

# Virtual classes to start in West next summer

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DENVER — When Western Governors University opens next June, students can take classes in a dozen Western states by logging on to the nearest computer, or plugging in a videocassette. Teacher conferences may be conducted by e-mail.

Organizers say it will be the world flagship for long-distance learning, with a faculty from more than 900 schools in Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

WGU, which will confer degrees just like any other college "is probably the most developed plan of its kind in the world right now," said Sally Johnstone of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

The project's chief promoters are Govs. Roy Romer of Colorado and Mike Leavitt of Utah. They persuaded fellow governors earlier this year to contribute \$100,000 each toward the \$6 million to \$10 million needed for start-up costs.

But much of the startup money is expected to come from industry, which needs to train workers in specific skills, according to Johnstone.

Romer said students will be able to consult an "electronic catalogue" that will allow them to choose how they want to learn and when they want to study. It searches course offerings for them at participating colleges.

Although courses will be drawn from Western schools, students from outside the region will be allowed to enroll.

Students may sign up through WGU, which may be staffed by 20 or 30 people, Johnstone said. A headquarters site has not yet been found. Tuition and fees will be paid to WGU, which will then pay contributing schools and teachers.

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