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ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Stepping Up from the Ivory Tower

A Message from WICHE Chair Roy T. Ogawa



How can higher education “step up” and meet the increasing demand for highly skilled workers in the West? And how can WICHE help states meet this demand? These are tough questions, with no easy answers. But innovative initiatives in two areas – workforce development and accountability – are playing an important role in creating solutions.

The West, along with the rest of the U.S., is facing a lack of alignment between identified state workforce needs and the way our colleges and universities prepare students. While some community colleges are engaged in workforce development (at least at a local level), our four-year institutions tend not to see it as part of their mission – instead, they traditionally focus on research, teaching, and service. For some, this disjunction is an accountability issue. For others, it’s a matter of weak or outdated statewide policy related to workforce and higher education. Whatever the cause or causes, it’s a fact that higher ed and workforce development generally run on separate tracks.

For the last three years, WICHE’s project *Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education*, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, has forged connections between

postsecondary education and state workforce and economic development. WICHE has worked with several states – including Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington – to try to bring all stakeholders into the conversation, including representatives from higher education, the state government, and the business community. By assisting higher education institutions as they “step up” from the ivory tower to meet workforce challenges – and by working with other stakeholders to ensure that higher ed’s voice is also heard – WICHE is helping our states and our region stay competitive in the global economy.

This work is especially critical now. With the off-shoring of blue-collar jobs that once employed a high percentage of our population, the U.S. needs to grow its educated “creative class,” our best hope for prospering in the new knowledge-based global economy and for supporting our own citizens. As huge numbers of Baby Boomers retire, we’ll need to repopulate that creative class by increasing our college graduate numbers. To do that, we must better prepare those students we haven’t served well in the past, including minority students – whose numbers

are growing rapidly, according to this year's edition of *Knocking at the College Door*, WICHE's high school graduate projections.

Escalating Engagement has approached this challenge from several directions. One example relates to skills assessment. In June WICHE partnered with ACT to host the Workforce Certification and Higher Education Summit in Lake Tahoe. We were fortunate to have some 70 education and workforce development leaders from all of the WICHE states gather to learn, share ideas, and review workforce certification tools like ACT WorkKeys, a job skills assessment that helps certify the competence of potential employees in particular areas. WICHE will propose a new phase of *Escalating Engagement* to support ongoing state activities in this area. At the same time, WICHE's Student Exchange Programs continue to strive to assist participating states in the West to respond to critical workforce shortages.

In the end successful workforce development requires accountability for the difficult task at hand from *all* stakeholders – higher ed, the state, and business, as well as each state's citizens. Accountability is one of WICHE's core areas – and the organization holds itself accountable, too. With an assist from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, WICHE is conducting an organizational evaluation and review of its work and leadership. I am confident that it will confirm

my belief that WICHE is a dynamic organization with superb leadership, ready to carry us forward as we strive for excellence in all our current and future projects, in 2008 and beyond.

The Power of Accountability

A Message from WICHE President David A. Longanecker

Accountability has gotten a bad rap: for many of us in the education community, the word implies a lack of faith in educators and a lack of trust in our public education system. So it's no surprise that when U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings's Commission on the Future of American Higher Education issued a report in September 2006 calling for more accountability in higher education, it raised a hue and cry. Would higher ed, which has generally monitored itself, now have the feds look over its shoulder? Would our colleges and universities be subjected No Child Left Behind-style testing and strictures (and the problems attendant with them)? But what really worried many people was the focus on student-learning outcomes: would imposing such standards reduce higher ed's traditional autonomy? And would standardization cut into the very freedom that has made our system of higher education great?

And one other thing: How, exactly, did the commission propose to measure the *quality* of higher education? After all, at this level (so goes the argument), educational quality is much less about the mastery of testable skills and the recall of facts and more about something greater than those things: the ability to learn, and the flexibility of mind that allows this.

But as writer Robert Pirsig said in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, "If you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all."

Where some saw certain doom, however, others saw opportunity – a chance to develop meaningful and workable accountability tools that would indeed improve the quality of higher education. Picking up the gauntlet thrown down by the commission were the National Association of State University and Land Grant Colleges and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, who together represent most of the nation's public four-year (and beyond) colleges and universities and who jointly developed the Voluntary System of Accountability. But they weren't alone. A select group of public two-year colleges got into the accountability act with Achieving the Dream, an accountability project funded by Lumina Foundation for Education. And a group of nontraditional institutions specializing in technology-mediated learning worked through the President's Forum to develop the Transparency By



Design initiative, which provides comparative information on online courses and services.

What these organizations know is that today, institutions *need* to be accountable – first and foremost, to their students. In an age when the cost of higher education is going through the roof, accountability is in large part about making sure that students – most of whom will take out sizable loans to cover their education – are getting value for money. As Michael Offerman, leader of the working group that developed Transparency By Design, said, “Students should be well-informed about their education options – what they will learn and how well other students have performed at a specific institution.”

Accountability has long been a primary focus for WICHE. In 2008 WICHE, through WCET, joined the Transparency by Design initiative to be a part of this smart and essential move to make our higher education system even stronger and better able to serve our students. Long ago we learned that access to higher education isn’t enough: we also need to ensure student success. Accountability can help us improve both the transparency and efficacy of these student success efforts. And ultimately, like it or not, measuring student learning will be the coin of the realm.

Programs and Services

A number of WICHE’s major initiatives relate to student access and services, and most of these are managed by Programs and Services. The newest student exchange program is **WICHE ICE** (Internet Course Exchange). Founded in 2007, ICE seeks to provide broader access to specific higher education opportunities and programs by facilitating the sharing of electronically delivered courses throughout the WICHE region and beyond. In fiscal 2008 15 higher education institutions and university systems in the West were ICE members. These institutions are developing (or assessing the feasibility of developing) course and program exchanges in a variety of disciplines, including general education, social work, allied health fields, teacher preparation (in secondary math and science), and others. Member institutions are represented on the WICHE ICE Steering Board, which oversees the policies that guide this regional consortium.

WICHE ICE enables institutions to share development costs for Internet courses. It also increases the menu of online course and program offerings available to students and helps states address workforce shortages in several targeted fields. Students enroll for WICHE ICE courses at their own institutions, eliminating financial aid and transfer hassles and enabling them to get the courses they need to complete their degrees. Faculty members

benefit from cross-institutional interactions. Colleges and universities avoid the cost of developing new courses that are available elsewhere; in addition, they can attract more students to their own online courses.

During fiscal 2008 WICHE staff and ICE members developed the *ICE Operations Manual* and *ICE Implementation Guide* to ensure consistent execution of the policies and procedures governing exchanges among member institutions. Staff also submitted a proposal to and received funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for the development of a business and marketing plan, work that will be completed in FY2009.

Another program that supports increasing access to postsecondary education and training is the **State Scholars Initiative** (SSI). SSI brings business leaders into middle and high schools to motivate students to complete a rigorous course of study. WICHE continues to work with 19 SSI business education partnerships, which are either receiving funds and operating SSI projects or have completed their projects but remain in the network. They are: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Five additional states were previously funded, and they created and completed SSI projects: Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico,

Rhode Island, and Washington. Each state receives up to \$300,000 to implement the SSI model in participating pilot school districts. Data, released this year, demonstrated that SSI has positively influenced all adult stakeholders regarding their perspective on the importance of the SSI core course of study. Most important, the data show that SSI positively influences student plans to take a rigorous curriculum in high school.

In fiscal 2008 WICHE completed its third year as SSI program administrator and was awarded continuation funding through spring 2009. The total amount of funding for State Scholars is \$6.6 million: \$2.1 million funds WICHE's administrative costs, and \$4.5 million supports state efforts.

At the request of the assistant secretary of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, WICHE hosted the National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance in Boston, MA, in April. The dual purpose of the summit was to examine the role and effectiveness of the business community in driving national education reform conversations and to discuss policy efforts designed to increase academic rigor and to improve academic relevance in high school. Thirty-six states and territories were represented, including: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire,

New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virgin Islands, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

WICHE's original access initiative, created in the early 1950s, was the **Student Exchange Program**, which now includes the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), and the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). These three programs allow students to attend out-of-state institutions in the region at reduced costs and also help the West's higher education institutions to fill enrollment gaps and better manage their resources. In 2007-08 students and their families saved almost \$138 million in reduced tuition costs by participating in just one of our programs, the Western Undergraduate Exchange.

Out-of-state students can pay 150 percent of the resident tuition rate if they enroll in **WUE** institutions. Last year, WUE enrolled more than 22,100 students in 135 public two- and four-year institutions in the West, saving students and their families \$137.7 million. WUE also welcomed two new California institutions: California State University–San Bernadino and California State University–Sacramento. WICHE continues to encourage more institutions to join WUE and has expanded its outreach efforts by working with Western regional associations of high school counselors.

WRGP helps students enrolling in 203 distinctive graduate programs (many of them related to healthcare), where they pay resident tuition. Some three dozen institutions in 14 WICHE states (all but California) participate, and 460 students enrolled in academic year 2007-08. WRGP now includes professional science master's (PSM) programs, such as Arizona State University's PSM program in nanoscience.

Through **PSEP** students in 12 WICHE states participate in 10 professional education programs, all focused on healthcare, in other Western states. Last year PSEP enrolled 790 students, a 6 percent increase over the previous year. Each state determines the number of students it will support and the fields, which include medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, physical therapy, occupational therapy, optometry, podiatry, osteopathic medicine, physician assistant, and pharmacy.

In fall 2006 PSEP-supporting states renewed their efforts to collect return rate data on their PSEP graduates: the findings are detailed in WICHE's *Student Exchange Program 2007-08 Statistical Report*. The average return rate for all reporting WICHE states was 59 percent. Return rates for states that contractually require their PSEP graduates to return and serve ("payback states") were the highest, averaging 74 percent and ranging as high as 94 percent, depending on the profession. Return rates for "honor system" states were lower, averaging

39 percent and ranging up to 75 percent, depending on the profession. This data will help “honor system” states that have long used PSEP as a healthcare education access program and are now considering using it as a state workforce-building program. The data also point to the importance of increasing rural incentive programs that make it feasible for new graduates with a high debt load to return to primarily rural states and serve their home communities.

In fact, Programs and Services has been focusing on the issue of how to attract **healthcare professionals to the rural West** and other underserved areas. This is a challenge, even with tuition assistance to reduce initial student debt load: low reimbursement rates and lower salaries in underserved and rural areas are major deterrents for healthcare professionals. Lack of employment opportunities for spouses and few urban amenities are also important factors. As a first step toward a better understanding of the recruitment tools currently used throughout our region, WICHE completed the *Inventory of Rural Health Practice Incentives in the Western WICHE States*. Staff found that, given the severity of the shortages, the current funding levels of incentive programs are insufficient to stem the erosion of rural healthcare in the West. Since the inventory was released, we have witnessed:

- ◆ An interest in increasing the amount of funding for

incentives that make a return to rural areas financially worthwhile for the recipients (e.g., New Mexico doubled the amount offered in one of its incentive programs; and the Montana Rural Physician Incentive Program increased its award).

- ◆ A move towards consolidation of the administration of these programs, to make it simpler for healthcare professionals to find and use local incentive opportunities.
- ◆ New incentive programs, such as those in Washington and Wyoming for rural veterinarians, similar to the North Dakota program that was legislated in 2007.

Programs and Services has also partnered with the WICHE Mental Health Program on a rural mental health training initiative, the Western Consortium for Rural Social Work, working with Western universities to increase the number of M.S.W.- and Ph.D.-prepared social workers who are committed to working in rural communities or as faculty members preparing students to serve rural clients. There is a shortage of doctorate-level social workers to serve as faculty to educate the workforce, particularly in rural states and states that do not have Ph.D. programs in this discipline. The participating institutions will recruit and retain doctoral candidates, who will enroll in the online, technology-enhanced doctorate offered by the University of Utah. Additionally, an online course exchange will enable the participating institutions to share courses

focused on social work practice in rural and frontier areas. The participating M.S.W. and Ph.D. programs will expand their enrollments by offering these online courses and will jointly offer a graduate certificate in rural social work practice to enhance the professional training of current practitioners.

Programs and Services has also been developing a series of **workforce briefs**. The West's demographics present unique challenges in educating our future healthcare professionals. WICHE's new series – *A Closer Look at Healthcare Needs in the West* – looks specifically at the regional healthcare workforce. In fiscal 2008 the series (available at www.wiche.edu/SEP/PSEP) looked at the following topics:

- ◆ Medical education for physicians (May 2008). This report highlights three interrelated workforce issues of importance to physicians and medical schools that prepare individuals for a career in medicine: the shortage of physicians and the planned expansion of medical school enrollment; medical student indebtedness; and primary care physician service, with an emphasis on care delivery in rural areas. Two companion surveys are also available: one details medical school expansion plans in the WICHE region; and the second addresses Western schools' rural track programs and other rural-related activities for medical students.

- ◆ Health information technology (November 2007). Electronic health records and telemedicine, which are critical for efficient and high-quality healthcare delivery, are even more important in the rural West. Unfortunately, the number of programs currently available to train health information technology professionals greatly lags behind workforce needs. WICHE is examining ways to share the resources of existing programs in the region and help institutions use distance education to deliver their programs to more individuals in the West.

Programs and Services serves as secretariat to the **Northwest Academic Forum (NWAFF)**, which includes 32 master's and doctoral level institutions and 11 states. The 2008 NWAFF annual meeting, held on April 2-3 at Boise State University, was themed "Local to Global: Partnerships and Strategies for Improvement." Speakers from the American Council on Education Center for International Initiatives, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, and National Center for Academic Transformation made presentations and engaged in discussions with the NWAFF provosts, vice presidents of academic affairs, and state academic officers about global educational comparisons, course redesign, and international education initiatives.

Policy Analysis and Research

Lastly, Programs and Services supports a cost-saving initiative for Western institutions, the **Master Property Program** (MPP). Developed and administered by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact and offered by WICHE to institutions in the West, MPP is an insurance and risk-management program that provides comprehensive property coverage related to higher education needs and enhances institutions' risk-management and asset-protection strategies. MPP has generated more than \$40.1 million in savings for participating institutions. It also gives its members the opportunity to earn dividends based on annual loss ratios. MPP members currently include 100 campuses (48 primary policies) with total insured values of nearly \$62.3 billion. The Nevada System of Higher Education was the first system in the WICHE region to participate in the Master Property Program and saved \$1.3 million a year on its insured assets in its first two years with MPP. Currently, six institutions and two systems in the WICHE region are members of the Master Property Program: Lewis & Clark College (OR); Nevada System of Higher Education; Pima County Community College System (AZ); Reed College (OR); Seattle Pacific University (WA); University of Northern Colorado; Westminster College (UT); and Willamette University (OR).

In March 2008 WICHE released its 7th edition of *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity*. The occasion was marked by a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. As with past releases of this publication, this edition raised interest in many corners of our nation. The Policy Analysis and Research unit responded to inquiries from the national mainstream media, local and campus-based newspapers, associations, researchers, public policymakers, and others. In addition, there has been a significant demand for *Knocking* presentations at national and regional meetings.

In June 2008 WICHE was awarded a new grant, **Getting What You Pay For: Understanding Higher Education Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid**, from Lumina Foundation for Education. Building upon the work of the *Changing Direction* project, this effort is designed to promote informed decision making and the alignment of higher education appropriations, tuition, and financial aid policy. The goal is to educate state legislators, news media (especially state house and higher education reporters), and others about these issues in an effort to increase student access and success. Together with the National Conference of State Legislatures,

and in collaboration with the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media, WICHE will produce eight policy briefs targeted to the state legislative audience, so that they may better understand the importance of policy alignment.

In November 2007 WICHE launched **Non-traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners**, a two-year project funded by Lumina Foundation that provides state and institutional leaders with a unique opportunity to increase access and success for the adult learner population in postsecondary education. *Non-traditional No More* is working with Arkansas, Colorado, and Nevada (which were selected through a competitive process) to identify their “ready adult” population – those adults who are close to having enough credits to obtain a degree but have not yet returned to college. The project employs two strategies: identifying ready adults and building a path to college success. The first strategy includes mining state data systems and partnering with public or private data systems to identify each state’s ready adults. The second strategy is comprehensive and focuses on academic policies, financial aid/financing, student support services, and communications (marketing and information strategies designed to reach out to the ready adult population). In June 2008 WICHE convened meetings in each of the three participating states to begin their efforts.

WICHE continued its work with its **Legislative Advisory Committee**, convening its annual meeting to bring legislators from WICHE states together to discuss how to maintain a state commitment to financial aid in times of changing demographics and fiscal challenges; we also hosted another meeting, focused on workforce development.

WICHE staff collaborated with Alaska and Nevada to apply for the **College Access Challenge Grant Program**, a new federal formula-grant initiative designed to foster partnerships among federal, state, and local governments and philanthropic organizations. The program uses matching challenge grants to help increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Through a consortium and network, Western states will have the opportunity to network, learn from each other, share best practices and lessons learned, and explore evidence-based research.

In FY2008 Policy continued work on **Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education**, a project funded by the Ford Foundation. *Escalating Engagement* supported a number of activities related to student access and success. First and foremost, the project enabled WICHE to follow up on its previous work in helping Oregon to restructure and expand its need-based grant award program. The result

was a meeting in January that sought to assist Oregon with its implementation by bringing in outside experts from Minnesota – which operates a similar grant program, based on the principles of “shared responsibility” – to discuss their experience and help improve marketing and communications efforts related to the program’s rollout. *Escalating Engagement* also hosted a meeting of the policy fellows in Boulder in April. Many of these early-career policy researchers have conducted research projects on issues involving access and success, and the meeting was a welcome opportunity for them to interact with one another and with the experts located here at WICHE and in the Denver/Boulder area.

Escalating Engagement also helps states focus more intentionally on the connections between postsecondary education and state workforce and economic development. In FY2008 the project supported technical assistance work in several states (in partnership with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems – NCHEMS – and Council for Adult and Experiential Learning – CAEL); a major meeting on workforce certification systems; and a commissioned paper. Technical assistance was provided to Alaska, North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington. A few details of the work:

- ◆ Alaska: A year’s worth of data collection and interviews in Alaska culminated in December with a statewide meeting in

Anchorage, where WICHE’s analysis and expertise led to a conversation about how the state is meeting its workforce and economic development needs and how it envisions its future needs.

- ◆ North Dakota: WICHE worked with the North Dakota University System (NDUS) and the North Dakota Legislature’s Interim Committee on Higher Education to help identify ways to strengthen the state’s public agenda-building efforts, which are shaped by the need to strive for improved access and success. In January WICHE hosted four legislators and two NDUS leaders in Boulder to begin that conversation. Technical assistance activities were also woven into the interim committee’s meetings throughout the year. The activities helped to reinvigorate the North Dakota Roundtable, a group of educators and businesspeople who have been instrumental in defining the direction of the state’s higher education efforts. They also helped North Dakota to more effectively conceptualize its accountability scheme and the responsibilities of the legislature, NDUS, and the roundtable related to it.
- ◆ Oregon: WICHE’s partner the (CAEL) helped the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development take steps toward the implementation of a career readiness certificate.
- ◆ Washington: WICHE is continuing to work with Washington’s Higher Education Coordinating Board

through a technical assistance activity designed to help the state better align its workforce needs with its production of degrees and certificates, especially at the baccalaureate level. Considerable data collection, combined with interviews and focus groups, will help inform a future statewide meeting.

In June WICHE organized the **Western Summit on Workforce Certification and Higher Education** in Lake Tahoe, which attracted over 70 individuals from all 15 WICHE states. The meeting focused on how states could prepare a more highly skilled workforce in order to remain economically competitive. Participants explored how states might use a workforce certification system to improve their ability to prepare individuals for productive careers and enhance the health of their economies. One highlight of the summit was a presentation by Jimmy Clarke, former chief of staff to former Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, in which he shared some of the lessons he learned in responding to the Katrina and Rita hurricanes and how they could be applied to meeting workforce development and educational challenges. Several states in attendance planned to look closer at these ideas.

Escalating Engagement also commissioned a paper by Patrick Kelly of NCHEMS, which examines the extent to which educational attainment gaps based on race/ethnicity threaten

states' ability to meet their workforce development goals, now and in the future.

Policy continued its work with the **Pathways to College Network**, an alliance of private and corporate foundations, nonprofits, educational institutions, and the U.S. Department of Education that works to boost access to higher education for disadvantaged students and prepare them for college. Pathways, with a network made up of researchers, policy analysts, educators, K-12 administrators, government representatives, businesses, foundations, and community organizations, seeks to identify the best ways of putting disadvantaged students on the path to college. WICHE's work with Pathways includes annually updating its online searchable policy inventory, SPIDO (State Policy Inventory Database Online). With additional support from Jobs for the Future's Making Opportunity Affordable initiative, this year brought exciting changes to the SPIDO database. Together with WICHE's web developer and IT staff, Policy led an effort to completely change the look and feel of SPIDO. For the first time, SPIDO policies now include hyperlinks. The site will feature many more resources, including direct access to WICHE's *Policy Publications Clearinghouse*. The new SPIDO, to be unveiled on August 31, will be a much more useful resource to policymakers, policy shapers, researchers, and others and will serve as a prominent resource for the initiative.

Policy Analysis and Research continues to produce annual updates to *Tuition and Fees in Public Higher Education in the West* and the *Benchmarks* document, as well as periodically updating the online *Regional Fact Book for Higher Education in the West*. In FY2008 Policy also produced a *Policy Insights* report that covered changes in tuition and fees and related policies, including an exploratory analysis of tuition differentiation policies at public institutions in the West.

WCET

WCET – a national membership cooperative of institutions and organizations dedicated to advancing access and excellence in higher education through the innovative use of technology – works toward goals in a host of areas, including: educational quality; increased access for underserved populations; improved services to support student success; financial models for technology-delivered education; student- and faculty-driven adoption of innovative technologies; practical applications of technology to teaching and learning; and support for international collaborations.

In fiscal 2008 under Louis Fox’s direction, WCET completed a **strategic-planning and branding analysis** that engaged

members in identifying how WCET could best meet their needs. WCET’s membership reaffirmed several core values and important attributes of this organization, including the following:

- ◆ WCET has evolved well beyond its Western origins and holds a national and international reputation and appeal.
- ◆ The size of the organization – not too large and complex – allows members ready access to WCET’s network of e-learning leaders, innovators, and practitioners.
- ◆ The principles of collaboration and community create a unique *esprit de corps* among WCET members, which results in creative solutions, personal networking opportunities, and in many cases lifetime friendships.

In fiscal 2008 WCET’s **new website** and communications tools allowed for more interaction among members. It also allowed the organization’s extensive network of e-learning leaders to comment on issues and developments important to the e-learning community.

Last year WCET joined a group of 12 adult-serving higher education institutions in an important new initiative, **Transparency by Design**, whose goal is to elevate accountability and transparency in higher education. The project was developed by the Presidents’ Forum of Excelsior College, a

consortium of adult-serving higher education institutions. The initiative will provide web-based access to information that allows adult students to make informed decisions about their education. Participating institutions will collect information on student demographics, completion rates, engagement with school/faculty, costs, and program-specific student outcomes. WCET is serving as a neutral third party that will challenge the institutions to meet their stated goals, audit data submitted for publication, and publish *Transparency by Design* information online. The website is scheduled to be operational in the first quarter of 2009.

In anticipation of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and its attendant legislation, WCET began work on a **study of pedagogical practices and technology systems** that will address concerns regarding academic integrity and student verification in online learning. The proposed federal legislation is targeted to accrediting agencies and would apply to distance education program providers.

WCET continued its work on online student services. Nearly a decade ago, WCET began conducting research on best practices in online student services. Last year, it collaborated with institutions and other partners to provide consulting services, workshops, and access to valuable resources through the **Center for Transforming Student Services**.

In addition, WCET began a redesign of **EduTools**, the highly successful model for providing comparative reviews of various e-learning products. The redesign will take advantage of contemporary Web 2.0 practices. The new EduTools website will make it easier for higher education administrators and faculty to obtain good information on emerging educational technologies and the latest ideas on teaching and learning.

In partnership with Kansas State University's Institute for Academic Alliances, WCET began work to create a website to collect resources (policies, studies, articles) to support those involved in **academic collaborations**, in which institutions partner to share access to technology-mediated courses. Several college and university system-level entities in the U.S. and Canada are participating in this new project. WCET released the findings from the first study to examine the funding mechanisms employed by organizations that support the multi-institutional sharing of e-learning services, courses, and expertise. The report, based on a survey of 39 academic collaborations, provided information on the different funding streams used by organizations and the amount of revenue generated from each stream.

Access and connectivity to leading-edge research and education networks is a significant challenge for the U.S.'s more than 200 minority-serving institutions. In 2007

WICHE published the white paper “Can You Hear Us Now? Connecting Minority-Serving Institutions in the West to U.S. Advanced Cyberinfrastructure.” The paper includes recommendations for raising awareness of the critical importance of cyberinfrastructure to future research, education, and healthcare. In addition, through his leadership and participation in several national networking initiatives, WCET Executive Director Louis Fox worked to advocate for and foster relationships that contributed to state, regional, and national agendas for expanded broadband connectivity for education and healthcare.

On the international front, WCET partnered with the United Kingdom’s Observatory on Borderless Higher Education on a **benchmarking project** for institutions from the U.S. and the British Commonwealth. Project participants shared how technologies had changed the mix of people who are involved in the teaching and learning processes, how these individuals now do their jobs differently, and how institutional policies and practices had adapted to recognize and respond to these changes. The resulting paper, “Impact of Using Technology in Learning and Teaching,” primarily authored by Carol Scarafiotti (vice president emeritus, Rio Salado College), outlines common and prevailing themes, as well as statements of good practice.

In fiscal 2008 WCET established a memorandum of understanding with **China Open Resources for Education (CORE)**, the leading proponent of open content for higher education in China and an organization similar to WCET. The WCET/CORE alliance will begin by promoting more interactions between the two organizations through their respective conferences and exploring opportunities for language and cultural exchanges that extend from China’s growing use of open educational content. Also in this area, WCET has initiated discussions with WICHE Commissioner Kaye Howe, director of the National Science Digital Library, to explore how to increase utilization of the library’s media-rich scientific educational resources by WCET’s e-learning providers. The recent adoption of legislation in several U.S. states concerning the rising cost of textbooks is contributing to institutional interest in the adoption of freely available digital resources, such as digital scientific simulations.

WCET participated as a partner in the GOALS (Gaining Online Accessible Learning through Self-Study) project, funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. This three-year project centers on the development, evaluation, and dissemination of materials related to web accessibility that educational institutions and accrediting bodies can use in their efforts to ensure that online content is accessible to all.

Finally, in November WCET held its annual conference, among the country's premier higher education meetings on teaching, learning, and technology. In recognition of its growing membership beyond the West and its national identity in the field of e-learning, WCET held the 2007 conference in Atlanta, the first time ever that the meeting has been staged east of the Mississippi. WCET's membership plays an active role in producing a conference program known for exceptional quality and pragmatic focus.

Mental Health Program

In FY2008 WICHE's Mental Health Program continued to work to enhance the public systems of care for persons with mental illnesses, children with serious emotional disturbances, and their families, partnering with state mental health authorities, advocacy and consumer groups, federal agencies, and higher education institutions. Its activities focused on direct technical assistance to state and local agencies, policy analysis and research, support of state mental health agency data analysis, and liaison activities with higher education to enhance workforce development. Last year the program worked on the following projects.

- ◆ WICHE Center for Rural Mental Health Research. A federally funded research institute, the center conducts studies that inform health policy at multiple levels of decision making. Focused on rural mental health, it is one of seven Rural Health Research Centers in the United States funded by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration's Office of Rural Health Policy. Since most rural Americans obtain their mental health care through primary care providers, the initial focus of the research sought to expand knowledge around supporting adoption of evidence-based practices in primary care and the potential impact of such adoption on health outcomes for the consumer.
- ◆ Western States Decision Support Group (WSDSG). Through a partnership in funding between the federal Center for Mental Health Services and 15 WICHE states, the Mental Health Program coordinated a regional effort to enhance and coordinate program evaluation and data-driven decision support in the public mental health systems of the WICHE West. WSDSG met face to face several times throughout the year to focus on regional issues related to enhancing accountability through sound data management to support quality improvement, policy formation, and administration.
- ◆ Workforce development. In fiscal 2008 the Mental Health Program engaged in an array of activities to improve the preparation and continuing education of the public

mental health workforce in the WICHE West. The program continued its work with Alaska, Nevada, and North Dakota to improve collaboration in training between state mental health systems and higher education training programs. Specifically, it:

- ◆ Produced Rural Mental Health Grand Rounds Webcasts, funded by the federal Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), which enabled rural professionals to obtain training on current issues in mental health practice and continuing education credit.
- ◆ Continued to work on improving the behavioral health workforce of the rural West in regards to deaf and hard-of-hearing populations.
- ◆ Was routinely called upon by member states and others to offer state-specific technical assistance, facilitating activities focused upon system improvement, planning, and needs assessment.
- ◆ Worked with Alaska to support an initiative related to building an integrated delivery system and an integrated data system.
- ◆ Had an ongoing project in South Dakota related to supporting the development of systems of care for children and families; and provided technical assistance, conducting surveys of consumers.
- ◆ Provided staff members to work as evaluators for two

federally funded suicide grants – one in Wyoming and one in South Dakota.

- ◆ Trained rural primary care providers in South Dakota on the identification of depression and other mental health disorders in rural primary care practice.
- ◆ Worked with states across the region in areas of needs assessment and gap analysis. An updated model more accurately estimates the prevalence of serious emotional disturbances, serious mental illness, and substance use disorders. Eight Western states contracted with WICHE for state-specific synthetic estimates of serious disorders at the county level.

WICHE Commissioners

Alaska

Diane M. Barrans, executive director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Juneau

Patricia Brown Heller, retired state director, Alaska Governor's Office, Anchorage

Marshall Lind, chancellor emeritus, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Arizona

John Haeger, president, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

David Lorenz, retired vice president of administration and finance, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

Joel Sideman, executive director, Arizona Board of Regents, Phoenix

California

Appointments pending.

Colorado

Joseph Garcia, president, Colorado State University – Pueblo

Kaye Howe, executive director, National Science Digital Library, Boulder

David Skaggs, executive director, Colorado Dept. of Higher Education, Denver

Hawaii

Roy Ogawa (WICHE chair), attorney at law, Oliver, Lau, Lawnah, Ogawa & Nakamura, Honolulu

Roberta Richards, state officer, Hawaii Dept. of Education, Honolulu

Helene Sokugawa, institutional analyst, University of Hawaii, Manoa

Idaho

Robert W. Kustra, president, Boise State University, Boise

Michael Rush, executive director, Idaho State Board of Education, Boise

Arthur Vailas, president, Idaho State University, Pocatello

Montana

Dan Harrington, state senator, Helena

Kerra Melvin, former student regent, Montana Tech, Butte

Mary Sheehy Moe, deputy commissioner for two-year education, Montana University System

Nevada

Warren Hardy, state senator, Las Vegas

Jane A. Nichols (WICHE vice chair), vice chancellor for academic and student affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education, Reno

Carl Shaff, educational consultant, Reno

New Mexico

Reed Dasenbrock, cabinet secretary, New Mexico Higher Education Department, Santa Fe

Dede Feldman, state senator, Albuquerque

Patricia Anaya Sullivan, assistant dean, College of Engineering, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces

North Dakota

William Goetz, chancellor, North Dakota University System, Bismarck

Pamela Kostelecky, member, State Board of Higher Education, Dickinson

David E. Nething, state senator, Jamestown

Oregon

Ryan Deckert, president, Oregon Business Association, Beaverton

Camille Preus (immediate past chair), commissioner, Oregon Dept. of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, Salem

James K. Sager, senior education policy advisor, Education & Workforce Policy Office, Salem

South Dakota

Robert Burns, retired distinguished professor, Political Science Dept., South Dakota State University, Brookings

James O. Hansen, regent, South Dakota Board of Regents, Pierre

Robert T. (Tad) Perry, executive director, South Dakota Board of Regents, Pierre

Utah

Bonnie J. Beesley, member, Utah Board of Regents, Salt Lake City

David Buhler, interim commissioner, Utah System of Higher Education

Peter C. Knudson, state senator, Brigham City

Washington

Ann Daley, executive director, Higher Education Coordinating Board, Olympia

Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, state representative, Seattle

Jeanne Kohl-Welles, state senator, Seattle

Wyoming

Thomas Buchanan, president, University of Wyoming, Laramie

Debbie Hammons, state representative, Worland

Klaus Hanson, mayor of Laramie, emeritus professor of German, University of Wyoming, Laramie

WICHE Staff

David Longanecker, president

Louis Fox, vice president, WICHE Technology and Innovation, and executive director, WCET

Dolores Mize, vice president, Policy Analysis and Research

Jere Mock, vice president, Programs and Services

Dennis Mohatt, vice president, Behavioral Health, and executive director, WICHE Mental Health Program