

# Net-based university sends off its grads

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*The Salt Lake Tribune*

Greg Marshall's academic standing now is on par with his job. The director of computer instructions at a Bellingham, Wash., community college is in Salt Lake City today to pick up a degree in business management and computers from the Internet-based Western Governors University.

Marshall, 36, married and father of one son, has navigated the education-job road in reverse. After working in the computer industry for many years, he was hired as a computer instructor for the community college. Two

years ago, he was named director of the non-credit side of the college's computer instruction program.

"I have frantically been trying to get my degree to catch up to my position," Marshall said in a telephone interview from his home in Washington state. It took six years.

Marshall and 45 other graduates will pick up their degrees at WGU's 2004 commencement at the Governor's Mansion.

Gov. Olene Walker will greet the graduates and their guests. Clara Lovett, president of the Washington-based American Association for Higher Education, is the keynote speaker

Marshall turned to the online university because, he says, the traditional university setting didn't work for him.

As a computer instructor, Marshall needed more flexibility for course work and studying.

He found that at WGU, he was able to attend the online school at times day or night that suited his schedule.

"If there was no WGU, I probably wouldn't be getting a degree and I certainly wouldn't have my job," Marshall said.

"I would still be trying to figure out how I could go back to college."

WGU gets its name from an organization of Western

governors who pioneered the virtual university under the leadership of then-Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt, according to WGU President Robert Mendenhall.

The school is supported primarily by the annual \$5,180 tuition. It also has received sizeable grants from the Department of Education.

WGU is the only accredited competency-based Internet-based university in the nation. As a competency-based university, students must demonstrate their grasp of a subject before passing a class or receiving a degree.

WGU began offering degree programs in 1999. Since then, the

## Commencement today

● Western Governors University's 2004 commencement is at 10 a.m. in the Utah State Governor's Mansion.

2004 graduating class: 46.

Degree program: associate, bachelor's and master's.

The youngest graduate is 23, the oldest 57.

Yearly tuition: \$5,180 (\$2,590/6 months).

school has conveyed 113 degrees.

The school's first graduation ceremony in 2000 consisted of one graduate, said Mendenhall.

Today, WGU has an enrollment of more than 2,600 students. The administration office is in Salt Lake City

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