

Western Policy Exchanges

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

March 2002

IN THIS ISSUE

Access to higher education is a major concern in the West. To better assist Western states with their efforts to increase participation in postsecondary education by underrepresented populations, WICHE collaborated with the Colorado Dept. of Education to compete for a grant from the U.S.

Dept. of Education's Advanced Placement Incentive Program (APIP). The project, the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities (WCALO), was funded at \$800,000 and began in Oct. 2000: the award for Year 2 is \$1,616,716.

Nine states committed to the consortium: Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, and Utah. The overall goals of the WCALO project: to increase the enrollment of low-income individuals in Advanced Placement courses and their participation in AP tests and to boost the availability of AP courses in schools serving high-poverty areas. The Western Consortium provides a unique opportunity to build K-12 and higher education collaboration around accelerated-learning options such as Advanced Placement courses, dual enrollment, and concurrent enrollment.

This project is supported through a federal grant from the Advanced Placement Incentive Program.

This issue of Exchanges was prepared by Annie Finnigan, communications associate, and Caroline Hilk, administrative assistant.

Alaska	Idaho	Oregon
Arizona	Montana	South Dakota
California	Nevada	Utah
Colorado	New Mexico	Washington
Hawaii	North Dakota	Wyoming

WCALO: A REGIONAL APPROACH TO EXPANDING ACCESS

Advanced Placement classes and accelerated-learning options have provided stepping stones to higher education for several decades, but their importance to students and educators alike has increased markedly over the last 10 years. Well-designed dual enrollment and Advanced Placement learning experiences can ease students' transition to college, improve their chance of success and, conceivably, shorten the time it takes for them to earn their degree.

These opportunities are critical for low-income students who have not historically had the same access to Advanced Placement and dual enrollment as their higher income peers. The fact that a much smaller percentage of students from low-income families enrolled in college as recent high school graduates than did students from middle and high income families -- 49 percent versus 60 percent and 76 percent, respectively -- reflects the potential of accelerated learning to enhance their competitiveness for college slots.

All of these benefits are critical today, when the rising demand for higher education and the limited supply of resources supporting it add up to a standing-room-only situation in the classrooms of many of our colleges and universities. In short, just when access to higher ed is essential for all students -- thanks to our increasingly sophisticated, information-based economy -- competition for a spot on the freshman-class roster is at an all-time high, even at some schools that were once considered "sure bets." Preparation for a successful higher ed career is more important than ever.

The APIP grant provided the opportunity for more low-income students from Idaho to participate in AP courses and exams. Last year, the number of students waiving the cost of AP exams increased from 76 to 178.

Gary Marx
Gifted and Talented Specialist
Idaho Dept. of Education

ADVOCATE FOR ACCELERATED LEARNING

To address these issues, in 2000 the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and the Colorado Dept. of Education launched a new project, the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities (WCALO). Funded by the federal government's Advanced Placement Incentive Program, the consor-

We met with representatives from other states in the network who are struggling with issues similar to ours, and we learned a lot from their experiences. Our conversations with them have helped us build a framework that will increase the number of Oregon students succeeding in accelerated learning programs.

Joyce Benjamin
Associate Superintendent of Federal Programs
Oregon Dept. of Education

tium aims to find ways to increase the number of low-income students enrolling and succeeding in advanced placement courses and other accelerated-learning options. The support for such activities varies widely across the West. A regional approach seemed the best way to bring the West up to speed and to help individual states broaden their access to accelerated-learning options, especially for low-income and rural students.

The consortium provides funding for AP, dual enrollment, and other accelerated-learning activities that promote access and success in higher education, as well as for AP training for teachers. In addition to providing direct services, the consortium also supports public policy research that examines accelerated learning in light of access and related issues.

Consortium members include several interested WICHE states: currently, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, and Utah participate. The consortium's network is a central feature in its coordinated effort to build K-12 and higher education collaboration around accelerated-learning options. Comprised of one K-12 representative from each state's department of education and one representative from the state higher education agency, the network helps ensure an integrated set of strategies to enhance access and success for underserved students.

In the 1950s, when WICHE was created, geography was the barrier many students faced when seeking a college education. Today, preparation is a major hurdle – and it's an especially tough one for low-income and

rural students, who often don't have the same educational opportunities that other students have. WICHE estimates that there are close to 68,000 18- and 19-year-olds living at or near the poverty level in the West. While not all of these students will go to college – or take AP courses and exams to help prepare them to do so – all should have the opportunity. As things stand now, many lower-income students don't have an equal opportunity to compete for slots in the higher education institutions that best meet their needs. For them, a number of factors are affecting higher ed access today, including:

► A shortage of high school counselors promoting college participation: today, counselors' attention is often diverted by crisis issues, ranging from school violence to student drug use and pregnancy. What's more, budget cuts have decimated college counseling at public high schools. Middle- and upper-income students can buy such counseling; poor students can't.

► Higher ed's increasing distaste for college-level remedial education: remedial courses have been a way for low-income students who've received a poor preparation for college to gain a foothold – and succeed -- in higher ed. As higher ed turns away from remedial courses, low-income students are often the losers.

► An emphasis on merit-based financial aid: Merit awards that promote outstanding academic achievement may cut into the number of slots available to less well-prepared, often low-income or minority students. For example, many highly selective public colleges and universities across the country offer automatic admission to the top five or 10 percent of high school graduates in the state. In at least one state – California – AP classes

The WCALO project has increased the awareness of policymakers and private foundations regarding the value and importance of accelerated-learning options for low-income students.

Roberto Haro
WCALO Evaluator and Professor
San Francisco State University

have a direct bearing on admission: new entrance criteria rely less on the SAT and more on grade point average - and weight AP classes more heavily than others. Such trends make access to advanced placement programs even more critical for low-income, minority, and rural students.

FOCUS ON FIVE ACTIVITIES

The consortium focuses both its research and financial support on five activities essential to the success of accelerated learning: serving students; enhancing professional development; improving online options; creating a regional network; and building public policy support.

► **Serving Students.** To increase the number of low-income students taking Advanced Placement courses and tests, the Western Consortium is working with participating states to support pilot AP-prep institutes that integrate Advanced Placement preparation into existing summer outreach programs for low-income students, such as GEAR-UP, TRIO, and CAMP. The consortium is subsidizing the cost of online AP courses and tests for low-income students and promoting outreach activities to middle schools and families. It's also collecting and analyzing demographic information on low-income students in WICHE states, with the goal of create a state-by-state and regional overview.

► **Enhancing Professional Development.** The consortium is providing support to participating states to help prepare educators to be trained as Advanced Placement teachers. Teachers can attend professional development institutes or enroll in online courses, as well as participate in other professional development activities that enhance their effectiveness.

The WCALO meetings sponsored and funded by the APIP grant have been very informative. The meetings have provided a forum in which to analyze specific topics (such as AP online courses) and, as an outcome, to help states implement specific activities.

Gary Marx
Gifted and Talented Specialist
Idaho Dept. of Education

Funds from the WCALO Network have allowed Montana to concentrate on early introduction to AP through pre-AP training workshops such as "Building Success," "Cornerstones," and vertical team training. This is particularly important for pocket areas, such as rural isolated communities and communities with high low-income populations. This year, through the WCALO subgrant, at least two GEAR UP schools will host "Building Success" workshops for their respective regions. A workshop specifically for GEAR UP guidance counselors is also being planned. The WCALO partnership has been helpful to Montana. It is an opportunity to learn from the experience, both positive and negative, of other states in the region. Beyond that, participating in an active regional consortium stimulates state and regional leadership and policy planning.

Kathy Mollohan
Advanced Placement Administrator
Montana Dept. of Education

Support also goes towards the development of "vertical teams" of middle and high school teachers, working in concert to prepare students to take AP courses and exams. The consortium also plans to collaborate with a university teacher education program in the West to develop models for preservice teacher education and counselor training.

► **Improving Online Options.** The number of online Advanced Placement courses for students – and for teachers interested in professional training – is growing rapidly. How can students and teachers decide among the different offerings – how, in short, can they judge the quality and value of a course or product? The Western Consortium is assisting states and school districts by developing quality assurance indicators for student courses and professional development packages. It's also focusing on other online AP issues, such as determining the transportability of online courses from one environment to another; helping states to manage licensure issues related to the use of AP products; and negotiating with online providers for an affordable rate for AP courses and tests for low-income districts.

WCALO: A PROGRESS REPORT

The Western Consortium identified a number of specific objectives to work toward, and members made good progress toward six of these goals.

► **Objective:** Assist states in identifying low-income students and encourage their participation in AP coursework and testing. We are establishing a database for each participating state and collecting data from the states and the College Board. We've funded fee waivers for low income students taking AP tests and supported six states in subsidizing online AP courses.

► **Objective:** To improve preparation of low-income students in middle school and early high school so they're ready to enroll in AP courses. The consortium has supported summer outreach programs -- like GEAR UP -- and vertical team activities, in which educators work to prepare students for AP courses. Member states held several professional development sessions and workshops on vertical teaming.

► **Objective:** To increase the number of teachers qualified to teach AP course. Consortium funds for face-to-face and online AP training supported teachers in four states – Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, and Idaho.

► **Objective:** To identify online AP course providers and improve the quality of such courses and materials for both teachers and students. Working with the Regional Network of AP Administrators, we identified course providers and assisted states in exploring alternatives in online courses. We established a working team that's developing a set of guidelines to evaluate the quality of online AP courses. We also have a consultant examining students' experiences in online learning with AP courses. This activity includes onsite interviews in three states with state program administrators, school personnel, and students.

► **Objective:** To foster the exchange of best practices and the resolution of problems related to increasing the availability of AP courses. We created the Regional Network of AP Administrators, whose members include a representative from the state department of instruction and a representative from the State Higher Education Executive Office (SHEEO) of each of the consortium's members.

► **Objective:** To educate policymakers and private foundations about the value of accelerated-learning options. We will be holding a roundtable meeting for policymakers in one of our member states. We use our connection with WICHE as a way of educating legislators and other decision makers about the importance of accelerated learning.

Now in the midst of our second year, we've focusing on a number of new goals. We're working to boost AP course availability and financial support for students taking AP tests and teachers taking AP prep courses in the Western states. We're also working to enhance school counselors' knowledge about Advanced Placement. And we're helping states to manage the licensure of online Advanced Placement and teacher development courses.

► **Creating a Regional Network.** The consortium's regional network of AP administrators and higher education representatives helps

member states to increase the number of low-income students in accelerated-learning courses. Each member state is part of this network (see insert describing the work of each state).

► **Building Public Policy Support.** Public policy support is essential for the long-term success of accelerated-learning options. The consortium works with policymakers to help them understand AP's critical role in increasing college participation and success and to aid them in creating the kinds of state policies that support broader accelerated-learning participation.

The Western Policy Exchange is a long-term commitment by WICHE to support better informed decision making through collaboration with a wide range of partners. Updates on all WPE initiatives are available at www.wiche.edu or contact Cheryl Blanco, director of policy and research at WICHE, 303.541.0224. *Western Policy Exchanges* is published by WICHE.

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WCALO STATE CAMEOS

ARIZONA

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2001 Allocation: \$122,579; 2002 Allocation: \$191,024

In Year 1, Arizona provided subsidies to Advanced Placement teachers attending summer institutes in their content area, as well as supporting vertical-training opportunities. The state purchased several class tools and exam review software packages for use by teachers and students and provided \$26,353 in exam fee waivers to low-income students around the state. Over 50 students participated in online Advanced Placement courses through APEX Learning. In Year 2 Arizona plans to place more emphasis on pre-AP activities and on supporting students involved in online Advanced Placement coursework.

COLORADO

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SHEEO Contact: Diane Lindner, Colorado Commission on Higher Education, (303) 866-4266, diane.lindner@state.co.us
2001 Allocation: \$103,638; 2002 Allocation: \$170,852

Colorado's membership in the consortium has helped to forge a closer working relationship between K-12 and higher education. The Dept. of Education and SHEEO office are working together to better align high school preparation and college admission standards. A regional planning session was held in September to discuss methods for identifying eligible students for accelerated options and to develop a plan for training teachers and administrators in rural areas of the state. Colorado offered teachers AP professional training, conducted by the College Board, in Fall 2001, and will offer it again in Spring 2002. Vertical team training will also be offered.

HAWAII

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SHEEO Contact: Barbara Polk, University of Hawaii, (808) 956-2560, bpolk@hawaii.edu
2001 Allocation: \$93,110; 2002 Allocation: \$158,608

A total of 270 exam fee waivers for low-income students were funded, and 60 teachers were trained in a variety of content areas and vertical teaming by the College Board AP Institute. Hawaii has also been developing a registry of all the AP teachers and those who have been through professional training. Low numbers of students were involved in online AP courses during Year 1, so the state plans to use its online allocation to develop more offerings through its virtual high school, E-school. During Year 2, Hawaii plans to use fee reductions to: encourage more low-income students to take AP exams; provide additional vertical team and content-area AP training; and set up conferences with counselors and administrators to promote AP to high-ability students.

IDAHO

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2001 Allocation: \$83,193; 2002 Allocation: \$147,700

In Year 1 Idaho invested close to \$7,000 in AP exam waivers for low-income students. The number of AP exams waived for low-income students increased from 76 during the 1999-2000 school year to 178 waivers during 2000-01. Professional development activities were another major activity: 49 teachers received stipends to cover the costs of attending AP institutes or workshops, while 90 teachers participated in English vertical team workshops conducted by the College Board. Demand for AP training is high, so in Year 2 Idaho will increase funding for professional development, including an AP summer institute at NNU in Nampa; it is also planning several two-day math vertical team workshops to stimulate team building among teachers across grade levels.

MONTANA

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SHEEO Contact: Joyce Scott, Montana University System, (406) 444-0312, jscott@oche.montana.edu
2001 Allocation: \$10,925; 2002 Allocation: \$32,500

In Year 1, WCALO funded several professional development activities in Montana, supplementing the state's Advanced Placement incentive program grant. Thirty teachers and administrators participated in a pre-AP presentation at

the annual Indian Education conference in March. Fifty teachers participated in a "Building Success" pre-AP workshop, and more than 100 participated in a gifted and talented program development project. In all, 260 staff members were trained in AP and pre-AP. In addition, 24 Montana high schools provided online AP courses for their students. The 2000-01 school year was the first time Montana offered any online AP courses; though many students struggled to complete the course, teachers and students are excited about the possibilities, especially in districts that previously had no AP program. Enrollments in online AP courses have increased in 2001-2002. For Year 2, WICHE will fund several more pre-AP and professional development workshops, with an emphasis on GEAR UP schools.

NEW MEXICO

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SHEEO Contact: Charlotte Cooper, New Mexico Commission on Higher Education (505) 841-6684, ccooper@che.state.nm.us

New Mexico receives only travel support because it has a comprehensive state APIP grant, but its representatives are active in the consortium. During the 2000-01 school year, the state offered online AP course slots for up to 150 students in 10 subjects through the New Mexico Virtual School and online AP exam review for any student in the state. In addition, New Mexico provides courses and professional development via the state's distance-learning infrastructure: for example, three schools are utilizing one AP chemistry teacher. New Mexico also provided workshops on AP program development and other professional development opportunities for over 1,521 administrators, AP coordinators, and counselors around the state. The State Learning Conference also featured specific sessions on a variety of AP topics, drawing expertise from practitioners and administrators across New Mexico. The state distributed over \$120,000 in incentive funds for classroom materials to develop new or revised AP courses. It also offered AP exam waivers for 1,822 low-income students. The Dept. of Education also coordinates a federal grant to support vertical teaming, curriculum development, and AP enrollment in rural schools and those serving a high percentage of Native American students.

OREGON

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2001 Allocation: \$69,375; 2002 Allocation: \$152,500

In Year 1, Oregon established effective working relationships between public school and higher education representatives in the state. The state already had its PASS (Proficiency-based Admissions Standards System) program in place and was working to align K-16 education. Oregon built on this, using its funding to develop a framework that integrates accelerated-learning opportunities into this innovative system, as well as increasing AP/IB programs across the state. In Year 2, Oregon will receive \$20,000 for test fee reimbursement to meet the needs of low-income students; in addition, the state will target small, isolated schools with professional development activities and vertical team development.

SOUTH DAKOTA

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2001 Allocation: \$69,375; 2002 Allocation: \$132,500

South Dakota AP participation increased from 280 students taking 338 exams in 1992 to 1,410 students taking 2,012 exams in 2001. The public universities have offered summer AP and vertical teams institutes for several years and did so again in 2001. In addition to AP courses offered by high school teachers, the state supports student enrollment in online courses, with 117 students from 36 school districts enrolling in online AP courses in 2001. The governor's programs "Wiring the Schools" and "Connecting the Schools" made online options possible.

UTAH

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Utah representatives are actively involved in the consortium though the state receives only travel support because it has a comprehensive state APIP grant. Utah already has increasing numbers of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and dual enrollment options; now the state is focusing on the challenge of reaching underserved students. Administrators and policymakers are also beginning to work on a K-16 agenda to strengthen the connection between high school and college. Utah is striving to inform high school and middle school counselors, teachers, and parents about potential Advanced Placement opportunities.