

2 virtual grads get degrees

Women earn master's while working full time

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There was no orchestra pumping out "Pomp and Circumstance." Other than that, it was all there — the regalia, the speeches, the same struggle to keep a mortar board correctly poised, congratulations and flowers, proud family members and the sense of accomplishment that goes with a new degree from a university.

And if everything was on a smaller scale for the two women who earned master's degrees in learning technology granted by the Western Governors University, balance that against the fact that the services Friday were in the state Capitol's elegant Gold Room, and the degrees were presented by Gov. Mike Leavitt.

Both Shauna Bagley and Kristy Yeschick said the WGU virtual program allowed them to get master's degrees they might not have been



Shauna Bagley, left, and Kristy Yeschick chat at the Capitol before receiving their master's degrees in learning technology from the Western Governors University.

able to manage otherwise. Both women had full-time jobs, and both managed to have a baby while involved in their electronic schooling via WGU. Adding to your family is not one of the requisites for enrollment, but it typifies the circumstances WGU was designed to accommodate, WGU President Robert W. Mendenhall said.

The two Utah graduates (there have been others — from Utah, California and Arizona) represent what can be done via the electronic university, Mendenhall said. With families and jobs, the women were able to "fit education into the cracks."

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Bagley said her chances for earning a master's degree through the usual route would have been nil. "SUU (Southern Utah University) is two hours away" from her home in Marysvale — the closest university where she could have earned her master's.

Mother of three, including baby Shandon, born in June, Amanda, 9, and Shalyn, 5, and a teacher/coach at Piute High School in Circleville, she could not reasonably take two years out of her life to devote to that

pursuit. The advanced degree will be not only a personal benefit but a contribution to her students, she said.

Yeschick, an instructional services specialist for the Salt Lake-Tooele Applied Technology College, stressed, however, that being in the comfort of their homes didn't make the work for a master's any easier. The courses were, if anything "a little tougher."

As students in a competency-based program, they were required to do six "mini projects" to demonstrate competency in certain areas of study, along with other stringent requirements.

In typical graduation rheto-

ric, WGU Provost Douglas Johnstone compared the graduates with the skilled artisan who designed the magnificent stained glass window for the Cathedral of York in England in the early 1400s. "The work of teachers is the same work of creation. You create windows on the world for your students, and you have no idea how long they will last."

Leavitt quipped that the advantage of the small graduating class was that the women could be "co-valedictorians." Each gave a brief speech before receiving a master of arts degree in learning technology.

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