



INTERSTATE PASSPORT INITIATIVE A Policy Brief on Phase I

The Interstate Passport Initiative, launched in October 2011 as a regional project of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), addresses the problems of interstate student transfer. In the two-year pilot project (Phase I), working with 23 institutions in five Western states—California, Hawai'i, North Dakota, Oregon, and Utah—the initiative has produced a new transfer framework that is based on learning outcomes. The project focuses on the lower-division general education core, the common denominator among institutions—concentrating on it as a whole, not on individual courses—and allows for a cross-state “match” of outcomes-integrated general education cores for block transfer. The Passport outcomes-based framework is designed to facilitate the transfer process toward the goals of improved graduation rates, shortening time to degree, and saving students money.

During the pilot phase, faculty from the targeted institutions collaborated to develop the Passport Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria, using the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes as a foundation, and referencing each state's own lower-division general education core learning outcomes. Registrars and institutional research representatives developed the processes for recording the Passport on student records, and for tracking and reporting on Passport students at both sending and receiving institutions. At the end of the pilot phase, 16 two- and four-year institutions from four pilot states (Hawai'i, North Dakota, Oregon, and Utah) forged a general education transfer agreement – the Passport – in the core content areas of oral communication, written communication, and quantitative reasoning.

With these processes and infrastructure in place, project leaders have planned a second phase that will focus on two objectives: 1) to encourage other WICHE states and institutions to apply for Passport status in the Phase I content areas, and 2) to develop outcomes and proficiency criteria, based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, for the remaining general education core content areas (creative arts, intercultural knowledge/social sciences, information literacy, natural and physical sciences, critical thinking, and teamwork/problem-solving).

As part of the pilot phase, the project plan called for research and analysis on four areas of inquiry:

1. Existing policies in the WICHE states related to the general education core and the means by which higher education policy change is effected in the five pilot states.
2. The courses, criteria, or outcomes that comprise the general education core in the WICHE states, and similarities and gaps across the region.

3. The extent to which WICHE state public institutions enroll students transferring from public institutions in other WICHE states, and the patterns of transfer that exist in terms of the amount of general education completed prior to transfer.
4. Existing block transfer agreements for the general education core in the WICHE states.

Project staff reviewed state statutes and regulations and solicited information from institutions in the WICHE region on general education and transfer and block transfer agreements, both in state and across state lines. In addition, data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) on student transfer for the fall 2006 cohort of public institutions in the WICHE region provided information about the transfer patterns of students both within WICHE states and across state lines, and also some national data for comparison purposes. These issues are discussed in more detail in three project reports available on the WICHE website; see www.wiche.edu/Passport/research. Determining the amount of general education that is completed prior to transfer will require data collection and analysis at the individual institution level – an audit of transfer students to determine progress and timing toward completion of the general education core. Although each state’s policies on general education and transfer are developed for the benefit of students and institutions within the state, clear commonalities and trends exist across states that are compatible with the Passport transfer framework. The purpose of this policy brief is to discuss related findings from these three studies and their implications for participation in the Passport Initiative by states and institutions in the WICHE region.

WICHE REGION OVERVIEW

The WICHE region consists of 16 members including 15 Western states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming – and the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states (the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is the first to participate).¹

General Education Courses, Criteria, and Outcomes. The Passport Initiative focuses on forging general education core transfer agreements that are based on the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in concert with hundreds of institutions. The LEAP initiative focuses campus practice on fostering essential learning outcomes for all students, whatever their chosen field of study. When the Passport project started, only three of the 15 WICHE states included in this study – California, Montana, and Utah – had identified and aligned student outcomes from their general education cores to the LEAP ELOs. During the pilot phase North Dakota began integrating the LEAP ELOs into the University System’s general education requirements. The LEAP outcomes concentrate on four overarching areas:

¹ The 16th WICHE member, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, joined after the Passport Initiative was launched.

1. Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world: through study in sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.
2. Intellectual and practical skills.
3. Personal and social responsibility.
4. Integrative and applied learning.

Although not aligned with the LEAP outcomes, South Dakota's general education requirements are notable because they are not based on course requirements or credits but rather are designed to achieve seven specific student-learning goals approved by the Board of Regents.

The content areas that compose the general education core in all WICHE states are as follows:

- Communication: written and/or oral (written communication is a requirement in all states; oral communication is required in 11 states).
- Humanities/social and behavioral sciences.
- Quantitative skills/critical thinking (includes mathematics in some states).
- Physical and natural sciences (includes mathematics in some states).

The decision to focus the Passport pilot block on oral and written communication and quantitative literacy was driven by this commonality among the WICHE states and the fact that these general education content areas aligned with the LEAP outcomes. In addition, working within a more narrow scope of three content areas, in the limited timeframe of the two-year pilot phase, enabled the successful creation of the Passport Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria.

Even though the subject areas are generally the same in all states, the number of units required in each area varies by state and cannot easily be compared across states. Typically, a general education course is equivalent to three semester credit hours. The required "units" for the core, i.e., credit hours, course credits, semester credits, quarter credits, semester hours, quarter hours – whichever one is used in a particular state – ranges from 12 credits in Utah to 48 semester units in California (see Table 1 on the next page).

Of 15 WICHE states examined, all but one have a statewide general education core for public higher education institutions. Three states – Alaska, Idaho, and Nevada – have a *system*-wide general education core, which encompasses all public higher education institutions in each state. Wyoming's one higher education institution (the University of Wyoming, or UW) does have general education requirements, as well as articulation agreements with all of the Wyoming community colleges, ensuring that students transferring to UW have met the general education requirements.

Table 1. Lower-Division General Education Core Requirements in WICHE States	
State	General Education Core Requirement
Alaska	34 credits
Arizona	35-37 course credits
California	39 semester credits plus 9 upper-division semester credits
Colorado	31 semester hours
Hawai'i	31 credits
Idaho	36 credit hours
Montana	30 semester credits
Nevada	21-24 credits
New Mexico	32-38 hours
North Dakota	36 semester hours
Oregon	31 quarter credits
South Dakota	30 credit hours
Utah	12 credits
Washington	15 credits
Wyoming	30-36 hours

Passport pilot states are shaded.

All WICHE states except Hawai'i and South Dakota have a policy that guarantees the acceptance of general education core credits upon transfer to another in-state institution. In Hawai'i the authority to accept general education core credits rests with the receiving institution, although state policy allows campuses to enter into articulation agreements, which they have done. South Dakota's transfer policy does not specify general education, but states: "Academic courses will be transferred as meeting graduation requirements if the courses parallel the scope and depth requirements for the degree or if the courses meet electives required for the degree."

The state policies related to and granting authority over transfer and the general education core are different in each state, and most states have policies that deal with transfer in statute or agency policy. In 11 WICHE states, policies and regulations on general education and transfer rest with the governing or coordinating board or system office. In four states – California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah – general education and transfer policies are in statute, although in these states the higher education board or department, or a similar entity, is authorized to oversee, implement, and make decisions about general education.

It is important to note that the Passport offers flexibility to institutions to align their general education course outcomes to the Passport Learning Outcomes – even if a state's general education core curriculum is defined and/or established in statute or in board or system regulations. In Utah, for example, American Institutions is one of the general education requirements; oral communication is not, although it's part of the Passport Block. In becoming a Passport state, Utah's general education requirements did not change. Utah institutions have

identified courses (including some in oral communications) that align to the Passport Learning Outcomes so that students can earn the Passport. General education requirements will be waived for Passport students transferring *into* Utah during Phase 1 of the initiative – with the oral communication credits applied to an elective or a major.

Student Transfer Patterns. In order to study the patterns and rates of student transfer in the WICHE states, Passport staff requested data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center to determine the number of students that transferred among public two-year and four-year institutions in each WICHE state over a five-year period, 2006 to 2010. Data for this “fall 2006 cohort” included the type of institution students transferred to and from; how often they transferred; when they transferred; and whether they transferred within the state, to another WICHE state, or out of the western region. Our analyses of this small sample of students gave us a snapshot of the volume, patterns, frequency, and timing of student transfer in the WICHE region.

According to the NSC 2012 Signature Report, *Transfer & Mobility: A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions*,² one-third of all students nationwide transfer at least once within a five-year period, and this trend holds true for the WICHE states. The total number of fall 2006 cohort students enrolled in public institutions in WICHE states who transferred was 224,392, or 33.6 percent of the entire WICHE-state cohort. The transfer rate for full-time students was 35.9 percent, and 31.6 percent for part-time students. Timing and frequency of student transfer are other factors that affect the larger transfer picture. Out of all WICHE students in the 2006 fall cohort who transferred, about one-third (33.2 percent) did so in their second year, double the percentage that transferred in their first year (15.9 percent). As to frequency of transfer, in the WICHE states 6.4 percent of full-time and 4.4 percent of part-time students transferred twice over a five-year period. About half that many students, both full- and part-time, transferred a third time in the WICHE states.

In the fall 2006 cohort, in all WICHE states, the highest number of transfers from both two-year and four-year institutions stayed in state. Neighboring states gained the next highest number of transfer students. Examination of this sample of student transfer data showed that the difference between the number of WICHE state students transferring into a state and those transferring out of that state to another WICHE state is not substantially different. For example, 1,088 students transferred out of Colorado to other WICHE states, while 1,091 students came into Colorado from other WICHE states. Similarly, North Dakota had a difference of only four students between students transferring in and students transferring out. California had the largest discrepancy: 807 more students transferred out to other WICHE states than transferred into the state. Three WICHE states – California, Colorado, and Washington – sent students to nearly all other states in the region.

A number of factors determine where a student might transfer to – program and course availability, cost, location, graduation requirements, available capacity of the receiving institution or state, and remaining time to degree. The type of institution students transferred

² National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), Signature Report, *Transfer & Mobility: A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions* (2012), 5.

from and the type they transferred to (two-year or four-year) varied across the WICHE states. Table 2 shows the percentages of students transferring along four different pathways:

- From two-year institutions to two-year institutions.
- From two-year institutions to four-year institutions.
- From four-year institutions to two-year institutions (commonly known as reverse transfer).
- From four-year institutions to four-year institutions.

Table 2. Interstate Transfers by Institution Type with Percentage of Total Student Transfers WICHE States, Fall 2006 Cohort				
	2 yr. institution students to 2 yr. institutions	2 yr. institution students to 4 yr. institutions	4 yr. institution students to 2 yr. institutions	4 yr. institution students to 4 yr. institutions
Alaska	No observations		33.34%	66.48%
Arizona	No observations		71.77	28.23
California	52.61%	23.15%	20.66	3.58
Colorado	18.45	27.67	27.66	26.22
Hawai'i	40.31	23.00	23.00	13.69
Idaho	6.47	25.28	30.85	37.40
Montana	1.52	23.44	26.42	48.80
Nevada	3.83	7.11	32.79	56.26
New Mexico	10.78	19.73	52.31	17.18
North Dakota	8.20	24.99	22.52	44.30
Oregon	34.06	31.45	21.83	12.66
South Dakota	3.55	7.52	32.36	56.58
Utah	7.72	46.90	15.12	30.26
Washington	29.50	27.10	20.01	23.38
Wyoming	33.70	51.71	10.68	3.91

Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Block Transfer Agreements of the General Education Core. The NSC data indicate that students most often transfer in state or to neighboring states, and in fact most states have greatly facilitated intra-state transfer between two- and four-year institutions by establishing statewide policies and regulations that guarantee transfer of general education core credits. Also, a majority of WICHE public institutions have block transfer agreements with other in-state institutions and many out-of-state institutions. However, a survey of WICHE institutions conducted during the pilot phase (which yielded a very small sample) indicated that more than 50 percent do not have general education core block transfer agreements with institutions in other WICHE states. The Passport transfer framework is an effective tool for facilitating such transfers across state lines, building on the transfer agreements already in place. Public four-year institutions in North Dakota, for example, have interstate transfer agreements – set in statute – with six other WICHE states that could be expanded to include the Passport. Arizona’s Maricopa Community Colleges have one-way transfer agreements with 25 institutions, over 15

of which are out of state. Through these agreements, relationships have been created among institutions that could make good candidates for utilizing the Passport.

STATE PROFILES

The following profiles present characteristics of state policies on general education and transfer implementation of each WICHE state; discuss the patterns of transfer into and out of the state; and address the conditions for viability of implementing the Passport. Plans are being developed for Phase II of the Passport Initiative, in which Passport Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria will be developed for the remaining lower-division general education core content areas (creative arts, intercultural knowledge (social sciences), information literacy, natural and physical sciences, critical thinking, and teamwork/problem-solving).

ALASKA. The University of Alaska System, comprised of three four-year institutions and two two-year institutions, has a systemwide (essentially statewide) general education core curriculum, articulated in the Board of Regents' Policy and University Regulations. Students who complete the general education core at one institution and transfer to another institution will be considered to have completed the general education core at all University of Alaska campuses.

National Student Clearinghouse data for the 2006 fall cohort indicate that about one-third of Alaska students who transfer stay in state, moving from two-year to four-year institutions. About 41 percent of Alaska transfer students go to other WICHE states, primarily California, Oregon, and Washington.

Implications for the Passport. While Alaska's general education core curriculum is not based on the LEAP outcomes, it does encompass the three content areas of Passport Phase I – oral and written communication and quantitative literacy. In addition, the state's solid general education core curriculum transfer policy for in-state institutions is amenable to the Passport framework. Alaska Academic Policy guarantees transfer of general education credits in the same *categories* of general education requirements, not the same coursework, which would enable faculty at Alaska institutions to align the outcomes of general education core courses to the Passport Learning Outcomes and identify the courses that achieve those learning outcomes to create a Passport Block. Fall 2006 cohort data show that Alaska students who transfer out of state go to as many as eight other WICHE states, particularly to institutions in California, Oregon, and Washington.

ARIZONA. Arizona has developed the Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC) as well as a transfer policy that serves well its 22 two-year institutions and six four-year institutions. Completion of the AGEC fulfills lower-division general education requirements at all Arizona public community colleges and universities, and is transferable – as a block – from one Arizona community college to another state community college and to an Arizona public university.

The NSC data sample for the fall 2006 cohort indicates that most students who transfer in Arizona – 65 percent – stay in state. For out-of-state transfers, California receives the largest number of transfer students from Arizona, and also sends the most students to Arizona from the WICHE region. Other states that trade transfer students with Arizona include Colorado, New

Mexico, Utah and Washington. About 16 percent of Arizona transfer students leave the WICHE region.

Implications for the Passport. The General Education Articulation Task Force and the Academic Program Articulation Steering Committee – both representing multiple institutions – oversee policies on general education and transfer, and could consider incorporating the Passport within the existing block transfer framework in Arizona. As in Utah, Arizona’s general education requirements do not include oral communication, so adoption of the Passport would entail identification of courses that achieve the learning outcomes for this content area as well. As noted above, the existing transfer agreements between the Maricopa Community Colleges and numerous out-of-state institutions can serve as a starting place to forge Passport agreements with other institutions in WICHE states.

CALIFORNIA. Two California institutions participated in Phase I of the Passport Initiative – California State University Sacramento and Sacramento City College. California is a “LEAP state” whereby the lower-division general education core curriculum, established for the purposes of transfer, is based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. The state has developed three pathways to complete general education requirements (CSU GE Breadth Requirements, Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), and the UC Campus lower-division general education) and these pathways are aligned with the state’s three higher education systems – California State University System, California Community College System, and the University of California. State policy guarantees transfer of credits from one California institution to another for students who successfully complete the transfer core curriculum. California has a total of 145 public institutions – 112 two-year, and 33 four-year.

In the California State University System, the California general education curriculum, overseen by the General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC), includes the “Golden Four” basic skills required of all students: oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, and mathematics/quantitative reasoning. California decided not to enter into the Passport agreement for Phase I because the Passport did not include critical thinking. This content area will be included in the Passport’s Phase II and representatives from California institutions would bring valuable expertise to the process for developing Passport learning outcomes and proficiency criteria in critical thinking and the other content areas.

Implications for the Passport. As in other WICHE states, most out-of-state transfer students come to California from its adjacent states – Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada. California students who transfer to other WICHE states most often go to these three states, plus Colorado. As a LEAP state, California was well suited to participate in Phase I of the Passport, and now, with that experience as well as its established block transfer framework, it is an ideal candidate for participating in the work leading to Passport agreements in Phase II. The General Education Advisory Board of the California State University System may consider participating in the Phase II implementation that will include critical thinking. As the most populous state in the WICHE region and with the highest number of students transferring into and out of the state, Passport agreements between California institutions and other WICHE state institutions would facilitate the transfer process throughout the WICHE region.

COLORADO. The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) is authorized to oversee and implement general education policy for Colorado’s 28 public higher education institutions – 16 two-year and 12 four-year. By statutory authority, the state guarantees transfer of the state’s gtPathways Curriculum, a set of general education courses that are not based on course equivalencies but meet content and competency criteria. This curriculum encompasses the Passport Phase I content areas.

Colorado exchanges transfer students fairly evenly with nine other WICHE states, including two that have institutions that have signed onto Passport agreements (Utah and Oregon). The highest numbers of transfers into and out of Colorado are from Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Wyoming; fall 2006 cohort data showed over 1,700 students transferring between Colorado and these four states.

Implications for the Passport. Colorado’s gtPathways Curriculum transfer framework is quite suitable for incorporating the Passport Learning Outcomes and establishing the Passport agreement in the state, without any effect on Colorado policy. Colorado’s transfer framework and the Passport framework are both based on competency criteria. Developing Passport agreements between Colorado and other WICHE states, particularly with institutions in the four states with a high number of transfers, would facilitate student transfer for a number of students in the region, and reinforce Colorado’s competency-based transfer framework.

HAWAII. Hawai’i participated in the pilot phase of the Passport Initiative, and two institutions (out of six two-year and four four-year public institutions in the state) have signed the Passport agreement: Leeward Community College and University of Hawai’i West Oahu. The state’s lower-division general education curriculum, based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, is composed of two overarching content areas – Foundation and Diversification. The Board of Regents of the University of Hawai’i System adopts campuses’ overall plans for general education “to ensure overall coordination of general education across UH campuses.” The authority to accept general education core credits rests with the receiving institution, and campuses are allowed to enter into articulation agreements. Thus, with this authority, faculty and administrators at Leeward and UH West Oahu have accepted the Passport agreement and will grant lower-division general education credit to transfer students from other Passport institutions that have completed the Passport Block. Leeward and UH West Oahu students who earn the Passport and transfer to other Passport institutions will receive credit for the general education requirements already completed.

Implications for the Passport. As a Passport signatory state and also a LEAP state, all Hawai’i institutions are well situated to join Phase I and to participate in Phase II of the initiative – to align learning outcomes in six additional content areas and establish a Passport Block in these areas. Because of its geographic location, the state does not exchange a high number of transfer students with other WICHE states. According to fall 2006 cohort data, most transfers to and from Hawai’i are with California and Utah institutions. Utah is also a Passport signatory state, so the lower-division general education transfer pathway between Leeward and UH West Oahu and all eight public institutions in Utah is in place. Most beneficial to Hawai’i transfer students would be a Passport agreement with institutions in California.

IDAHO. The Idaho State Board of Education oversees seven higher education institutions in the state – three two-year and four four-year institutions. In December 2012 the Board established a policy for statewide articulation of the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science Degrees. The lower-division general education requirements for the Transfer Associate Degree include 36 credit hours across six content areas (including the Passport Phase I content areas). Students who complete requirements for either associate degree at an accredited institution in Idaho (as well as a specific community college in Oregon) will be considered to have satisfied the lower-division general education core requirements, granted junior standing upon transfer to a four-year public institution in Idaho, and will not be required to complete any additional lower-division general education core courses. This policy also applies to transfer students from any out-of-state accredited institution that have completed the equivalent of the Idaho’s general education core for the Associate Degree, but these students must obtain certification of such completion from the transferring institution.

Fall 2006 cohort data indicate that more than half (58 percent) of students who transfer in Idaho stay in the state, most transferring from two-year to four-year institutions. Approximately 35 percent of students who transfer go to other WICHE states, primarily Oregon, Utah, and Washington – two of which are Passport signatory states.

Implications for the Passport. The relatively new articulation policy in Idaho positions the state well to consider the Passport agreement for the Phase I Block. Idaho’s statewide policy on lower-division general education requirements and its sound transfer framework could encompass the Passport to facilitate cross-state transfers. The Passport agreement would put in place the required certification from students transferring into Idaho from other Passport institutions, thus reducing the burden on students and facilitating the transfer process.

MONTANA. Montana offers three options for transferring general education core requirements completed at one Montana University System (MUS) campus to another campus: 1) students complete all lower-division coursework in a campus-specific general education program, which will transfer as a block; 2) students complete the MUS Transferable Core, which is made up of 30 credits distributed across six categories, with each campus identifying a set of classes that satisfy these requirements; and 3) students earn an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree, which indicates completion of the general education program of a specific two-year campus.

The Montana University System Core Curriculum (MUS Core) is based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. It represents an agreement, set in System policy, among community, tribal and publicly funded colleges and universities in the state, which includes 12 two-year and six four-year institutions. The General Education Council oversees the provisions of the general education policy, including the MUS Core. The MUS Core encompasses the Passport Phase I content areas of oral and written communication and quantitative literacy.

Student transfer data from the fall 2006 cohort shows that 65.4 percent of Montana transfer students stay in state. About 21.4 percent transfer to adjacent WICHE states – Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming – and also to Alaska, California and Colorado – and students from all those states transfer to Montana institutions.

Implications for the Passport. As a LEAP state Montana is an ideal candidate to integrate the MUS Core learning outcomes and the Passport Learning Outcomes, and identify courses that make up a Passport Block. The General Education Council could consider a procedural change to approve the Passport for cross-state transfer. While the total number of students transferring to and from Montana is not substantial, the pattern of exchange between Montana and its adjacent states merits consideration of the Passport to facilitate the transfer process.

NEVADA. In fall 2012 the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) established statewide general education requirements for all universities and colleges in the system (seven four-year and two two-year institutions). Required for all degree programs, the general education curriculum encompasses two of the three Passport Phase I content areas: written communication and quantitative literacy. In addition, a Transfer and Admission policy, set in statute, was made effective in fall 2013 which automatically transfers credits earned at a community college toward a degree at a state college or university, i.e., completion of an associate degree automatically fulfills the lower-division general education requirements at any other NSHE institution. In addition, transfer agreements, which include general education and degree requirements, have been developed and posted online by nearly all Nevada institutions.

The 2006 fall cohort data indicate that 67 percent of transfers in Nevada are in-state – primarily four-year to four-year institutions. Nearly 23 percent of students transfer to other WICHE states; the number of students transferring to Nevada from other WICHE states is a bit higher than the number of students transferring from Nevada to other WICHE states. States with the most transfer activity with Nevada include Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Utah, and Washington. Approximately 10 percent of Nevada transfers leave the WICHE region.

Implications for the Passport. Nevada’s recent statewide general education requirements and transfer and admission policy establish a framework for consideration of the Passport. As transfer agreements are developed and implemented by Nevada public institutions, attention should be given to the number of students that transfer with the lower-division general education requirements completed, and to the destinations of those transfers, i.e., institutions and states. Nevada institution faculty and administrators may wish to examine student transfer patterns to determine the WICHE-state institutions with which a Passport agreement would be most beneficial for students coming into or leaving the state.

NEW MEXICO. The New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED), in accordance with state law, has established policies that guarantee successful transfer of completed core courses between New Mexico postsecondary public institutions. The General Education Course Transfer Curriculum, which is based on learning outcomes, covers five content areas, including the Passport Phase I. The Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Articulation Task Force, facilitates the review and approval of new courses for the General Education Core. In addition, all public institutions – 20 two-year and eight four-year – are required to conduct a continuous assessment of the General Education learning outcomes in each of the five areas according to a plan developed by the institution using whatever assessment methods are appropriate to its mission and context.

The majority of transfers in New Mexico – 74 percent – are in-state transfers, primarily on the four-year to two-year institution pathway. The fall 2006 cohort data also show that 16 percent

of students transfer out of the WICHE region, leaving about 10 percent of transfers between New Mexico and three other WICHE states – Arizona, California and Colorado.

Implications for the Passport. New Mexico’s general education curriculum is based on learning outcomes, and its transfer policy seeks to “guarantee successful transfer of completed core courses between New Mexico postsecondary public institutions.” These two factors make New Mexico a very good candidate for Passport consideration, particularly to facilitate cross-state transfers with Arizona and Colorado institutions.

NORTH DAKOTA. The North Dakota University System participated in Phase I of the Passport project, initially bringing its 11 public institutions (out of 14 in the state) into the pilot. Midway through Phase I, four institutions dropped out due to lack of time and capacity to engage in the project, and by the end only four institutions signed the Passport agreement. Concerns about “initiative overload” and stakeholder buy-in were factors in this outcome.

As mentioned earlier, during Passport Phase I, North Dakota University System (NDUS) faculty members have started the process of reviewing and revising general education requirements based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. Through the system’s General Education Requirement Transfer Agreement, general education courses accepted by any University System institution count upon transfer toward the general education requirement at all institutions. The general education curriculum requires 36 credit hours in four content areas and encompasses the Passport Phase I content areas.

Fall 2006 cohort data show that only three percent of transfers to and from North Dakota are cross-state transfers with three WICHE states: Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming. More than half of all transfers in North Dakota are in-state, primarily to four-year institutions from both two- and four-year institutions. Even so, North Dakota has the highest number of cross-state transfer agreements in the region, outlined in System policy, that facilitate the process for students transferring from California community colleges; Minnesota community colleges (only to the University of North Dakota); public and private two-year institutions in Montana, Oregon, and South Dakota; public two-year institutions in Washington, and Wyoming community colleges.

Implications for the Passport. As a Passport signatory state and also a LEAP state, four North Dakota institutions have completed the process to align their outcomes with the Passport Learning Outcomes. Other North Dakota institutions are informed about the Passport and may apply to participate in the future once their faculty members have more time to review the Passport learning outcomes and proficiency criteria. Ideally for students, the Passport would be a system-wide agreement as in Utah. Due to the University System’s turnover in leadership positions during the pilot project, this level of consideration was not possible. Once new leadership is in place, it may be explored. Also, the state’s existing block transfer agreements with seven other WICHE states present an opportunity to forge Passport agreements with institutions in those states as well.

OREGON. Oregon institutions also were participants in the Passport Phase I, with four institutions engaged in the process. At the conclusion of the pilot, one four-year institution signed the Passport Agreement and a second institution – not originally part of the Oregon

contingent – signed as well. Similar to North Dakota, the Oregon higher education governance structure and leadership experienced change during Phase I, which affected the ability of some stakeholders to stay involved in the project.

The AAOT (Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer) degree was created in the late 1980s, through collaboration between Oregon community college faculty and Oregon University System faculty, to reduce bureaucratic obstacles for students transferring from an Oregon community college to an OUS institution. Community colleges agreed in 2008 to standardize their AAOT degree requirements to maximize the efficient transfer of credit for students. The requirements of the AAOT degree constitute Oregon’s transferable general education curriculum. Outcomes and criteria have been identified for eight different content areas that make up this curriculum and, while not based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, the curriculum (developed by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education and the Oregon State Board of Education) seeks to promote skills, appreciation, and awareness of specific principles similar to the LEAP outcomes. The lower-division general education core curriculum is transferable to any institution in the Oregon University System, which has 26 public higher education institutions – 17 two-year and nine four-year institutions.

Fall 2006 cohort data show that 79 percent of transfer students remain in state. Five percent of transfers leave the WICHE region, leaving 16 percent that transfer to other WICHE states. The most transfers to and from Oregon are with California and Washington, but Oregon also takes in transfers from seven other WICHE states, and sends students to six other WICHE states.

Implications for the Passport. Oregon participants in Phase I of the Passport Initiative were very engaged in working to align institution outcomes to the Passport Learning Outcomes, develop transfer proficiency criteria, and develop the transfer process. In both Oregon and North Dakota it took more time than the Phase I timeline allowed to fully acquaint all stakeholders with the project, so re-engaging individuals at specific campuses to sign on to the Passport Phase I Block would be a next step. It should be noted that the general education curriculum requirements at Oregon four-year institutions do not necessarily encompass the Passport Learning Outcomes. For instance, the University of Oregon does not require oral communication or a quantitative literacy course for earning a bachelor’s degree. Faculty members at other institutions interested in joining the Passport can work collaboratively to align the Passport Learning Outcomes to institutions’ learning outcomes and identify courses to for the Passport Block. The two Passport signatory institutions in Oregon – Eastern Oregon University and Blue Mountain Community College – have already forged this path.

SOUTH DAKOTA. South Dakota has seven four-year and five two-year public institutions and a statewide general education curriculum that encompasses the three Phase I content areas. In addition, the state’s general education requirements are built around seven goals, with each designed to achieve student specific learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are not unlike the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.

The fall 2006 cohort data show that student transfer activity between South Dakota and other WICHE states is fairly minimal. Most transfers occur in state, with a small exchange of students with North Dakota, Wyoming, and Colorado. The data show that approximately 33 percent of students who transfer from South Dakota leave the WICHE region.

Implications for the Passport. The state’s small number of institutions and outcomes-based general education curriculum are factors conducive to considering the Passport. Specific South Dakota institutions likely have degree programs that would be of interest to students transferring from similar programs in other states – for example, from the Wyoming community colleges and the University of Wyoming to the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. A Passport agreement would facilitate such transfers for these institutions.

UTAH. The environment in Utah was particularly favorable for signing the Passport agreement. The state’s lower-division general education curriculum is based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, and the 11 public institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) grant total reciprocity for general education programs completed at other USHE institutions. The General Education Task Force and the Utah Board of Regents oversee these policies. The 11 USHE institutions have signed the Passport agreement. One of the Passport content areas – oral communication – is not a general education requirement in Utah institutions, so Utah students wishing to earn the Passport must complete coursework in this area.

Data from the fall 2006 cohort show that almost 85 percent of student transfers in Utah are in-state; about six percent of transfers leave the WICHE region. The rest are cross-state transfers within the WICHE region, primarily to the states adjacent to Utah plus California, Oregon, and Washington. The most common pathway for all Utah transfers is two-year to four-year.

Implications for the Passport. With 11 institutions participating in the Passport Phase I agreement, Utah is all set to begin work on Phase II – developing Passport Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria in the six remaining general education content areas. Faculty members and others from Utah institutions were key players in the pilot phase of the Passport, so their experience and expertise will be valuable in Phase II.

WASHINGTON. The statewide general education curriculum in the State of Washington includes the three content areas of the Passport. In 2012 the Washington Legislature passed and implemented the “Washington 45,” which requires, “Community and technical colleges, jointly with the four-year institutions of higher education, [to] develop a list of academic courses that are equivalent to one-years’ worth of general education credit and that would transfer for that purpose to any other two or four-year institution of higher education. Students may transfer a maximum of 45 credits under this agreement.” The Washington Student Achievement Council oversees general education and transfer policies for the state’s 34 two-year public institutions and nine four-year institutions.

According to the fall 2006 cohort data, more than 82 percent of Washington student transfers are in-state. About five percent of transfers leave the region, and a little over 12 percent transfer to and from 11 of the 15 WICHE states in the region. Likely because Washington has a large number of two-year institutions, student transfers into and out of the state are fairly equally distributed along the four different transfer pathways.

Implications for the Passport. Both the general education core transfer policy and the required general education content areas in Washington present a solid framework for consideration of the Phase I Passport. In addition, students from a number of other WICHE states transfer to Washington institutions, so a Passport agreement with Washington institutions would facilitate

student transfer overall in the WICHE region.

WYOMING. The sole four-year institution in Wyoming, the University of Wyoming, has transfer articulation agreements with all seven two-year institutions in the state: students with associate degrees will have met the UW general education requirements. These general education requirements include the Passport Phase I Block content areas.

Approximately 22 percent of cross-state transfer activity from Wyoming is with five adjoining states (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah), according to data from the fall 2006 cohort. About 63 percent of transfer students remain in state, and 22 percent of transfers from Wyoming leave the WICHE region.

Implications for the Passport. Despite its low population and low number of transfer students, Wyoming would benefit from the Passport agreement to enable students to transfer easily to other institutions in the WICHE region, particularly from Wyoming two-year institutions to four-year institutions in other states – the predominant pathway among Wyoming transfers. The established general education transfer agreements in the state are amenable to the Passport transfer framework.

CONCLUSIONS

Through these analyses we have gained a better understanding of each state's general education and student transfer policies and the implications for implementing the Passport at public institutions in the WICHE states. The Passport Agreement has not required changes in state or institutional policy in the four pilot states whose institutions signed the agreement (Hawai'i, North Dakota, Oregon, and Utah) because it is seen as an articulation agreement. In some cases modifications to procedures were not necessary; in others, minor changes were implemented. In Utah, for example, the general education core policy does not require oral communication – one of the content areas of the Passport block – so Utah students who earn the Passport take oral communication as an elective. This approach could work in other WICHE states (Hawaii, Nevada, and Washington), and where oral communication is not a lower-division requirement.

In California, however, system policy precludes institutions from participating in Phase I. As discussed earlier, the California State University System's general education policy requires critical thinking as one of its "Golden Four" general education content areas. For institutions in the California State University System (CSU) to sign the Passport Agreement Phase I, the General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) policy would require modification. Since critical thinking will be included in Phase II, however, it may make it possible for CSU students to earn the Passport as a combination of Phases I and II, depending on the alignment of the Phase II content areas with California's remaining lower division requirements. It does not appear that any other WICHE state will require policy changes for participation in the Passport, however, they may need to implement procedural changes.

It would seem to be an easier task to implement the Passport in states with centralized policies on general education but this may not always be the case. In both Utah and North Dakota, for example, the environment was ideal for introducing the Passport framework and implementing it in all public institutions as a system-wide initiative. However, not all institutions in North Dakota signed the agreement, for reasons having to do with staff turnover and the institutions' own capacity to study and implement it. As an obstacle, policy was secondary to institutional commitment and readiness.

The two-year term of the Passport pilot imposed some limits on the time and effort needed to secure agreements from all pilot institutions. In two pilot states, staff turnover or workload created a reluctance to move forward until all stakeholders were fully acquainted with the project. This circumstance simply required effort beyond this project's initial timeline. Since institutions can continue to join Phase I, however, some of these pilot institutions may still apply for participation.

Phase II will provide more time for this effort and expand the Passport to include all of the lower division requirements. This complete package may be of more interest to some institutions, as it signals an important milestone for students on their pathway to completion. As plans for Phase II develop, this document serves as an important resource pointing out that there are relatively few state/system policy hurdles to the widespread adoption of the Passport. Policies or procedures at some institutions, however, may require modifications. These will be explored as Phase I continues to expand participation and Phase II begins.