



Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

media release

Connecticut One of Eleven States Targeted for Expanded Access to Higher Education

Boulder, Colorado – Connecticut has been selected to participate in an ongoing project to explore and implement innovative strategies to increase access to higher education.

A total of 11 states are now participating in *Changing Direction: Integrating Higher Education Financial Aid and Financing Policy*, coordinated by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and its partners, the American Council on Education's (ACE) Center for Policy Analysis, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). The project is funded in part by a \$1 million grant from Lumina Foundation for Education.

Five of the states – Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Tennessee – will explore and implement innovative ways of improving state-level policymaking strategies on tuition, financial aid, and state appropriations. The lessons learned from these states will be useful to others as they grapple with similar issues. A sixth state – Pennsylvania – will convene a roundtable, in which the state's key stakeholders can begin a dialogue about the alignment of financing and financial aid policies.

Changing Direction provides a venue for policymakers and educators from all regions of the country to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of public policies and to develop new models by looking at emerging trends, their potential impact on higher education, and the policy implications related to issues of financial aid, finance, the cost of education, and access. The project addresses current practices and policies and emphasizes the exploration of innovative, creative, perhaps untested approaches to national- and state-level challenges. While this necessarily involves all sources of assistance and financing – federal, state, local, and institutional – the project focuses on state policies and practices. *Changing Direction* serves policymakers in the legislative and executive branches of state government and their staffs, higher education researchers, state executive agencies, governing and coordinating boards, educators, college and university leaders, and business and corporate leaders.

"One of the key policy problems affecting higher education access for a majority of students in the U.S. is the disconnected nature of fiscal policy setting, tuition setting and financial-aid appropriations in the 50 states," said Martha D. Lamkin, president and chief executive officer for Lumina Foundation. "This project holds great promise to build on phase one efforts to communicate, support and facilitate the increased synchronization of these three policy dimensions, thus benefiting students and institutions."

Initial project activities, which were completed in September 2003, included surveying state legislators on their perceptions of effective financial aid, tuition, and appropriations policies and practices, as well as examining the efficacy of their perceptions. The project also provided technical assistance to the first five *Changing Direction* states (Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, and Oregon); established a national advisory board that developed a research agenda; and commissioned research papers. This fall, WICHE began the second stage of this project. Phase two expands state involvement; commits to broader participation by the public two-year sector; and focuses on aligning financial aid and financing policies to enhance retention to graduation. The states involved in the

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project receive technical assistance so that they can develop consensus among their key policy and education players and implementation policies.

Teams – comprised of the state higher education executive officer, a state coordinator, and others – will tailor the exploration of these issues to suit their state's individual needs:

- **Hawaii** - The University of Hawaii System is working with key policymakers to develop a working knowledge of the issues surrounding state appropriations, tuition setting, and financial aid as they relate to access and retention; create a set of shared principles as guidelines for long-term planning and budgeting for the university system; construct a draft of the next five-year tuition schedule, including a plan for increases in need-based financial aid; and generate support in the legislature for a state-supported financial aid program benefiting residents attending public postsecondary institutions.
- **Idaho** - The Idaho State Board of Education is building consensus among key policy and educational leaders, businesses, philanthropies, and students and their families on the factors involved in financial support for a college education; completing a review and inventory of finance policies; and improving collaboration in aligning tuition and financial aid policies in state appropriations decisions.
- **Louisiana** - The Louisiana Board of Regents is working with the legislature to broaden the scope of the requirements of recent legislation to include financial aid and postsecondary education financial issues and to develop a framework for analyzing various policy options and relationships related to financial issues.
- **Oklahoma** - The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education is conducting a series of meetings and associated activities to pursue adequate funding for the higher education system, the institutions, and the students, while identifying systemwide efficiencies and strategic priorities to maximize higher education's resources.
- **Tennessee** - The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is working to raise the awareness of policymakers regarding the importance of linking appropriations and fee determinations with student aid levels; develop a new statewide master plan; and restructure its long-standing funding formula so that it will be more responsive to statewide policies and goals.

WICHE & Lumina Foundation for Education

The **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)** and its member states work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. Its programs – Student Exchange, the Western Cooperative for Education Telecommunications, Policy Analysis and Research, Mental Health, and the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration – are working to find answers to some of the most critical questions facing higher education today. WICHE is the only organization in the West that focuses exclusively on higher education issues, from access and accountability to tuition and fees to distance learning and innovation. Public higher education is the primary backbone of the Western economy, and WICHE's policy research and collaborative programs support the West's citizens and its constantly evolving cultures. WICHE's 15 member states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Lumina Foundation for Education, a private, independent foundation based in Indianapolis, strives to help people achieve their potential by expanding access and success in education beyond high school. Through research, grants for innovative programs, and communication initiatives, Lumina Foundation addresses issues surrounding financial access and educational retention and degree or certificate attainment, particularly among underserved student groups, including adult learners. For more details on the foundation, please visit its web site at www.luminafoundation.org.

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