

WGU NEWS



September, 1996 Vol. 1 No. 4

Quote of the Month...

“As higher education continues to balance quality, cost, delivery methods, infrastructure expenses and various other issues, the virtual university will find its niche. That it has received such overwhelming support from leaders in the West is refreshing.”

The Idaho Statesman,
June 26, 1996

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Co-Directors Appointed, WGU Moves Forward

Govs. Mike Leavitt of Utah and Roy Romer of Colorado have appointed two higher education officials to oversee the continued development and eventual roll-out of the Western Governors University by the summer of 1997.

Serving as co-directors of the WGU initiative are E. Jeffery Livingston, Executive Assistant to the Governor and Associate Commissioner of Higher Education for the Utah System of Higher Education, and Robert C. Albrecht, Associate Vice President of the University of Colorado.

The WGU will expand higher educational opportunities by using advanced information technology to cross state and institutional lines, and will provide a means for assessing competencies acquired by students. Leavitt and Romer serve as lead governors for the initiative.

“Jeff and Bob are extremely qualified to guide several critical activities, including the development of a business plan, leading toward its successful implementation by next year,” Romer said.

Livingston and Albrecht will work part time at the Western Governors’ Association to provide strategic direction for the initiative and coordinate public and private outreach efforts. In addition they are working with members of the implementation team to move forward on several critical activities approved by governors at their annual meeting in June.

“We believe there is a strong market for the type of educational

services the WGU will offer,” Leavitt said, “and we want to make certain it will meet the needs of potential students, employers and educational providers.”

Livingston said increasing access through technology and certifying learning outcomes and competency acquisition are the distinguishing characteristics of the WGU.

“The critical initial tasks are to develop an appropriate role and strategy for the university’s initial certificate and degree offerings, and to complete the development of the ‘smart’ catalog,” Livingston said.

An electronic catalog or advisor will be developed allowing students to identify skills they already have or may need to receive certification or a degree. It will also enable students to sign up for and take courses and will assist in assessing their mastery of learned skills.

“The prospect of increasing access to post-secondary education for expanding populations is challenging and exciting,” Albrecht said.

“Initiating the enterprise to accomplish that will require extensive cooperation and participation across the private and public sectors. We believe the governors’ vision is timely and its realization significant for large segments of the population.”

Albrecht oversees the fiber optics network for the University of Colorado and coordinates technology projects for the multiple campus

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WGU Views

Much has been written about the WGU in the past several months. This column incorporates portions of three editorials.

The Sacramento Bee recently wrote that the new venture "reflects the governors' conviction that in many states, the coming wave of students seeking college opportunities will overwhelm the states' ability to fund sufficient new space in conventional colleges and universities..."

"Given the new information technologies, widespread systems of on-line education—offered by private companies as well as public institutions—are inevitable. That won't be a panacea: A great deal is likely to be lost—in the sense of community, in the experience of living with other students and in all the intangibles of campus life. But the 'virtual university' will challenge existing institutions, as never before, to define themselves not by their input—courses offered, length of time to degree, books in the library—but by output: What does a person have to know and be able to do to earn an undergraduate degree in chemistry, or as a major in history or English? And what about a sense of civic and social responsibility? That will be a huge task both for the virtual university and for more established institutions."

The Washington Post in a July 11 editorial noted that the WGU initiative goes far beyond distance learning and "obliges actual universities to think anew about their functions."

"A huge assortment of financial and practical pressures on university management of actual campuses—rising costs, student overflows, the price of faculty—make the no-campus a tantalizing dream. On the other hand, ordinary pen-and-paper correspondence schools have existed for a long time because of similar pressures, and somehow the vast majority of would-be students continue to prefer the real thing. The virtues of the Virtual University may yet trump the familiar virtues of the other kind, but it will take more than plugging in a modem."

The Idaho Statesman editorialized on June 26: "As higher education continues to balance quality, cost, delivery methods, infrastructure expenses and various other issues, the virtual university will find its niche. That it has received such overwhelming support from leaders in the West is refreshing."

Hawaii, Nevada Join WGU

Hawaii and Nevada are the latest states to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to proceed with the next phase of the WGU's development.

That document commits each of the 13 governors who have signed the MOU to seek \$100,000 for the next phase of development, to establish at least one local WGU center in his state and to help identify and eliminate barriers to its establishment.

"As we approach the dawn of the 21st century, Hawaii stands to benefit immensely by joining other western states to take advantage of new technologies to provide long distance learning," said Hawaii Gov. Benjamin Cayetano. "I see the possibilities for educating our young people of Hawaii to be limitless by becoming a technologically 'smart' state, instead of limiting access to education because of geography."

Nevada Gov. Bob Miller called the WGU an "educational break-through."

"It will provide opportunities in higher education that are simply unavailable today," he said. "WGU is a marriage of education and technology that will enrich the lives of people in our region and across the globe."

Info-Lines

Most WGU documents, press releases and newsletters are available on our Internet web site at www.westgov.org/smart/vu/vu.html. Some key documents can also be faxed to you directly by calling 1-800-659-5858.

If you would prefer to receive e-mail notification of future issues of the WGU News, which is available on the Internet, send an e-mail message to kdeike@westgov.org.

WGU: Everything You Wanted to Know

From the beginning, the idea of creating a western virtual university has had its supporters and its skeptics who wrote, phoned and e-mailed their interest, concerns and questions. How will it work? Won't it hurt existing institutions? When can I sign up?

In June, many of those questions were answered when the governors approved an implementation plan for the WGU. However, other details remain to be worked out over the next year.

Following are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.

I Want to be A Student...How Do I Sign Up? And How Will it work?

Potential students inquire regularly as to when and how they can enroll in the WGU. Some are genuinely disappointed when they're advised the start-up date is not scheduled until the summer of 1997—an aggressive time frame for launching such an ambitious undertaking.

They also want to know how this university without walls will work for them.

Critical to the operation of the WGU is the smart catalog or WGU Advisor, which will be accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world. A prototype of this future Internet site, was developed by IBM with guidance from a design team appointed by the governors.

Courses listed on the

catalog will be offered by existing higher education institutions and non-traditional educators such as corporations that train employees who require specific skills. All courses will undergo a quality control screening before they are brokered through the catalog by the WGU.

But the catalog is much more than a list of courses. One very important role it will play is to assist students in assessing their existing skills and knowledge. Students will be able to test themselves in specific skill areas to determine if they're ready to take a course or to work toward a certification or degree.

Students will create a profile for themselves, including their preference for the types of technologies to use and convenient times for taking courses. Using the profile and a student's self assessment, the catalog will recommend a list of possible courses to meet their educational goals from both traditional and non-traditional providers. It will also include information on the cost of each course and the technology through which it is delivered, such as over the Internet, on CD-ROM, on videotape or by e-mail. This will allow students to do comparison shopping.

After the catalog has been operational for a few years, the WGU will publish the success rate of students passing the certificate of competency linked to courses and educational providers.

The catalog will contain a variety of search options to guide students, based on whether they are seeking a certificate of competency, a professional certification program, an academic degree, an individual course, jobs and career information, or assessment services.

Enrollment will be simple, taking information already provided in the student's profile. The information will only need to be entered once, even if a student is taking courses from more than one provider. Tuition

will be paid to the WGU, which will make distributions to the providers.

Once a student acquires the skills required for a certificate of competence, an assessment will be conducted by a third party under contract to the WGU. It won't matter where a student acquired the knowledge or skill, as long as he or she can pass the assessment. In some cases, such as lab work, assessment will require a student to travel to a campus or other location for an intense evaluation period. Again, the catalog will be used to locate a center and schedule an assessment based on preferences listed in the student's profile.

I Don't Have a Computer, How Can I Participate?

Each of WGU's participating states must establish at least one center that will provide one-stop shopping for WGU services, including access to the delivering technologies.

These local/regional centers will be affiliated with the WGU to provide many support services and to serve as a point of access for students. While some centers may be newly created organizations, it is anticipated that most will be existing organizations such as public libraries, county extension offices, high schools or postsecondary institutions, companies training their workforce through the WGU, or local businesses that see supporting WGU students as a business opportunity.

Among the services the centers will offer:

- Conduct pre-admission, interim and final assessments of specific competencies.
- Provide individual counseling and advising, as well as assistance in accessing centralized services (such as the smart catalog and on-line counseling and advising services).

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Questions

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- Provide access to information on learning resources, requirements for certification and credentialing and assessment resources.
- Provide access to information technology and services, including computers, audio and video classrooms and Internet connections.
- Identify unmet education and training needs in the local or regional area and provide the WGU with information on needs assessment and market analysis.

How Can I Become a Member of the WGU Faculty?

The WGU will not employ faculty; rather it will rely on universities, colleges and businesses to broker their courses or programs through the WGU.

During the next year, a solicitation for programming will be sent to various institutions, non-traditional providers and commercial

providers. The solicitation will contain relevant criteria which must be addressed when an entity or faculty member submits a program or course.

Every proposal will undergo a thorough review process relative to a set of quality standards to determine if it will be included in the WGU catalog. Persons or entities interested in receiving notice of the solicitation should send their names and addresses to the Western Governors' Association at 600 17th St, Suite 1705 S., Denver CO 80202. Or you may e-mail the information to tsinger@westgov.org. Please specify in your message that you wish to receive information on any future solicitation related to course submissions.

How Can I Join the WGU Staff?

Currently the initiative is being staffed by the Western Governors' Association whose work is overseen by participating governors and their designees.

Eventually the WGU will be an independent non-profit corporation. Its central office will be responsible for governance and policy, for creating and maintaining its key assets (the catalog, management systems, etc.), and for quality control. A location for the WGU home office has not been selected, and WGU staff is not

yet being hired. When it's available, information on the WGU central office and its staffing needs will be posted on the WGU Internet home page and in this newsletter.

Co-directors

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system. He has played a leading role in state planning for telecommunications. Albrecht has also chaired the steering committee of the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications.

Livingston has served as a member of the WGU design team, which developed the WGU implementation plan. He advises Gov. Leavitt on higher education issues related to technology. As a Utah higher education associate commissioner, Livingston has been involved with system-wide strategic planning, including the use of technology to deliver and enhance education services.

While Albrecht and Livingston will direct development of the business plan, a final document will be approved by a steering committee composed of WGA governors who have signed a memorandum of understanding to work together to move the project forward.

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