco Hernandez, vice chancellor for students, University of Hawai’i at Manoa, Honolulu; Carol Mon Lee, attorney, retired associate dean, University of Hawai’i Richardson School of Law, and former member, Hawai’i State Board of Education, Honolulu; and Steven Wheelwright, president, Brigham Young University-Hawaii, Laie.

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 Representative Isaac Choy and Senator Brian Taniguchi – 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, by 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.

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