

2/26/01 Deseret News

# WGU releases glowing report

**By James Thalman**

Deseret News staff writer

Enrollment is up 150 percent, assets are up 33 percent and its Web site has passed the million-user mark, Western Governors University administrators say in a report assessing progress in 2000.

The WGU, the virtual university

based in Salt Lake City and co-founded by Gov. Mike Leavitt, now has 500 students, up from 200 students a year ago, spread across 44 states and five countries.

In the past year, it had its first graduate — a teacher from Roy who earned a master's degree — and was accepted as a candidate

for accreditation by the Interregional Accrediting Committee, a consortium of four regional accreditation commissions. WGU is one of only a handful of online universities to achieve candidacy status and the only competency-based university to do so, accord-

*Please see **WGU** on B2*

## WGU

*Continued from B1*

ing to the committee.

"Competency-based" means that degrees are awarded on ability and knowledge rather than earning school credit hours in approved courses. Since its creation in 1997, the WGU has started seven competency-based degree programs in information technology, business and education.

Full accreditation could take two to five years and will be based on

how well WGU shows that students are making academic progress and completing programs.

WGU's first graduate, Gennie Kirch, said she never would have received a master's degree without the online university, which she said is as difficult and maybe harder than a traditional classroom education.

The university now has 21 corporate and foundation partners. Five joined the past year, including Salt Lake companies Qwest and Convergys.

Not included in the report was mention of a legislative audit in Sep-

tember that criticized WGU for low enrollment and poor performance in competing with other distance-education programs. The audit report stated that many people questioned whether WGU will survive.

"Rumors of our demise were greatly exaggerated," said Doug Gough, WGU director of enrollment. "Recent months show us clearly growing."

WGU offers 939 courses, and anyone who can use the Internet can learn anywhere anytime, Gough said. Not only that, every student is assigned a mentor to guide them

through.

The university now has articulation agreements with seven colleges and universities around the country. The agreements allow students who graduate with a WGU competency-based degree to transfer into credit based programs offered by those schools.

No such agreements have been reached with Utah schools.

"Many universities here and elsewhere are interested," Gough said "but they're on the fence until we accredited."

**E-MAIL:** [jthalman@desnews.com](mailto:jthalman@desnews.com)