Since 1953 Utah 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 Utah joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of essential ways.

- Thousands of students from Utah 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, Utah students and their families have saved $58 million since 1988, when the program was founded. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for Utah’s return on investment.)

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

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

WICHE and Utah 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.

Utah 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 Utah’s students and families saved over $6.7 million. Utah saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Utah students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Utah’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2013-14, 913 students from Utah are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving some $5.1 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $5,597. In the last 10 years, students have saved $41.8 million. Utah benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Utah’s institutions can choose how many out-of-state slots to offer and in

Doing the Math: Utah’s Return on Investment

In 2013-14 Utah, its institutions, and its students saved or brought in some $6.7 million through WICHE and spent $131,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 51-fold return on investment.

In the last 5 years, Utah students’ savings from WUE alone have totaled more than $23.7 million, yielding a 38-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.
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 Utah after graduating. In 2013-14 Utah received 814 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Utah has sent 699 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in a host of critical fields, including optometry, podiatry, and veterinary medicine. Historically, some 69 percent of PSEP students return to Utah to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Utah’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 Utah sent 63 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 102.

**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.

Utah 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. Sixteen institutions in four states – including all of Utah’s public institutions – have agreed to award the Passport to students who achieve its Phase I learning outcomes during the next five years.

**WICHE’s Added Value**

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

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Utah 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 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. Utah decision makers also keep current on pressing policy issues developing all over the nation through WICHE’s extensive network.

Utah participates in the **College Access Regional (CAR) Network**, a collaborative effort that brings together state projects focused on increasing postsecondary access and success for low-income students. The CAR Network began as the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Network, an effort to spur collaboration between states who were receiving the federal CACG, which aims to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education. In 2013, WICHE expanded eligibility for the Network to include other large scale programs focused on similar goals.

Utah worked with the **Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities**, to increase the number of low-income students enrolling and

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**Figure 1. Utah Savings and Revenues through WICHE, 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$5,110,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEP</td>
<td>$691,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$882,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td>$6,684,066</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue to UT Institutions (PSEP)</th>
<th>$27,378</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$6,711,444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“I’ve always known I wanted to study marine biology, but that’s difficult in my land-locked home state. Thus, I began looking at schools on the West Coast and fell in love with Western Washington University. The WUE program allowed me to study what I was passionate about in the Pacific Northwest, without burdening my parents too much. Without WUE, I’d most likely be pursuing a major that didn’t hold my interest and waiting for graduate school. At Western, I have the opportunity to get hands-on experience through engaging labs, study in a university-owned marine center, and even go on study abroad trips to learn about tropical marine biology in Mexico!”

– Kaitlyn, Utah resident, Class of 2014, Western Washington University, Creative Writing and Marine Biology
succeeding in Advanced Placement courses and tests, with funding from the federal Advanced Placement Incentive Program.

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 Utah Legislature.

Utah 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 Utah System of Higher Education and Dixie State University 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. Salt Lake Community College and Snow College are members.

Technology. Several Utah 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. Western Governors University participated in the Transparency by Design project, a consumer education and accountability strategy benefiting adult students and the online higher education community.

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 has also managed multi-institutional projects, including 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. Southern Utah University participated in a research study, funded by the National Institute for Mental Health, that focuses on campus mental health and the effects of mental health first aid training for campus residence life staff.

Other Initiatives. Utah 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.

“With all of the talk about new healthcare policies, I was worried about the amount of debt that I would accumulate by the time I graduated from optometry school. I moved forward with the process, hoping that I would be able to get a good job afterwards. However, I found out about the WICHE program and decided to apply. So much of my stress was relieved when I learned that I was awarded the PSEP scholarship. It has allowed me fully focus on my schooling. Thanks to PSEP, I will be a better doctor and will be able to provide better care to my future patients.”

– Jason, Utah resident, Class of 2017, Pacific University, College of Optometry

“I am currently studying at Midwestern University in the Podiatric Medicine program. My wife and I are so grateful for the assistance that WICHE’s PSEP has given us. It gives us peace of mind knowing that our indebtedness will be greatly reduced! The stresses of school are many, and it helps to know that we have some financial assistance through this program. Thanks to Utah’s participation in WICHE’s PSEP, I will soon be the doctor I want to be and can return to Utah to practice. I plan to “pay it forward” as soon as I can! Thanks WICHE! ”

– James, Utah resident, Class of 2015, Midwestern University, Doctor of Podiatric Medicine
Utah’s Westminster College participates in another initiative, the Master Property Program (MPP), which helps institutions 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.

**Utah & WICHE’s Leadership**

The WICHE Commission, with three commissioners from each state, molds the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Utah’s commissioners are David Buhler, commissioner, Utah System of Higher Education, Salt Lake City; Dan Campbell, managing general partner, EsNet Group, and vice chair, Utah Board of Regents, Provo; and Senator Peter C. Knudson, Brigham City.

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 Senator Knudson, Senator Steve Urquhart, and Representative Keith Grover – 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.

April 2014