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WGU Media Contact:
Jeff Xouris or Elaina Boudreau
Barkley Evergreen & Partners
816-842-1500

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jxouris@bande.com or eboudreau@beap.com

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Society of Manufacturing Engineers Contact:
Barbara Gaston
313-271-1500

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gastbar@sme.org

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USU Media Contact:
Lynnette Harris
435-797-1359

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lharris@relations.usu.edu

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Western Governors University Forges Unique National Alliance

WGU, Society of Manufacturing Engineers and Utah State University initiate nationwide, competency-based engineering program based upon industry needs

SALT LAKE CITY -- Western Governors University (WGU) announced today the university has entered into a unique agreement leading to new, industry-defined, competency-based credentials and degrees for the manufacturing engineering profession.

Through the agreement, WGU, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) and Utah State University's (USU) College of Engineering, are cooperatively developing a distance-learning pilot program, initially offering certificates of competency in manufacturing engineering related disciplines. The organizations intend to eventually offer accredited, competency-based distance degree programs.

Officials from the organizations anticipate the program offering distance-deliverable USU engineering classes, which are based upon educational needs and competencies identified by SME's practicing, professional members and industrial constituencies. WGU expects to grant certificates and other credentials, using mutually agreed-upon competency assessments. "This is a unique cooperative effort between industry and academe that will produce un-imagined rewards for this profession and for distance learning," said Utah Governor Michael O. Leavitt, co-chair of WGU's Board of Trustees. "It's exactly the role we anticipated for WGU -- building upon the competency model and distance delivery mission to help broker relationships and agreements that more closely align industry needs and educational resources."

The organizations formally initiated their cooperative effort, during WGU's National Advisory Board and Board of Trustees meetings in Salt Lake City. Taking part in the ceremonial signing were: Robert Albrecht, chief academic officer from WGU; Bruce Bishop, dean of USU's College of Engineering; and Philip Trimble, executive director & general manager of SME.

The alliance is an outcome of SME's Manufacturing Education Plan, a joint effort of SME and the SME Education Foundation, for the transformation of manufacturing education.

About USU

USU's Manufacturing Engineering Program, accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), is one of only nine institutions nationwide selected to participate in the SME Education Foundation's Manufacturing Education Plan. USU's Manufacturing Curriculum courses are carefully matched to competencies identified by SME and major manufacturing industries throughout the country.

About SME

SME, headquartered in Dearborn, Mich., U.S.A., is an international professional society dedicated to serving its members and the manufacturing community through the advancement of professionalism, knowledge and learning. Founded in 1932, SME has nearly 65,000 members in 70 countries. The SME Education Foundation, the grant-making arm of the SME, serves the manufacturing community by providing support for the advancement of manufacturing education.

About WGU

WGU is a competency-based, degree-granting, virtual university that delivers cost-effective education using the Internet and other advanced telecommunications and networking technologies. WGU's mission is to expand educational opportunities for learners everywhere by offering online access to courses from universities, colleges and corporate training programs through its unique SmartCatalog™.

WGU was formed in 1996 as a result of the vision of the governors of the Western United States to share higher education distance learning resources. WGU's administrative offices are located in Salt Lake City, Utah, and its academic offices are in Denver, Colorado.

SME and MEP program information is available at the SME Web site:
www.sme.org