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

- Tens of thousands of students from Colorado have attended undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in other Western states through WICHE’s Student Exchange Program. In just one of the programs, the Western Undergraduate Exchange, Colorado students have saved $190 million since 1988, when the program was founded. (See “Doing the Math,” below, for Colorado’s return on investment.)

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

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

WICHE and Colorado 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.

Colorado is active in WICHE’s Student Exchange Program, which includes the Western Undergraduate Exchange, the Professional Student Exchange Program, and the Western Regional Graduate Program. In 2013-14 Colorado’s students and families saved $18.8 million. Colorado saved money, too, through not having to establish and maintain costly programs in a number of areas, including some in healthcare.

Western Undergraduate Exchange. Colorado students have enrolled in undergraduate programs beyond Colorado’s borders through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) since 1988. In 2013-14, 2,675 students from Colorado are enrolled in out-of-state programs at reduced rates (150 percent of resident tuition), saving more than $17.4 million in tuition and fees – the average student savings amounted to $6,535. In the last 10 years, students have saved $143.7 million.

Colorado benefits from WUE in another way: by receiving students from out of state. Colorado’s institutions can choose how many out-of-state slots to offer and in which areas, allowing them to make the

Doing the Math: Colorado’s Return on Investment

In 2013-14 Colorado, its institutions, and its students saved $23.9 million through WICHE and spent $131,000 for membership in the commission, yielding an 182-fold return on investment.

In the last 5 years, Colorado students’ savings from WUE alone have added up to $78.8 million, yielding a 125-fold return on the state’s investment in WICHE.
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 Colorado after graduating. In 2013-14 Colorado received 3,786 students through WUE.

**Professional Student Exchange Program.** Colorado has sent 329 students to professional programs through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), with 24 students currently studying optometry. In addition, in 2013-14 the state received 183 students and some $5 million in support fees from other Western states. Historically, 87 percent of PSEP students return to Colorado to pursue their professional careers.

**Western Regional Graduate Program.** Colorado’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 Colorado sent 67 students to out-of-state institutions, while receiving 345.

**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.

The Consortium for Healthcare Education Online (CHEO), funded (2012-2016) with a $14.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, is making use of the North American Network of Science Labs Online (NANSLO). With WICHE as its hub, NANSLO is an international network of web-based science labs using robotic software to allow students to conduct science experiments over the Internet. NANSLO opens access to STEM fields for rural and place-bound students by making it possible for them to participate in lab courses remotely. Otero Community College, Pueblo Community College, and Red Rocks Community College are CHEO partner institutions and one of the NANSLO labs is based at Red Rocks Community College.

**WICHE’s Added Value**

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

**Policy & Workforce Development.** WICHE was commissioned by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the College Opportunity Fund (COF) legislation and its implementation. The evaluation was required under the legislation and included an analysis of enrollment patterns before and after COF’s implementation, along with interviews and focus groups with key architects of the policy and with institutional officers in financial aid, admissions, and registrar’s offices. WICHE presented its results to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and to the institutions’ presidents.

Colorado 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. Colorado 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.

In 2012 WICHE staff joined a meeting of various Colorado and Denver agencies to examine ideas for increasing the rates of education and training among the state’s low-income residents. The state was also a member of an earlier project, the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities, funded by the Department of Education and designed to better serve students, principally low-income and underrepresented students, with advanced placement courses and tests. Colorado was allotted $442,000 for online advanced placement enrollment, teacher training, test-fee reimbursement for low-income students, and other work. Low-income student participation increased, as indicated by advanced placement test-fee

---

**Figure 1. Colorado Savings and Revenues through WICHE Programs in 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Savings</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUE</td>
<td>$17,481,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEP</td>
<td>$393,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRGP</td>
<td>$938,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$18,813,400</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revenue to CO Institutions (PSEP)</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,063,481</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$23,876,881</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
related fields

the production of graduates in
high-demand health-
WICHE and the Sullivan Alliance aimed at improving
Colorado attended a 2009 meeting organized by
access to and success in higher education.
four-year institutions, focusing on strategies that increase
articulation and transfer
of how states coordinate their
Systems
Best Practices in Statewide Articulation and Transfer
Colorado also participated in another Lumina project,
State University are members of the
Leadership Forum
Western Alliance for Community College Academic
The 2011 Forum meeting was held in Fort Collins. The
higher education issues and engage in resource sharing.
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 Colorado Legislature.
Colorado 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.
Colorado attended a 2009 meeting organized by
WICHE and the Sullivan Alliance aimed at improving
the production of graduates in high-demand health-
related fields.

Colorado State University-Pueblo, and Metropolitan
State University are members of the Western Academic
Leadership Forum, whose members address regional
higher education issues and engage in resource sharing.
The 2011 Forum meeting was held in Fort Collins. 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. The Colorado Community College
System office and the 13 community college campuses
are members.

Technology. Several Colorado 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. In 2012 Rhonda Epper, assistant provost at
the Colorado Community College System, won WCET’s
Richard Jonsen Award for her contributions to the
e-learning community. Denver was the host city for the
2011 WCET annual conference, a four-day event that
drew some 400 attendees from across the country.

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. The program completed a comprehensive
behavioral health workforce study, funded by the
Colorado Health Foundation. It also supported a
community-based training initiative for health and
behavioral health providers to enhance their ability
to identify and serve the needs of returning service
members and their families. Additionally, WICHE is
partnering with Mental Health America of Colorado
to improve awareness of mental health with college
and university student services and support staff. Two
Colorado higher education campuses participated in
a research study funded by the National Institute for
Mental Health that focused on campus mental health
and the effects of mental health first aid training for
campus residence life staff.

Other Initiatives. Colorado College and the University of
Northern Colorado participate in 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

“As an undergrad, I was constantly stressed about money. Even with loans to cover my tuition, I still had to work nearly 30
hours a week to pay for my rent and living expenses. In four years, I racked up a debt of nearly $40K. With debt looming
over my head and my busy work schedule, my grades were sub-par. I knew that I didn’t want to repeat the same mistake for
grad school. WRGP has given me an opportunity to fully dedicate myself to my studies and my teaching. Utah State University
has one of the best cost-to-education quality ratios in the country, and the WRGP resident tuition rate reduced my master’s
tuition from nearly $10K to only $3K. My teaching stipends and scholarships have reduced my costs even further. It has been a
wonderful experience being able to study without financial concerns.”

– Frederick, Colorado resident, Class of 2014,
Utah State University, Second Language Teaching
offer MHECare, a new health program providing vetted, competitively priced medical benefits for students. Underwritten by UnitedHealthcare StudentResources, MHECare offers a variety of plans. Several of the University of Colorado campuses participate along with the University of Southern Colorado and Metropolitan State University.

Colorado & WICHE's Leadership
Colorado Lieutenant Governor Joseph Garcia, who also serves as the executive director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education, was the 2011 chair of the WICHE Commission, whose members mold the organization’s mission and set its priorities. Colorado’s other two commissioners are: Loretta Martinez, general counsel and secretary to the board, Metropolitan State University of Denver; and Dene Kay Thomas, president, Fort Lewis College, Durango.

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.

February 2014

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 Dave Young – has been crucial in this regard. 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 in the West.

– Brenda Schick, Professor and Coordinator of Graduate Studies, Speech, Language, & Hearing Sciences, University of Colorado - Boulder