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

- Tens of thousands of students from Nevada 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, Nevada students have saved $91.8 million since 1988 when the program was founded. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for Nevada’s return on investment.)
- Nevada has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- Nevada has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

WICHE and Nevada 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.

Nevada 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 Nevada’s students and families saved over $12 million. Nevada saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

**Western Undergraduate Exchange.** Nevada students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Nevada’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2013-14, 1,449 students from Nevada are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving $10.6 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $7,349. In the last 10 years, students have saved over $66 million.

Nevada benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Nevada’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 Nevada after graduating. In 2013-14 Nevada received 3,624 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Nevada has sent 1,438 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with 42 students currently studying in a host of critical fields, including optometry, pharmacy, physician assistant, and veterinary medicine. Nevada received 18 PSEP students from other states in 2013-14, along with $285,503 in support fees. Historically, 89 percent of PSEP students return to Nevada to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Nevada’s postgraduates also enroll in degree and certificate programs through the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers access to some 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 Nevada sent 45 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 21.

**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.

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

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Nevada has participated in projects supporting better-informed decision making at the state level. WICHE initiatives have been sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation, 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.

Nevada participates in the **Adult College Completion Network.** The ACC Network, funded by Lumina Foundation, is a nationwide collaborative learning network that shares promising strategies among institutions, organizations, state agencies, and others working to increase completion rates for adults with prior college credit. The network offers a listerv and webinars on issues related to adult completion, and an annual meeting of large-scale projects working in this area. Nevada was also chosen for an earlier, related Lumina-funded project: **Non-traditional No More.** WICHE worked with state leaders to identify the “ready adult” population – those who have almost enough credits to graduate but who have not yet returned to college – and help them earn their degrees. Over two years the state received $65,000 and technical assistance.

Nevada participated in WICHE’s **College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Network,** a federally funded formula grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who enroll and succeed in college. The network provides a forum for developing, implementing, and maintaining state CACG efforts, with states sharing best practices and lessons learned and receiving current evidence-based research.

Nevada 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. Representatives from the state also attended the **Western Summit on Workforce Certification and Higher Education** for policymakers.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$10,648,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEP</td>
<td>$754,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$630,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,033,019</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue to NV Institutions (PSEP)</td>
<td>$285,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,318,522</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Optometry school is quite an expense in and of itself, but thanks to WICHE’s Professional Student Exchange Program, I don’t have to worry as much about how I’m going to make my graduate studies affordable. I hope this program will continue to receive support and provide assistance to many more students across the western United States. Thank you WICHE!”

– Bryan, Nevada resident, Class of 2016, Pacific University, College of Optometry
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.

WICHE President David Longanecker has worked with the Nevada System of Higher Education on funding formulas and accountability systems. Staff also consulted with the provost of the University of Nevada, Reno, during his visit to WICHE’s offices for the Western Academic Leadership Forum meeting. And WICHE staff has produced targeted documents for the state, including a customized table from our annual Tuition and Fees report for NSHE staff usage.

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 Nevada Legislature.

Nevada 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 on strategies that increase access to and success in higher education.

Additionally, the Nevada System of Higher Education, Nevada State College, University of Nevada Reno, and the University of Nevada Las Vegas 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, will bring 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. Western Nevada College and Great Basin College are members.

**Technology.** Several Nevada colleges and universities are active participants in the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), a membership cooperative that accelerates the adoption of effective practices and policies to advance excellence in technology-enhanced teaching and learning in higher education. WCET partnered with Fred Lokken, dean at Truckee Meadows Community College, in a national webcast on changes in federal distance education policy to broaden awareness of the new requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act and call attention to concerns related to distance education, such as financial aid fraud. In addition, WCET featured the University of Nevada Las Vegas’s “concierge” program for returning adult students in its “Conversations with...” series.

WCET members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and exemplars of successful learning technology innovation in practice. WCET provides access to peers, colleagues, common interest groups, experts, and decision makers; communications tools that enable members to stay informed about developments affecting technology-enabled teaching and learning; and information about key developments affecting e-learning providers, such as new federal rules pertaining to distance education. WCET also manages multi-institutional projects, one aimed at adult online learners and another on large-scale student data aggregation and predictive analytics to improve student outcomes.

**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.

**Other Initiatives.** Another initiative, the Master Property Program (MPP), helps institutions reduce their insurance premiums and improve their coverage. Created by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact

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"Without WUE, I would not have had the opportunity to attend a large university outside of my home state. I am currently in my first year and just applied to my baccalaureate program here at Idaho State University. Now I have the ability to be all that I can, without crippling my parents or myself with student loan debt, or taking away from my two younger siblings’ educational opportunities. Without this program, I wouldn’t have been able to achieve my life-long dream."

– Grace, Nevada resident, Class of 2015, Idaho State University, Elementary Education with English Emphasis

"The PSEP program made veterinary school a much more affordable option. It gave me a little more financial stability in a career that can be fraught with excessive student loans."

– Katie, Nevada resident, Class of 2015, Colorado State University, College of Veterinary Medicine
in 1994 and expanded to the WICHE region in 2004, the MPP includes 58 member institutions with total insured values of $86.4 billion. The 10 institutions in the Nevada System of Higher Education are insured through the MPP and collectively have **saved several million** on their insurance costs. 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.

**Nevada & WICHE’s Leadership**

The **WICHE Commission**, with three commissioners from each member state, molds the organization’s mission and sets its priorities. Nevada’s commissioners are: Vance Farrow, industry specialist, healthcare, Governor’s Office of Economic Development, Las Vegas; and Vic Redding, vice chancellor of finance, Nevada System of Higher Education, Reno.

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 Nevada Senator Hardy, Senator Debbie Smith and Assembly Member Paul Aizley – 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.

**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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“A DNP program is not available in my home state of Nevada, which has been one of the hardest hit by the economic crisis. The University of Utah’s “distance option” and the resident WRGP tuition rate allowed me to consider furthering my education. Now I’m pursuing my dream of becoming a pediatric nurse practitioner and making a difference in the lives of the kids of Nevada. I am a first generation college graduate in my family, so years ago I never would have dreamed that I would now be preparing a doctorate. Thank you!”

– Angela, Nevada resident, Class of 2015, University of Utah, Doctorate of Nursing Practice