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### **Governor Will Award Degrees and Honorary Degrees At WGU Graduation on Saturday**

SALT LAKE CITY - Gov. Michael Leavitt will present degrees to 10 graduating students during Western Governors University (WGU) graduation ceremonies at the governor's mansion on Oct. 19, 2002. In addition, the governor will present honorary degrees to Senator Robert Bennett and venture capitalist James R. Swartz.

These are the first honorary degrees awarded by WGU, America's only competency-based online university. WGU President Robert Mendenhall said Sen. Bennett has been an advocate of competency-based education in the Congress and Jim Swartz has provided significant funding to make access to higher education available to people with low income.

Sen. Bennett is serving a second six-year term in the U.S. Senate after a successful business career as CEO of the Franklin International Institute (now Franklin Covey). Jim Swartz has been a leading Silicon Valley venture capitalist since the early 1970s and is a founder and general partner of Accel Partners.

President Mendenhall said, "Senator Bennett and Jim Swartz exemplify the forward-thinking supporters of WGU in both the public and private sector, and their concern, understanding and leadership in establishing competency-based education models speaks both to their expertise and their very real concerns about expanding access and accountability in higher education."

In keeping with the "distance education" theme, graduates are not required to attend graduation ceremonies and may receive their diplomas by mail. However, 16 students who have finalized their studies and successfully completed their assessments were invited to attend the special ceremony at the governor's mansion. The 10 graduates attending are from Utah, California, Illinois, and Wyoming.

Graduate Catherine McAtee, an elementary teacher in Elk Mountain, Wyoming, said of her experience: "[Through WGU], I attended classes from some of the finest institutions in the country, including Brigham Young University, Texas Tech University, University of New Mexico, Washington State University, and Jones International University. Each class was unique [and] provided instruction where work was completed and transferred via the Internet. At times, I could interact with online chat classes where we would discuss and plan assignments with other students around the state and country. Our classes were not restricted to specific time schedules. Many of the interactions with my classmates occurred at night due to most of us having teaching positions during the day."

Another graduate, Arna Clark, an English and journalism teacher in the Jordan School District, reflecting on what she accomplished at WGU, said, "I have learned about the different hardware and software options available to procure for my classroom; I have learned how to research in a scholarly and systematic manner; I have developed a training program to teach my students [about] an Internet-connected journalism lab, including such issues as privacy, security, and fair use policies; I have discovered the importance of careful curriculum planning and evaluation and how to integrate technology into my teaching style, strategy, and media; in short, I have become a better teacher."

Matt Stowell, Digital High School coordinator and athletic director at Tennyson High School in Hayward, California, will be in attendance, along with his family. He said the education he received is already making him better and more efficient at his job. "I learned things that are more relevant and I learned in a manner that makes it transferable to the workplace. I'm already using 85 percent of it right now."

These graduates bring the total number to 30 students who have graduated from WGU since degree programs were first offered three years ago.

WGU offers the only online competency-based degrees in the country. At the university's Web site, [www.wgu.edu](http://www.wgu.edu), students can find competency-based degree programs, an online catalog of quality distance-learning courses, an online library, bookstore, and access to a personal WGU mentor who will guide a student through his or her customized degree program.

WGU was founded and is supported by 19 states and governors, as well as 24 leading corporations and foundations. WGU offers associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees in three areas: business, information technology, and education.