The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to become active in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education’s programs and initiatives. The other two U.S. Pacific territories – American Samoa and Guam – and the three freely associated states – Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau, also are eligible to participate and as they sign on, they will join CNMI collectively as the 16th member of WICHE. As part of its membership in WICHE, CNMI is participating in the Western Undergraduate Exchange which allows students from member states and territories to enroll in undergraduate programs in other member states and territories at deep discounts.

**WICHE 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.

The **Student Exchange Program** (SEP) provides students with access to out-of-state higher education options, along with significant tuition savings. Over 35,600 students are enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs outside their home states through SEP, saving $264.7 million in 2013-14. In WICHE’s **Western Undergraduate Exchange**, students pay no more than 150 percent of the receiving school’s resident tuition, substantially less than standard nonresident tuition. Through the **Western Regional Graduate Program**, over 1,100 students are enrolled in 314 distinctive graduate programs at 56 institutions. More than 15,100 professionals have received home state support when enrolled in programs in another Western state through the **Professional Student Exchange Program**. And WICHE’s **Internet Course Exchange**, an alliance of member institutions and systems, broadens student access to online courses and programs.

WICHE’s **Policy Analysis and Research** unit 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. WICHE policy experts often visit members to present or consult on vital issues, including workforce needs, financial aid policy development, governance, and performance funding. WICHE also offers policy and information resources that support better-informed decision making at the state level.

The **WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies** (WCET) is a cooperative whose members work to accelerate the adoption of effective practices and policies to advance excellence in technology-enhanced teaching and learning in higher education. WCET members have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and exemplars of successful learning technology innovation in practice. WCET also manages multi-institutional projects, including one on large-scale student data aggregation and predictive analytics to improve student outcomes.

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 (MHP) is another well-used resource. The program works with the public mental health systems of the West, higher education, mental health practitioners and administrators, and consumers and family members to improve training in mental health, and expand public mental health resources.

WICHE’s Leadership
The WICHE Commission, with three commissioners from each member, molds the organization’s mission and set its priorities. The U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states will be represented by three commissioners from CNMI, until other states or territories begin to participate. They are: Sharon Hart, president, Northern Marianas College, Saipan; Jude Hofschneider, lieutenant governor, CNMI, Saipan; and Joshua Sasamoto, president, Pacific Development and Marianas Home, Saipan.

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 and territory, has been crucial in this regard (CNMI appointments are pending). The LAC works to keep WICHE’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.

WICHE Commission & Staff
The WICHE Commission’s 16 members include representatives from 15 Western states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, 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.

March 2014

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“[I visited four high schools in Saipan and student interest was high; 30 to 100 students attended each presentation and many have applied. They were hungry to learn more about college options and were appreciative that a representative would travel a great distance to meet with them. Many have never been to the mainland and wondered how they would adjust and wanted to know the resources available to help them succeed so far from home. Many are high achieving students and enthusiastic leaders in their communities. Many are bilingual and have much to contribute culturally to any campus community].”

– Kenley Jones, Associate Director of Admissions, Southern Utah University