Since 1955 Washington 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 Washington joined the commission, the state has benefitted in a number of essential ways.

- Tens of thousands of students from Washington 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, Washington students and their families have saved some $308 million since 1997, when the state started participating. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for Washington’s return on investment.)
- Washington has received funding to be part of numerous WICHE policy initiatives, including those focused on financing and financial aid, workforce policy, and other areas.
- Washington has participated in WICHE initiatives related to distance education, workforce development, and behavioral health.

WICHE and Washington 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.

Washington is active in two of the three WICHE Student Exchange Programs: the Western Undergraduate Exchange and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2013-14 Washington’s students and families saved over $35 million. Washington saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Washington students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Washington’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1997. In 2013-14, 3,837 students from Washington are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving $33.4 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $8,692. In the last five years alone, students saved more than $163 million.

Doing the Math: Washington’s Return on Investment

In 2013-14 Washington, its institutions, and its students saved or brought in some $38 million through WICHE and spent $131,000 for membership in the commission, yielding a 288-fold return on investment.

In the last 5 years, Washington students’ savings from WUE alone have totaled more than $163 million, yielding a 259-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.
Washington benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Washington’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 Washington after graduating. In 2013-14 Washington received 1,289 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Washington sent some 240 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with students studying in optometry and osteopathic medicine. Historically, some 81 percent of PSEP graduates return to Washington to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Washington’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 Washington sent 160 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 71.

**Internet Course Exchange (ICE).** WICHE’s newest exchange, 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$33,351,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$2,240,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td>$35,592,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue to WA Institutions (PSEP)</td>
<td>$2,207,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$37,799,844</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WICHE’s Added Value**

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

**Policy & Workforce Development.** Washington is one of four states chosen to participate in WICHE’s *Facilitating Development of a Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange* pilot project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The initiative 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. In addition, the state participated in a Gates-funded meeting that brought together the stewards of the data systems in 14 WICHE states for discussions around linking data internally and with other states.

WICHE is partnering with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to research the new Washington Opportunity Scholarship program and its alignment with other state higher education finance policies, at the behest of Microsoft. WICHE staff has often consulted with and been invited to present to Washington policymakers on accountability, finance, and other issues. WICHE President David Longanecker worked with Washington policymakers on the **state master plan**. WICHE Director of Policy Research Brian Prescott was invited to give a talk to the NW Gear Up Association.

Washington 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. WICHE-related services to the consortium states include grant development and management, program implementation and evaluation, and ongoing expert consultation and guidance.

Staff from the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges participates in WICHE’s **Adult College Completion Network**, a Lumina-funded project to increase the number of adults with significant college credit but no degree who return to postsecondary education and **complete a credential**. Washington also participated in another Lumina project, **Best Practices in Statewide Articulation and**
common interest groups, experts, and decision makers; in practice. WCET provides access to peers, colleagues, exemplars of successful learning technology innovation and Technical Colleges, have access to trusted information on emerging trends, policies, and include the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, which 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. Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is a member.

Technology. Washington has been very active in the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), a membership organization that advances access and excellence in higher education through the innovative use of technology. WCET members, including the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, 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.

The University of Washington's Catalyst program won the WCET Outstanding Work (WOW) award, which recognizes effective and innovative uses of technology to address specific needs in higher education. In addition, WICHE has worked with the state on pursuing grants from the national Broadband Technology Opportunities Program and other programs.

Mental Health. WICHE's Mental Health Program has worked on a number of Washington initiatives. Staff has collaborated with the University of Washington's Institute for Mental Health Research and Training to explore the application of evidence-based practices in rural settings. Dennis Mohatt, WICHE's vice president of behavioral health, was a plenary speaker at the Washington Association of Community Mental Health Programs' annual conference, discussing rural mental health workforce development.

Other Initiatives. Washington 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.

"There were two things I wanted out of college. First, a degree in audiology. Second, a chance to leave home and become my own individual. The WUE program allowed me to pursue both of these things without worrying about accumulating a large amount of debt. The financial peace of mind WUE gave me allowed me to focus all my efforts on school. I am so thankful for WUE – I can’t even begin to explain how essential it has been to my college experience. Without it, my college and life goals were unreachable. WUE granted me access to my dreams, and that is something I will cherish forever."

– Tiffany, Washington resident, Class of 2014, Idaho State University, Pre-Audiology Studies

"The California Maritime Academy was the only institution on the West Coast where I could pursue my career dreams. No other college around Seattle offers even a remotely similar program. My family couldn’t afford to send me to Cal Maritime without the immense help that we have received from the WUE scholarship. Thanks to WUE, I’ve been able to focus on my studies and have been very successful at Cal Maritime. Thank you!"

– Lauren, Washington resident, Class of 2013, California Maritime Academy, Marine Transportation
Seattle Pacific University participates in another initiative, the Master Property Program (MPP), which helps institutions in the West 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.

**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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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 Kohl-Welles, Representative Seaquist, and Representative Larry Haler– 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.

**Washington & WICHE’s Leadership**

The **WICHE Commission**, with three commissioners from each member state, molds the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Washington’s commissioners are: Don Bennett, deputy director, Washington Student Achievement Council, Olympia; Jeanne Kohl-Welles, state senator, Seattle; and Larry Seaquist, representative, Washington House of Representatives, Gig Harbor.

“I knew I didn’t want to go to college in my home state because I wanted to get away and experience new things. Thanks to WUE, I was able to go to Northern Arizona where they have an excellent hotel and restaurant management program. Thanks to the WUE discount, I’m able to focus on my studies and enjoy a new home at the same time. School is more affordable because of WUE and I don’t have to worry about a huge debt load when I graduate.”

– Amanda, Washington resident, Class of 2016, Northern Arizona University