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Paul Schmitt/The Associated Press

From left, 3Com CEO Eric Benhamou, Colorado Gov. Roy Romer and Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt click computer mice to launch the Western Governors University on Wednesday in San Jose, Calif.

Online University Opens for Business

BY DAN EGAN
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Western Governors University is finally open for business, and prospective students might be shocked at the cost of some of the online school's courses.

A three-credit class on Adolf Hitler offered through Washington State University, for example, will cost \$855. By comparison, a full-year's tuition at the two-year Snow College in Ephraim costs Utah students \$1,011, and a year's tuition at the University of Utah is about double that.

Full-time students typically take 15 credits per se-

meester.

A three-credit WGU class titled "Early Childhood" offered through Oklahoma State University costs \$798, but other participating schools are charging much less. For example, a three-credit class on English composition offered by the Community College of Southern Nevada will cost \$215.

The reason for the high prices is some of the 17 states participating in WGU are charging students out-of-state tuition rates. Others are not, and this is one of the reasons Gov. Mike Leavitt and fellow WGU founders are so excited about

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the new school.

"Eventually, what we think will happen is [schools] are going to look at the tuition costs and say: How can we charge out-of-state tuition when [other schools] are charging students in-state [tuition rates]?" said Jeff Edwards, WGU's director of marketing. "It will become more of a market-driven environment rather than a regulated environment."

At a Wednesday press conference in San Jose, Calif., a pair of virtual scissors snipped a virtual ribbon on a video screen. With that, one year after its projected opening, Leavitt announced that the all-electronic university is ready to accept students who can begin their studies immediately.

Leavitt, who co-founded WGU with Colorado Gov. Roy Romer, called the West's newest college "a higher-education institution for the next millennium."

WGU will not offer any of its own classes. Instead, it will act as a broker for Internet and television courses taught by existing schools.

But WGU hopes to do more than float degrees over the airwaves; the plan is to redefine what it means to be educated. While WGU does not teach, it does plan to grant degrees based on a thing called "competency certification."

The school is prepared to give degrees to anyone who can pass its tests, and that may include those who have never taken a college class. Edwards said that early next year WGU should be ready to grant an associate of arts degree and an associate of science and electronics degree.

Leavitt predicted that within five years the school will have tens of thousands of students and offer dozens of degrees.

The university hopes to be more responsive to business, and WGU has applied for accreditation from the four accrediting bodies that have authority within WGU's member states.

"I've never run across an idea as big as the one wrapped up in [WGU]," said Romer.

But he added the school will not supplant traditional campuses.

"We absolutely need the existing institutions," said Romer.