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Amy Carmer
Western Governors University
801-575-5358
acarmer@wgu.edu

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WGU Gains Two Members, Financial Future Strong

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SALT LAKE CITY, UT -- Alaska and Guam announced today they are joining the Western Governors University, increasing its membership to 14 states and one territory. The announcement was made during a meeting of the WGU Board of Trustees in Salt Lake City.

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"The concept of an electronically accessed virtual university is most timely, and the founders are to be congratulated for their vision," said Alaska Gov. Tony Knowles. "I believe the WGU will fortify and energize higher education in Alaska and enable our residents to better prepare themselves for the 21st Century."

"The technology that would allow the university to come to the student, rather than the student going to the university, already exists," said Guam Gov. Carl Gutierrez in a prepared statement. "All we have to do is make the commitment to do our part, and our children and grandchildren will one day be thankful for our foresight."

Also at today's meeting, board members were given a preliminary assessment of the WGU's financial prospects. It is estimated the WGU will need \$25 million in funding during its first eight to nine years of operation. After that, it is expected to begin making a significant profit.

The Monitor Company, which is developing the WGU business plan, said it believes all of the early financial needs can be met through corporate, foundation and other non-state government sources. Participating governors have already committed or agreed to seek \$100,000 from their legislatures. The draft business plan is expected to be made public in the near future.

Max Farbman, development director for the WGU, announced that Sun Microsystems, Inc. has made a substantial grant to the WGU.

"This is one of the largest contributions to date," Farbman said, "and Sun Microsystems is working closely with the WGU in a variety of ways to assure the momentum we have going will continue as we work toward opening our doors to students early next year."

Farbman said Barbara Gordon, Vice President of Academic and Research Computing for Sun Microsystems, has accepted a position on the National Advisory Board for the WGU. Since its inception in 1982, a singular vision, "The Network Is the Computer™," has propelled Sunmicrosystems, Inc., (NASDAQ "SUNW"), to its position as a leading provider of hardware, software and services for establishing enterprise-wide intranets and expanding the power of the Internet. With more than \$7 billion in annual revenues, Sun can be found in more than 150 countries and on the WorldWide Web at <http://www.sun.com>.

In another major development, four regional accrediting commissions that operate in the western region have agreed to create a joint body called the Inter-Regional Accrediting Committee to act on their behalf in the review and accreditation of the WGU. Board members described this action as extremely significant, making WGU a model in developing accrediting standards and policies for other distance education efforts across the country.

The board adopted a resolution thanking the commissions for creating the accrediting committee. The committee's membership includes the Commission on Colleges of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association for Schools and Colleges.

The Western Governors University is a nonprofit corporation whose Board of Trustees is comprised of the governors of the participating states and one additional appointee made by each governor. It seeks to expand access to higher education by harnessing information technology to the fullest and will use competency-based learning as a basis for credentialing. Board members who attended the meeting included:

Arizona: Dr. Clara Lovett, President, University of Northern Arizona

Colorado: Gov. Roy Romer, WGU Co-chair

Idaho: Dr. Rayburn Barton, Executive Director, Idaho State Board of Education

Montana: Dr. Richard A. Crofts, Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University

Nebraska: Gov. Ben Nelson and Dr. David Powers, Executive Director, Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

Nevada: Dr. Richard Jarvis, Chancellor, University and Community College System of Nevada

New Mexico: Dr. Bruce Hamlett, Executive Director, New Mexico Commission on Higher Education

North Dakota: Larry Isaak, Chancellor, North Dakota University System*

Oregon: Roger Bassett, Governor's Education and Workforce Policy Advisor*

Utah: Gov. Mike Leavitt, WGU Co-chair; and Dr. David Gardner, President, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation

Washington: Dr. Samuel H. Smith, President, Washington State University

Wyoming: Gov. Jim Geringer

* Participated via telephone conference call.