Western Governors University

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Motto	Online. Accelerated. Affordable. Accredited.
Established	1997
Type	Private, Non-profit
President	Robert Mendenhall
Location	Salt Lake City, Utah, United States
Campus	Distance learning
Status	Non-profit
Website	www.wgu.edu

Western Governors University (commonly known as **WGU**) is a private, non-profit, online university with more than 20,000 students. A competency-based university, WGU has students in all 50 states, and offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Business, Teacher Education, Information Technology, and Health Professions, including Nursing. Western Governors University's Online MBA Ranked Among Top 10 Best Values by GetEducated.com [1]. WGU was awarded Best of State for Online Education in 2009 and 2010. The university's president, Robert Mendenhall, was named 2010 CEO of the Year by Utah Business Magazine.[2][3].

The University was founded in 1997 by a bi-partisan group of 19 western governors with the mission to improve quality and expand access to post-secondary educational opportunities. WGU enrolled its first student in 1999. It is notable for offering a unique competency-based learning model in which students earn their degrees by demonstrating competence rather than by accumulating credit hours by spending time attending classes. Students can use their work, academic, and life experience (combined with learning new skills) to earn a college degree. A variety of learning resources, including standard textbooks, simulations, and webinars, are

available to help students develop the new skills and competencies they need to advance in their degree programs. In many cases students are able to accelerate their time to degree completion.

While the university receives grants from state and federal agencies as well as large corporations and foundations, it is self-sustaining on tuition and does not rely on state or federal funding for its operations. Corporations and foundations supporting WGU include AT&T, Dell, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, Sun Microsystems, HCA, HP, Microsoft, Qwest, American Express, Simmons Media Group and Zions Bank [5] .

The University accepts applications only from individuals living in the United States and select geographical areas of Canada. (The exceptions are U.S. active-duty military personnel and their families stationed at overseas installations, and individuals living in Guam, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands.)[4] There is no minimum high school grade point average for admission, and no minimum score on the SAT or ACT. However, all applicants must pass an admissions examination administered by the university.

The administration is based at Salt Lake City, Utah and Dr. Robert Mendenhall serves as university president. In addition, the University operates an office in Phoenix, Arizona[6]. All academic operations are virtual. The nearly 1,000 WGU staff members are located throughout the U.S; many work from virtual offices. In 2010, WGU Indiana , a wholly owned subsidiary of Western Governors University opened to expand access to higher education for Indiana residents [4] .

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Aims

WGU aims to offer an affordable higher education opportunity to students who may not have access to a traditional college or university. As a non-profit, the University aims to focus on the needs of individuals with modest incomes, first-generation college students, minorities, and those who live in rural locations. WGU students are eligible to apply for federal financial aid, and the University offers a number of scholarship programs. Most importantly, WGU aims to help

working adults improve their lives and the lives of their families by helping them complete accredited degrees in high demand career fields.

Foundation

The university was founded in 1997[5] by 19 governors,[6] led by Roy Romer[7] when he was governor of Colorado, Michael O. Leavitt[8] when he was governor of Utah, and Jim Geringer when he was governor of Wyoming. As of 2008 Geringer remains directly involved with WGU as Chairman of the Board of Trustees.[9]

Western Governors University Headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah

Chairman:

- Jim Geringer, Governor, (R) - Wyoming 1995-2003

Chairman Emeritus:

- Michael O. Leavitt, Governor, (R) - Utah 1993-2003

Member Governors include:[10]

- Governor Jan Brewer, (R) - Arizona
- Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, (R) - California
- Governor Bill Ritter, (D) - Colorado
- Governor Felix Perez Camacho, (R) - Guam
- Governor Linda Lingle, (R) - Hawaii
- Governor Butch Otter, (R) - Idaho
- Governor Mitch Daniels, (R) - Indiana
- Governor Brian Schweitzer, (D) - Montana
- Governor Dave Heineman, (R) - Nebraska
- Governor Jim Gibbons, (R) - Nevada
- Governor Bill Richardson, (D) - New Mexico
- Governor John Hoeven, (R) - North Dakota
- Governor Brad Henry, (D) - Oklahoma
- Governor Ted Kulongoski, (D) - Oregon
- Governor Mike Rounds, (R) - South Dakota

- Governor Rick Perry, (R) - Texas
- Governor Gary Herbert, (R) - Utah
- Governor Christine Gregoire, (D) - Washington
- Governor Dave Freudenthal, (R) - Wyoming

The ongoing bipartisan support from governors for WGU is attested to by those recently active on the board. For example, Bill Ritter, Democratic governor of Colorado, and Mitch Daniels, Republican governor of Indiana, are currently serving on the board. Of the 19 governors, 12 (63%) are Republican, whereas 7 (37%) are Democratic.

Academic offerings

Western Governors University comprises four colleges, each offering bachelor's and master's degree programs:

College of Business

The College of Business offers bachelor's degrees in business management, marketing, accounting, finance, HR, and IT management, as well as three MBA programs. Graduates of the MBA programs are unique in that they receive the Certified MBA designation.

- B.S. Business Management[11]
- B.S. Business—Human Resource Management
- B.S. Business—Information Technology Management
- B.S. Sales and Sales Management
- B.S. Marketing Management
- B.S. Accounting
- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- M.B.A. Information Technology Management
- M.B.A. Healthcare Management

Teachers College

As one of the largest teachers colleges in the United States with more than 9,000 students, the WGU Teachers College offers NCATE-accredited, competency-based teacher licensure and master's degree programs. The WGU Teachers College offers programs in interdisciplinary studies, mathematics, science, special education, ELL/ESL, learning and technology, instructional design, and educational leadership.

- B.A. Interdisciplinary Studies (K-8)
- B.A. Early Childhood Education
- B.A. Mathematics (5-9 or 5-12)
- B.A. Science (5-9)
- B.A. Science (Chemistry, 5-12)
- B.A. Science (Physics, 5-12)
- B.A. Science (Biological Sciences, 5-12)
- B.A. Science (Geosciences, 5-12)
- B.A. Special Education (K-12)

- Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Preparation Program (K-8)
- Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Preparation Program, Mathematics
- Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Preparation Program, Science
- Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Preparation Program, Social Science
- M.A. Teaching (K-8)
- M.A. Teaching, Mathematics
- M.A. Teaching, Science
- M.A. Teaching, Social Science
- M.S. Special Education (K-12)
- M.S. Educational Leadership
- M.A. English Language Learning/English as a Second Language (ELL/ESL) (PK-12)
- M.A. Mathematics Education (K-6, 5-9, or 5-12)
- M.A. Science Education (5-9)
- M.A. Science Education (Chemistry, 5-12)
- M.A. Science Education (Physics, 5-12)
- M.A. Science Education (Biological Sciences, 5-12)
- M.A. Science Education (Geosciences, 5-12)
- M.Ed. Instructional Design
- M.Ed. Learning and Technology
- Endorsement Preparation Program in English Language Learning (ELL/ESL) (PK-12)
- Endorsement Preparation Program in Educational Leadership

College of Information Technology

The College of Information Technology offers bachelor's degrees that incorporate up to 10 current IT certifications. With degrees in databases, software, security, health informatics, networks administration, and design and management, the IT certification exams are fully integrated with the degree program.

- B.S. Information Technology
- B.S. Information Technology—Networks Administration
- B.S. Information Technology—Networks Design and Management
- B.S. Information Technology—Databases
- B.S. Information Technology—Security
- B.S. Information Technology—Software
- B.S. Health Informatics (from the College of Health Professions)
- B.S. Business—Information Technology Management (from the College of Business)
- M.S. Information Security and Assurance
- M.B.A. Information Technology Management

College of Health Professions

To address the growing need for compassionate, competent health professionals, WGU has developed several accredited degree programs designed for healthcare professionals. Emphasizing mastery of essential skills and knowledge, the College of Health Professions offers degree programs in nursing, nursing education, nursing leadership and management, health education, health informatics, and healthcare management.

- B.S. Nursing (RN to BSN)

- B.S. Nursing (Prelicensure)
- B.S. Health Informatics
- M.S. Nursing—Education
- M.S. Nursing—Leadership and Management * M.S. Nursing—Education (RN to MSN Option)
- M.S. Nursing—Leadership and Management (RN to MSN Option)
- M.B.A. Healthcare Management

Online learning and one-on-one mentoring

All aspects are completed entirely online. The university states [12] that "learning resources come in a variety of forms, including textbooks, web-based tutorials, simulations, [and] online classes." Each student at WGU is assigned a working mentor who advises and assists the student from enrollment through degree completion. Each mentor/student team creates a personal academic action plan (AAP) that helps the student track his or her progress through each 6-month term. Students at WGU have some control over how much coursework they complete per term, but are required to complete a minimum each term to maintain what is called Satisfactory Academic Performance (SAP). There are no written limitations regarding course loads, but students must have the approval of their mentor to add courses during a term. In addition, courses can only be added one at a time during the term, and only after the student's current courses have been completed successfully. Students may take certain exams without study for some courses if they show competency via pre-assessments. Other courses require weeks-long participation in online courses and in written submissions that are graded by independent contract evaluators.

Assessment methods

WGU offers courses that are generally assessed using an equal weighting of examinations and coursework. The coursework component normally is done by submitting marked assignments. The examinable component is a proctored exam. Exams are taken at proctored exam sites, which are located across the country or via Kryterion online monitoring, using a webcam. There are no "open book" exams. Students must prepare themselves to take the exams after completing their "course of study" materials; they must also pass a pre-assessment exam that is available for most subjects before attempting the final exam.

Competency-based learning

WGU offers students competency-based programs for completing their degree and certificate requirements, with no requirement of class attendance. Competency-based programs allow students to demonstrate through assessments that they have acquired the set of competencies (levels of knowledge, skill, or ability) required for a particular degree or certificate. For example, the University states that the business management bachelor's degree requires "132 Competency Units (credit equivalents)" and can be completed in four to five years for students with little or no prior college, but that "successful students who commit 20 hours or more per week to their studies are often able to complete their programs more quickly."[11] Adult students have often acquired many of the skills necessary for a degree through life and work experiences. WGU's

competency-based system is designed to enable students to employ such previously learned skills in proving their competency.[13]

Accreditation

- Western Governors University is regionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, one of the major accrediting commissions recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. WGU has the distinction of being the only university to receive regional accreditation from four regional accrediting commissions:(a) the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities; (b) the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; (c) the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges; and (d) the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.
- WGU is also nationally accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC).[14]
- In October 2006, the WGU Teachers College became the first exclusively online school to receive accreditation from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).[15]
- In 2008 WGU won a 21st Century Award for Best Practices in Distance Learning from the U.S. Distance Learning Association (USDLA).[16]
- In May 2009, Western Governors University's Nursing Education Programs were accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The initial accreditation, which has a five-year term, was awarded following a rigorous process that included a site visit as well as a review of WGU's nursing curriculum.[17]

Affordability

In 2010, tuition is $5,780 per year for most undergraduate programs and has only increased by $200 in the past four years. WGU's competency-based degrees allow well-qualified students to complete their education and graduate more quickly, and therefore less expensively, than traditional systems that require class attendance to receive credit hours.