

## Overview: Distance Education and Workforce Development Reports

NC-SARA contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to create a new Distance Education and Workforce Development Report for each SARA member state. The goal for these reports is to better help states identify how distance education can be used to meet workforce needs, as well as to identify gaps in state offerings.

These reports incorporate [NC-SARA data](#) on exclusively distance education enrollment and out-of-state learning placement activity, data from IPEDS on distance education programs offered, state educational attainment measures, and workforce development data provided by Lightcast (formerly Emsi Burning Glass). For questions about this report please contact NC-SARA at [data@nc-sara.org](mailto:data@nc-sara.org).

Please note that states may report figures other than those included in this report due to differing methodologies; please refer to the higher education system or state higher education agency for more information.

### Definition of Terms:

**Distance Education:** Education that uses one or more types of technology to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.

**Distance Education Program:** A program for which all the required coursework for program completion can be completed entirely via distance education courses.

**Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment (EDEE):** Students who are solely taking coursework via distance education.

**Out-of-State Learning Placement (OOSLP):** Supervised field experiences such as, but not limited to, clinical rotations, internships, or student teaching, offered by SARA-participating institutions in locations outside their home state.

### About NC-SARA

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a nonprofit organization that helps expand students' access to educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance learning programs.

Today, more than 2,400 institutions participate SARA across 49 member states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands all voluntarily participate in SARA.

### About NCHEMS

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) is a private nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve strategic decision making in postsecondary education for states and institutions in the United States and abroad. Its work has touched on topics across a wide spectrum of public policy: strategic planning to finance and resource allocation to the development of new educational delivery models. Throughout its more than 50 years, NCHEMS has been a resource for turning data into usable knowledge for leaders and policymakers at all levels.

## Distance Education and Workforce Development

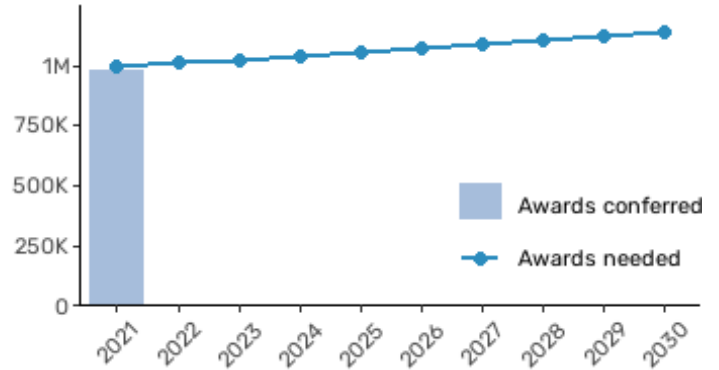
### Educational Attainment and the Workforce

The Lumina Foundation has set a goal for 60 percent of the U.S. population aged 25 to 64 to possess at least a postsecondary degree or certificate of value or industry recognized certification by 2025. In order for the WICHE states to collectively reach that goal by **2030**, awards from institutions in these states will need to increase by 1.5% annually.

While each state differs, the industries projected to be the largest overall across the WICHE region in 2030 are Health Care and Social Assistance, Government, and Retail Trade, and the ones projected to grow by the largest percentage are Transportation and Warehousing, Accommodation and Food Services, and Management of Companies and Enterprises. This document summarizes how distance education may contribute to meeting workforce needs across the WICHE states.

*Some data sources used in this document do not include California and/or WICHE-member U.S. Territories; Please see the "data details" on page 4.*

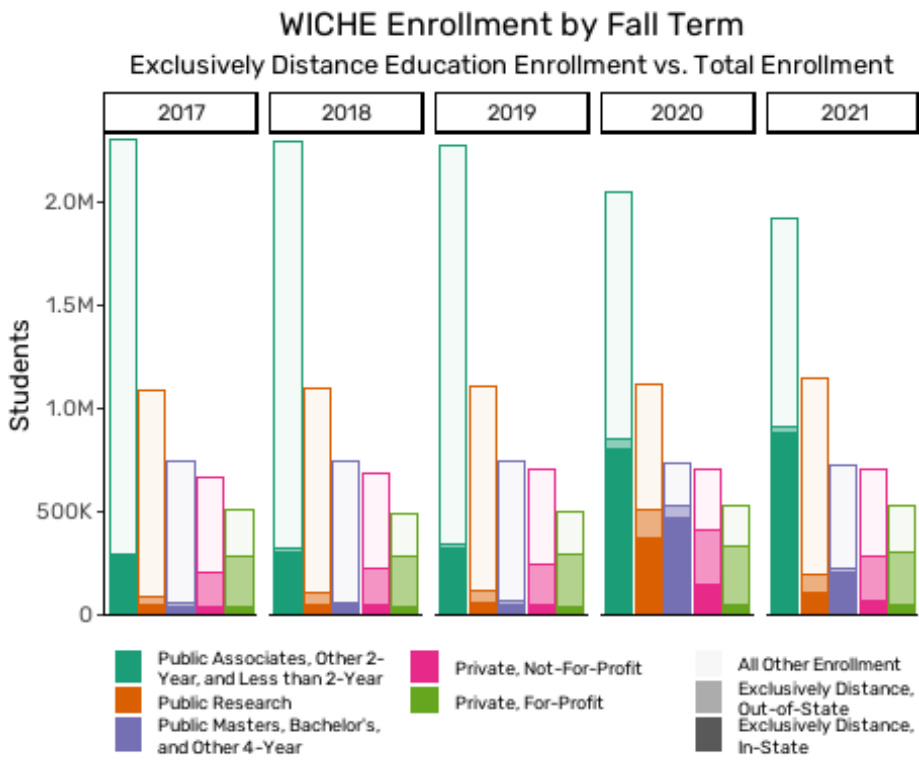
WICHE States Award Production  
Progress towards meeting attainment goal by 2030



Sources: IPEDS, U.S. Census Bureau, Lumina Foundation, Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce

### College Enrollment and Distance Education

How much exclusively distance education enrollment is taking place at colleges and universities in the WICHE states?



In line with nationwide trends, overall college and university enrollment in the WICHE states has declined; there were 241,272 fewer students in Fall 2021 compared to Fall 2017. The number of students attending exclusively via distance education, however, grew from 948,183 (18% of enrollment) in Fall 2017 to 1,068,617 (20% of enrollment) in Fall 2019. The pandemic accelerated this trend, and Fall 2021 exclusively distance education enrollment was 1,988,926 (39% of enrollment). Of those attending exclusively via distance education in Fall 2021, 66% were attending institutions in their home state. This represents an increase from 2019, when the percentage was 49%. In Fall 2021, the sector with the highest percentage of exclusively distance education students was Private, For-Profit, while Public Research was lowest.

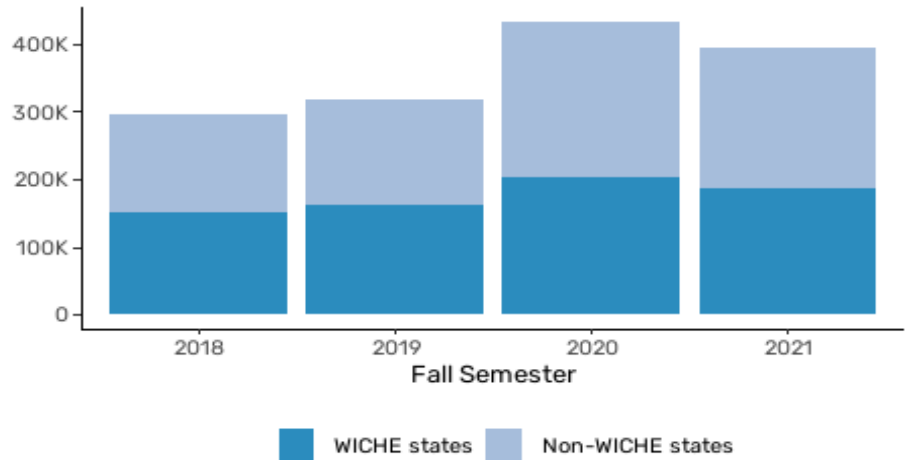
When reading the chart above, note that the darker bands represent exclusively distance education enrollments.

## How many students from the WICHE states are studying via distance education at out-of-state institutions?

The number of students from the WICHE states who study at out-of-state institutions exclusively via distance education has also increased over time.

According to NC-SARA data, in Fall 2018, 296,901 students from WICHE states were attending out-of-state institutions (both within and outside the WICHE region) exclusively via distance education. In 2021, that number was 394,853, which was an increase of 33% over three years. In 2021, 47% of the students from WICHE states who were studying at out-of-state institutions were attending institutions in other WICHE states.

**Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment  
WICHE Students at Out-of-State Institutions**

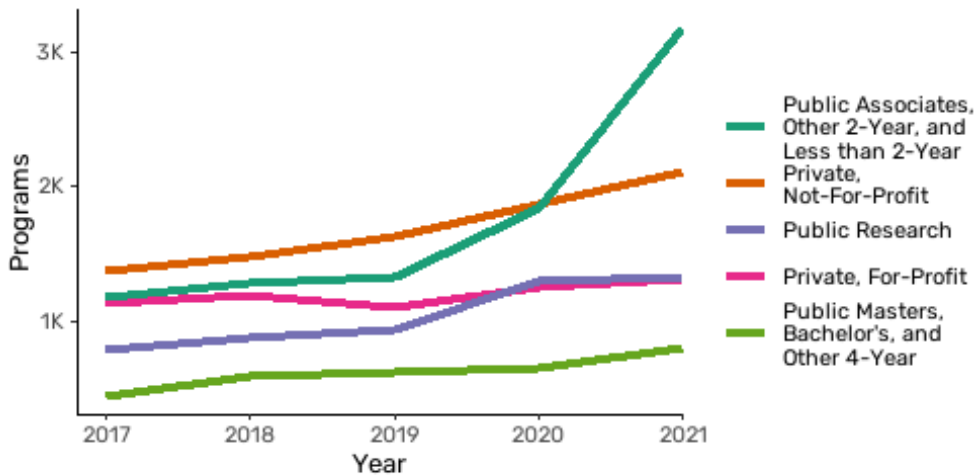


Source: NC-SARA

The NC-SARA data represents enrollments at over 2,300 institutions, or 67% of all postsecondary institutions that offer distance education. In the chart to the right, the light blue areas represent enrollments at institutions new to SARA participation – so any change is because of their inclusion, not an increase in students.

## What are the distance education offerings from WICHE-state institutions?

**Distance Education Programs at WICHE Institutions  
Over Time For All Program Levels, by Sector**

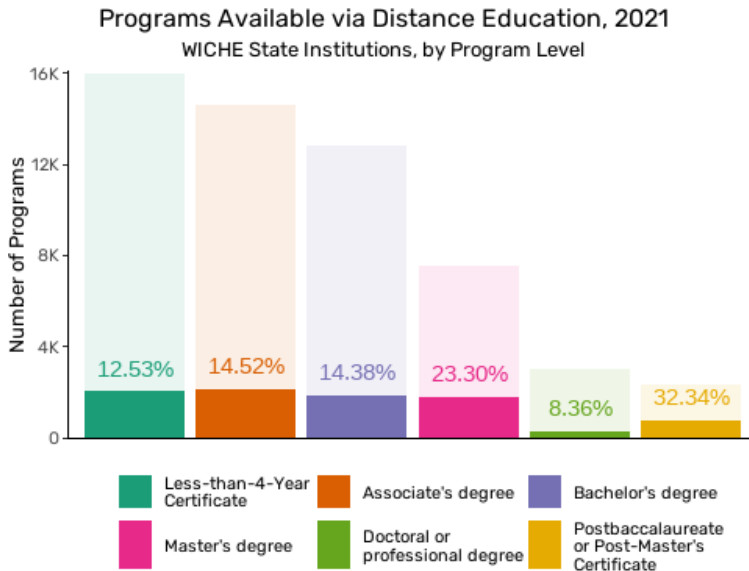


Source: IPEDS

Just as the number of distance education students has grown, the number of distance education programs has also grown, allowing students a wider variety of distance education options. A distance education program is defined as a program for which all the required coursework for program completion can be completed entirely via distance education courses.

In 2017, colleges and universities in the WICHE states offered 4,955 distance education programs. By 2021, that number had grown to 8,788, an increase of 77%. In 2021, the sector with the largest number of distance education programs was Public Associates, Other 2-Year, and Less than 2-Year, which offered 13% of its programs (3,177 programs) via distance education. Across all sectors, 39% of institutions in the WICHE states offered at least one program that could be completed entirely via distance education.

In 2021, institutions in the WICHE states offered distance education programs in 38 disciplines. These accounted for 16% of all programs offered by institutions in the region. The largest number of distance education programs were available at the Associate's degree level; there were 2,120 such programs across 279 institutions. The programs most commonly offered via distance education were in Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services.



Source: IPEDS

**Five most common distance education programs in the WICHE states, 2021**

Program Level	Discipline	Distance Education Programs
Less-than-4-Year Certificate	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	607
Associate's degree	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	425
Master's degree	Education	411
Bachelor's degree	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	389
Master's degree	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	323

Source: IPEDS

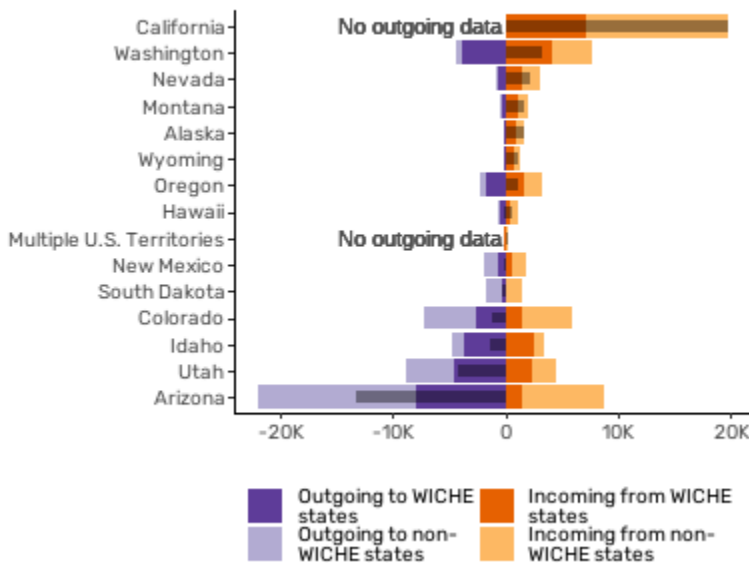
**Out-of-State Learning Placements**

These learning placements include supervised field experiences such as, but not limited to, clinical rotations, internships, or student teaching.

In 2021, 39,653 total incoming students from institutions in non-WICHE states participated in learning placements in the WICHE states, and 28,287 outgoing students attending WICHE-state institutions participated in learning placements in non-WICHE states. There is considerable variation, however, between states in their ratios of incoming to outgoing learning placements. States with larger numbers of incoming students may be places with job opportunities for new college graduates; they could also be states in which many students attend out-of-state institutions (either via distance education or in person) but complete their learning placements back at home. States with higher numbers of outgoing students are the reverse.

Within the WICHE compact, movement between the WICHE states for learning placements has increased to 26,602 in 2021, and occurs most frequently in Health Professions and Related Programs.

**Outgoing, Incoming, and Net Learning Placements**  
WICHE states, 2021



**Out of State Learning Placements**  
Movement among the WICHE states

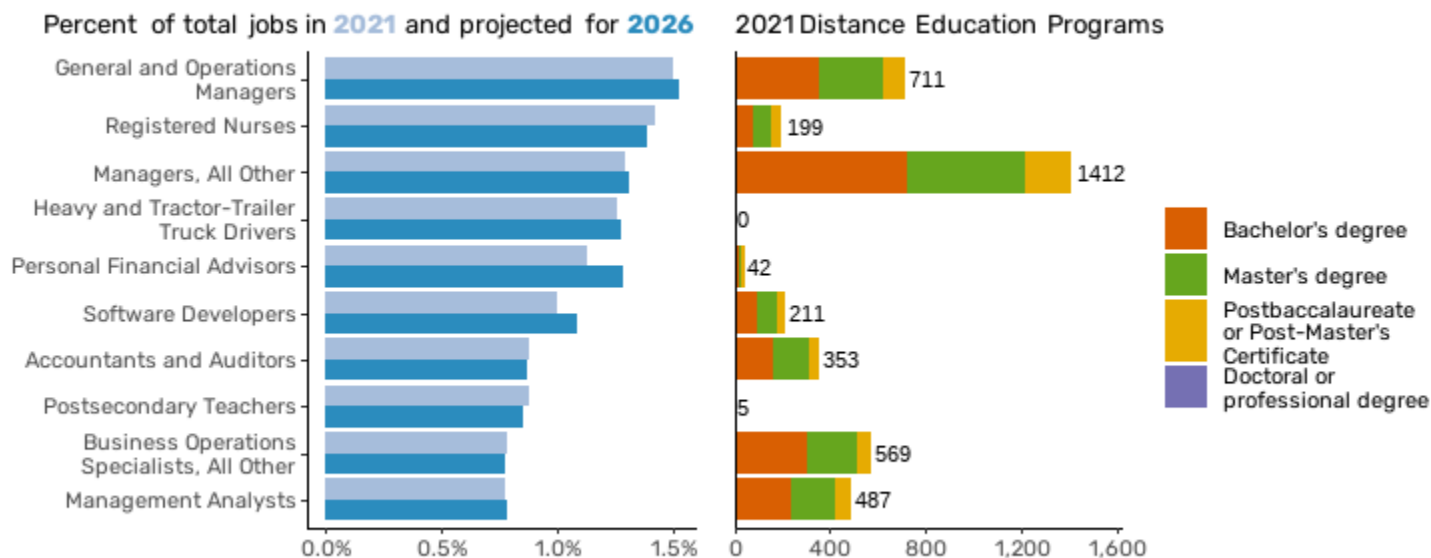


## Workforce Development

What are the top occupations in the WICHE states that require a postsecondary credential or degree?

### Top Occupations in That Require Some Postsecondary Education

#### WICHE States



Sources: Lightcast, IPEDS

Many of the largest occupations that require postsecondary education are expected to grow as shares of total employment over time, increasing the need for college-educated workers in the WICHE states. Of these ten occupations, colleges and universities in the WICHE states offer distance education programs at the typical entry level of education, or one level higher, in nine of them.

The WICHE states' ten largest occupations requiring a postsecondary credential comprised 11% of the total jobs within those states in 2021. Among these occupations, the largest is General and Operations Managers, and the one expected to grow by the largest percentage from 2021 to 2026 is Personal Financial Advisors.

### What skills are in demand?

Among jobs with higher education requirements, the skills in highest demand in the WICHE states are the "common" skills of Communications, Management, and Leadership. Common skills are prevalent across many different industries and include personal attributes, behaviors, competencies, and learned skills.

Among more job-specific specialized skills, those most in-demand in the WICHE states, based on job posting language in 2022 that also mentioned a college degree, are Marketing, Computer Science, and Accounting.

#### Top 10 In-Demand Specialized Skills in the WICHE states

- Marketing
- Computer Science
- Accounting
- Auditing
- Finance
- Nursing
- Data Analysis
- Project Management
- Workflow Management
- Process Improvement

Source: Lightcast

#### Data Details:

- Attainment projections exclude data from U.S. Territories.
- Enrollment data include institutions that do not participate in Title IV financial aid.
- The five most common distance education programs may include more than five programs if there are ties.
- In the data on outgoing distance education students, please note that a small amount of the increase in students is due to an increase in the number of institutions participating in SARA and therefore reporting data.
- Outgoing distance education data exclude students studying at institutions in California, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and American Samoa.
- Out-of-state learning placements data exclude students studying at institutions in California and the U.S. Territories listed above.
- Industry and Occupation data from U.S. Territories are not included.
- The occupation graph includes the top 10 occupations that typically require a postsecondary credential or degree, based on 2021 data and 2026 projections. The top 10 for both time intervals are included, though there is significant overlap. Occupations are based on 6-digit SOC code and ranked by the number of jobs. All types of workers are counted, including those who are self-employed and those not covered by Unemployment Insurance. The distance education programs connected to these occupations are based on Lightcast's CIP-SOC crosswalk. Only programs at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level higher are included.