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WGU Launches Nation's Only Online Competency-Based Teachers College

Secretary Paige Makes Announcement in Washington D.C.

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and Gov. Michael O. Leavitt (Utah) announced today the formal launch of the WGU Teachers College, which provides online, competency-based bachelor's and master's degrees and licensure for current and prospective teachers. The College (www.wgu.edu/tc) was created by Western Governors University through a \$10 million Star Schools Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, with additional funding being provided by foundations and corporate partners, as well as additional federal grants for teacher education.

Secretary Paige said, "WGU Teachers College will be a boon to states seeking training for current teachers and paraprofessionals to help them meet education requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act and speed their licensure. WGU Teachers College maintains very rigorous standards for teachers and ensures they demonstrate their true competence -- not just that they've sat through a number of required courses. It provides an innovative option for individuals who would be turned off by the hoops and hurdles of traditional teacher preparation and certification programs."

Gov. Leavitt said, "The Teachers College has developed programs in three areas: First, for paraprofessionals in the schools, allowing them to earn associate's degrees, and later bachelor's degrees and teacher licensure; second, for uncertified teachers and second-career professionals, allowing them to apply their existing competencies to become certified as teachers, and if they wish, to earn a master's degree; and thirdly, for existing teachers to upgrade their skills and earn more money with a master's degree or graduate endorsements."

WGU announced last week that it received accreditation from four regional accreditation commissions. According to Robert W. Mendenhall, president of WGU, "The WGU Teachers College is the only national program providing accredited, online, competency-based degrees and elementary and secondary licensure to K-12 teachers and prospective teachers in math, science, reading, ESL, and learning technology. It is also one of the only national initiatives focused on those already working in schools, including paraprofessionals, uncertified and substitute teachers, and existing teachers. WGU degrees are internet-delivered, making them accessible to working adults, and are the only competency-based degrees in the country."

Dr. Marti Watson Garlett, dean of the Teachers College at WGU said, "The WGU Teachers College will be particularly important to large, urban districts that have the largest populations of paraprofessionals and uncertified teachers, as well as the greatest need for more qualified teachers. For example, the university is already partnering with the Clark County School District (Las Vegas), Region IV in Texas (Greater Houston), and the Los Angeles Unified School District."

WGU is in the process of seeking individual state approvals and has already received approval from Arizona, Nevada, and Texas. Through reciprocity agreements with these three states, WGU licensure for teachers is accepted in a total of 46 states.

Dean Garlett said significant scholarship dollars are available to qualified applicants. The Western Governors Foundation has committed to raise 1,000 scholarships for teachers in the west to pursue their education at WGU, while the university also has a national scholarship fund, and has received federal grants to provide additional scholarships. In addition, the university is authorized to provide federal financial aid to its students. "Our goal is to meet the needs of current and future teachers," she said, "and we realize that providing financial assistance meets an important need for these individuals."

WGU is not new to teacher education. The university has offered a master's degree in learning and technology for the past two years and has current enrollment of more than 250 students, making it one of the largest programs in the nation.

At the WGU Web site, 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 25 leading corporations and foundations, and is accredited both nationally and by four regional commissions. WGU offers associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees in three areas: IT, business and education.