



For Immediate Release

August 4, 2009

Contact: Russ Poulin

Project Director

Transparency by Design Initiative

Associate Director, WCET

rpoulin@wiche.edu

(303) 541-0305

New Website Offers Transparency to Adult Learners Returning to College

BOULDER, CO – A consortium of adult-serving colleges and universities has launched a new initiative aimed at adult learners seeking better information in choosing an institution offering degrees through distance education. The initiative, called Transparency by Design, launches a website that gives adult learners new information to accelerate and better inform their decision making process. The website www.collegechoicesforadults.org will offer adult learners information on program-level learning outcomes, how outcomes are measured and how students performed on these measures. In the next stage, still in development, adult learners will have access to student satisfaction, progress rate, and other data on each member institution participating in the initiative.

“Adults make up nearly 85 percent of all higher education enrollments today,” said Michael Offerman, President Emeritus of Capella University and Chair of Transparency by Design’s Executive Committee. “Our goal with the initiative is to enable adults to make informed choices about higher education options by providing them with program-level learning outcomes, measurements and results that are difficult to find elsewhere,” said Offerman.

The Transparency by Design initiative which resulted in the College Choices for Adults website was born out of The President’s Forum, which is a consortium of both traditional and non-traditional institutions sharing information about successful operation in an online environment. WCET (formerly the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications), a division of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), was chosen to provide quality assurance on the standards of data reporting jointly developed by the charter institutions of the Transparency by Design initiative.

The initial website launch will include data for each institution and will grow over time. In addition, upcoming features to be added in the future include:

- Third-party test of general education skills administered by Educational Testing Services (ETS);
- Third-party assessment of satisfaction of online learners administered through Noel-Levitz;
- Results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE);
- Enhanced search functionality within the site;
- Comparative data analysis tools to help adult learners focus in on selection factors important to their educational goals;
- Additional data from each member institutions; and
- Data from new member institutions joining the initiative after the initial launch.

“We want student-centered tools and data. This isn’t about colleges promoting their wares, but creating an environment where we can help adult students make more informed choices on attending college, what opportunities there are to learn at a distance and what institutions match up on their needs. We’re excited to roll out more services to help students make informed choices,” says Russ Poulin, Project Director of Transparency by Design and Associate Director of WCET.

Transparency by Design is funded by a generous grant from Lumina Foundation for Education and by contributions from each of the member institutions. Charter members of the initiative are: American InterContinental University Online, American Public University System, Capella University, Charter Oak State College, Colorado Technical University, Excelsior College, Franklin University, Kaplan University, Regis University, Rio Salado College, Southwestern College Professional Studies, Union Institute and University and Western Governors University. Also, new members to the consortium include Ashford University and University of the Rockies. Data from recent members, along with members that choose to join the initiative at a later date, will be added to the College Choices for Adults website regularly.

Lumina Foundation for Education is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college — especially low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners. The organization’s goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and using communications and convening power to build public will for change. Additional information on the Lumina Foundation for Education can be found at www.luminafoundation.org.

The **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education** (WICHE) works collaboratively with its' members to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. WICHE is the only organization in the western United States that focuses exclusively on higher education issues, from access and accountability to tuition and fees to distance learning and innovation. In addition to Transparency by Design, WICHE's other adult-focused programs include Non-Traditional No More, College Access Challenge Grant Program and Best Practices in Statewide Transfer and Articulation Systems. For more information about WICHE, please visit www.wiche.edu.

WCET (formerly the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications) is a cooperative network of member institutions and organizations that provides a leading source of critical thinking and expertise on the evolving role of technology in higher education. WCET has a long standing tradition of involvement with quality assurance having been an integral part of the Best Practices for Electronically offered Degree and Certificate Programs written with the Council of Regional Accrediting Agencies, CENTSS an audit service which helps institutions benchmark their online student services developed with MnSCU and is currently partnering with the Campus Computing Survey to administer the first "Managing Online Programs" survey. For more information about WCET visit www.wcet.info.

The Presidents' Forum was established in 2004 and is hosted by Excelsior College. The forum is a collaboration of accredited, national, adult-serving institutions and programs which have embraced the power and potential of online education. The Mission of the Presidents' Forum is to advance the recognition of innovative practice and excellence in online learning. Additional information on The Presidents' Forum can be found at <http://presidentsforum.excelsior.edu>.

The College Choices for Adults website can be found at www.collegechoicesforadults.org.

###