

WGU's Online Master's Degree Addresses National Shortage in Certified English Language Learning Teachers

Program to Help Teachers Earn an ELL Endorsement

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SALT LAKE CITY, April 7, 2005 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Western Governors University announced today that its Teachers College now offers an online Master of Arts degree in English Language Learning (ELL) and an ELL endorsement preparation program. The new offerings provide current teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to be certified to teach in an ELL setting.

According to Dr. Philip Schmidt, WGU's program coordinator, "this is particularly important because of the large number of professionals currently teaching in ELL settings without certification or without an appropriate background in ELL content and pedagogy." According to a 2002 study from the National Center for Education Statistics, of the 41 percent of teachers nationwide with ELL students in their classrooms, only 12.5 percent participated in eight or more hours of professional development related to ELL in the past three years.

"As the ELL population continues to grow, school districts are sometimes forced to employ uncertified ELL teachers to fill vacant classroom positions," said WGU President, Dr. Robert Mendenhall. "Our programs provide teachers with a convenient way to earn their degree online, while gaining the competency to understand language acquisition and cultural influences on learning."

The WGU programs are the first competency-based graduate programs in ELL. Also, since the programs are available online, currently working teachers can complete their master's or endorsement preparation programs without the need to attend traditional classes. WGU is a non-profit, regionally-accredited university that grants degrees and certificates based completely on competency -- the ability to demonstrate skills and knowledge on a series of assessments carefully selected to measure knowledge of a field of study -- not on required courses. Students study online from any location and can use knowledge obtained from prior work or academic training.

"Besides being competency-based, WGU's ELL master's program is unique because it requires a significant research-based capstone project," said Schmidt. "As a result, graduates will be ready to not only enter ELL teaching, but also provide curricular leadership to the school systems in which they serve."

The WGU Teachers College has structured the ELL programs to meet the requirements of state and federal standards for ELL. The programs also adhere to Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards. There are 42 states where the WGU program could lead to an endorsement in ELL or ESL. Many other states that don't offer a specific endorsement in ELL or ESL are nonetheless highly motivated to hire qualified ELL teachers.

The Endorsement Preparation Program in ELL is a stand-alone program covering multiple dimensions of English language learning and pedagogy. The M.A. in English Language Learning includes additional graduate-level study areas.

The WGU Teachers College was established in 2003 through the assistance of a \$10 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Since that time, enrollment has climbed to more than 2,000. The Teachers College now offers 20 degree and certification programs. To learn more about the ELL program, scholarships and federal financial aid, go to www.wgu.edu/Elldegree, or call an enrollment counselor toll-free at 1-866-225-5948.