



## News Brief - 1/31/05

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### WGU Graduates Prove it's Never too Late to Earn Your Degree

*Utah Governor to Address Western Governors University Graduates*

SALT LAKE CITY -- Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr. will help Western Governors University recognize its 103 graduates at its upcoming commencement ceremony on Saturday, Feb. 12, at 10 am in the Salt Lake Public Library Auditorium.

WGU provides distance-learning for people seeking higher education but who do not have time or access to traditional programs. The accredited university grants degrees and certificates based completely on competencies—the ability to demonstrate skills and knowledge through a series of assessments carefully selected to measure knowledge of a field of study.

Of the 103 graduates, 87 have earned bachelor's or master's degrees from WGU's Teachers College. Sharla Hart of Smithfield, Utah earned her master's in learning technology while teaching English at Logan High School. "Flexibility was critical for me considering my full-time teaching career and family," said Hart, who is one of 53 teachers to earn an advanced degree. "WGU made me feel part of a community—something I thought would be missing from an online program."

Another Teachers College graduate, Sybil Holland, said an online education was her best option since she lives in a small rural community of 2,300 people in Clayton, New Mexico. "I had no other way of receiving a degree since I needed a job to support myself and my children," she said. "WGU provided me a way of studying at a time that was convenient for my hectic schedule."

The 103 graduates, who represent 28 different states and two countries, are the largest graduating class since the university started enrolling students in 1999.

Forty students plan to attend the graduation ceremony including Ammon Cookson of Hillsboro, Oregon. For Cookson, working full-time and raising a family with six kids left little time to pursue a degree. "I always knew I had the knowledge," said Cookson. "I just didn't have time to sit in the classroom."

Cookson had extensive experience as a software programmer. "For years it's bugged me that I didn't have a degree," he said. "WGU's competency-based education was attractive to me because it rewarded me for what I knew rather than how much time I spent in a classroom." Since earning his bachelor's in computer information systems from WGU, Cookson says he has accepted an offer to be a program manager for GE Healthcare Information Systems.

"At WGU, we seek to expand access to post-secondary educational opportunities so individuals can leverage themselves to current or future employers," said Robert W. Mendenhall, president of the university. "Our graduates don't just take a transcript into a competitive workplace, but a comprehensive list of skills and credentials that are attractive to employers."

The commencement ceremony caps a year of remarkable growth for WGU. Enrollment more than doubled from 1,500 students to more than 3,000; tuition revenues increased 400 percent; and university net assets increased 37 percent. In addition, WGU launched its first MBA programs with a general MBA degree and an MBA in IT management. WGU now offers more than 30 degree and certificate programs.

#### **About Western Governors University**

WGU is the only accredited university in the U.S. offering online competency-based degree programs. The private non-profit university was founded and is supported by 19 governors, as well as over 20 leading corporations and foundations. WGU offers bachelor's and master's degrees in information technology, business and education. More information is available at [www.wgu.edu](http://www.wgu.edu).