

Online Classes Virtually Empty

Computer-only WGU gets off to a slow start

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The education revolution trumpeted by the founders of the computer-based Western Governors University is off to a slow start.

WGU opened Sept. 2 with an enrollment goal of 1,000 by the end of this term. By the end of last week, the cyberschool that spans 17 states and the territory of Guam had about 10 students.

"It would have been great to have a massive enrollment when we first [opened], but we're finding students want to know more . . . they want to find out about the university, how it works," said Jeff Edwards, WGU's director of marketing. "It's a real new idea."

WGU has a staff of about 20 working in Denver and Salt Lake City and has raised \$9.5 million in public and private funds so far. It does not offer any of its own classes, but instead acts as a broker for Internet and television classes provided by existing schools.

But it also offers what it calls competency-based degrees, which are awarded to students who pass WGU's tests. That is one of the reasons for the slow enrollment,

Edwards said. Students want to talk to WGU advis-

ers to learn more about how to get a degree, not just take a few courses.

There are other reasons as well.

WGU spokesman Jeff Xouris said computer problems snarled the enrollment process during the school's first two weeks.

The good news is that the school is processing 75 applications.

Edwards said another factor in the slow enrollment may be money.

Some WGU classes are surprisingly expensive because some WGU member states charge student out-of-state tuition rates.

A three-credit class at Washington State University, for example, costs \$855 to an out-of-state student. On the other end of the spectrum is the Community College of Southern Nevada, which charges students \$215 per three-credit class for in- and out-of-state students.

On the bright side, nationwide interest in WGU appears to be growing.

WGU's home page is www.wgu.edu.

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