WGU Teachers College Receives NCATE Accreditation

The Teachers College of Western Governors University has received full and unconditional five-year accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). This is the first ever NCATE accreditation for an online institution. According to NCATE, "In 2001, NCATE modified its standards in part to anticipate the accreditation of non-traditional providers, and WGU is the first to engage the opportunity." The approval ratifies WGU's focus on the quality of its teacher preparation programs. It further validates that WGU's online, competency-based programs meet the highest criteria by which professional education programs are evaluated.

WGU President Dr. Robert Mendenhall said, "We are very pleased with the growing acceptance of competency-based education not only by students, but by accrediting organizations, state departments of education, school districts, and the U.S. Department of Education. It is a tribute to NCATE that they were willing and able to apply their standards of quality to a non-traditional program, that is both online and that measures learning rather than time."

Faculty mentor Jennifer Smolka says she recently spoke with a student who was deciding which online program to choose. "When I discussed with him our recent NCATE accreditation, he was impressed. It sealed the deal for him since none of the other programs that he was evaluating had NCATE approval," says Smolka.

WGU graduates can apply directly to 41 states for teacher certification, and WGU students are eligible for reciprocity in most of the remaining states. With the NCATE accreditation, WGU students may be able to apply for certification directly in even more states.

After just four years, the college now enrolls more than 4,100 students, with approximately 1,000 of these students concentrating on math and science education. Approximately 700 candidates for licensure will graduate this year.

NCATE (www.ncate.org) is the largest accrediting body evaluating the professional education programs of universities,

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WGU Awarded $3 Million Grant by U.S. Department of Labor to Aid Rural Teachers

Western Governors University has been awarded a $3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to increase the national pool of qualified rural teachers, particularly in the hard-to-fill disciplines of mathematics and science. The grant money will also be used to develop and disseminate a new model for addressing workforce development of rural teachers that can be implemented on a national scale.

WGU will partner with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in the implementation and evaluation of this rural teacher initiative. The project will include working with states, workforce investment boards, One-Stop Career Centers and local rural school districts to identify and prepare potential rural teacher candidates. The grant will allow WGU to provide financial, academic and clinical support for teacher candidates, including scholarships of up to $7,500 for qualified students.

WGU's mission is to expand access to higher education through its online competency-based degree programs. Because the degrees are offered via the Internet, they are accessible to those living in rural areas who cannot

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Largest Graduating Class Ever Hears Inspiring Speech from Keynote Speaker Dr. Bess Stephens of Hewlett-Packard

Dr. Bess Stephens, Vice-President of Corporate Philanthropy and Education and Global Director of the HP Company Foundation, delivered an inspiring message during her keynote speech at Western Governors University graduation February 10th at Abravanel Hall in Salt Lake City.

Her theme was lifelong learning. She cited the graduates as models of the 21st century workforce, using technologies that make learning and work possible.

"I applaud each of you, not only for earning your degree, but also for making the choice—and having the courage and persistence—to attend such an innovative institution. You exemplify the vision that WGU had at its inception," said Dr. Stephens. She went on to relate stories about her own career, which started as a research scientist at Vanderbilt University.

Dr. Stephens emphasized the career process, and stressed, "Each year has placed new demands on me to learn more about our products and solutions and their applications. I've also had to continually focus on personal growth and developing my own skills, while serving as a leader and role model for others. This has kept me challenged, motivated and continually striving to stay on the cutting edge." Her story pointed to hard work, potential, creativity, support of entrepreneurship, facilitation of economic growth and building community. She challenged the graduates to use five strategies: to strive for excellence, collaborate, increase team value, contribute beyond the office and remain open-minded.

WGU also honored Dr. Stephens with an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, recognizing her career accomplishments in education and technology, and her invaluable contribution to the growth and success of WGU. Dr. Stephens has served as a Trustee of WGU for many years, and Hewlett-Packard has been a key corporate supporter of the University.

Degrees were awarded to 495 students, from 48 states, the largest class ever for WGU, which holds graduations twice each year. Fifty-seven students from more than 20 states attended the ceremony in Salt Lake City. Others participated via a live Internet broadcast for graduates and family members. For most of the students attending, this was the first opportunity to meet their fellow students and their faculty mentors face to face. The university awarded 316 undergraduate degrees, 106 graduate degrees and 73 post-graduate certificates to this graduating class from the WGU Teachers College, the College of Business and the College of Information Technology.

Four graduates addressed the audience. Cynthia Boland related her feelings about her WGU experience. "If I wasn't being pulled with a tow rope, I was being pushed by a train. I found WGU to be the exact vehicle I needed." She felt she mirrored many of the graduates' thoughts when she tearfully spoke of the support community they created together, saying she had grown personally and that her classroom family had grown as well. Richard Todd Wood thanked the faculty and said, "Until I got here, I never enjoyed school that much. So, for the first time in my life, this is a bittersweet ending. I'm kind of sad that it's over." Raylene Laird told the audience, "Those looking for an easy way to earn a degree soon found WGU wasn't the place to get it." She told her fellow graduates the academic programs were not only...
Student Spotlight

Tim Zernick

A zest for learning is evident when talking to Master Chief Petty Officer Tim Zernick of the U.S. Coast Guard. In his 23 years of service, he's been involved in training and education. In his new position as Special Enlisted Advisor to Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES), he's continuing the pursuit of knowledge. The 23-year-veteran, who is also a WGU student, represents all military personnel in all of DANTES programs, including Troops to Teachers, testing, and ACE accreditation of actual military training and experience for college credit.

Zernick got his Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies at Excelsior and attained college credit in the Coast Guard. He had the urge to teach. Zernick spoke with Troops to Teachers representatives and settled on WGU. He liked the convenience and competency-based model. He says he's using his existing knowledge, loves discovering ideas, and the current course work allows him to learn beyond the requirements. Zernick believes learning is a lifelong process. He's seeking his Master of Arts in Science Education (5-9).

"Part of the Coast Guard mission is passing on knowledge to others," says Zernick. "They can do them both—service and education—and we see lasting benefits. They tend to stay with us. It goes back to what you could do and you turning that into what you will do, and not looking back at what you should have done."

Matthew Wallace

A native Utahn, WGU graduate Matthew Wallace is focusing on new territory. He spent a good part of his work life focusing on real estate and land issues in the Wasatch valley. But Matthew was increasingly fascinated by computers. So he turned to WGU to take him headfirst into the computer world. Wallace says students have to have discipline and be ready to work in an online education environment.

"You do have to be self-directed and diligent, and you cannot give up. You have to have the desire," says Wallace. And he did stick to it, graduating in Salt Lake at the February 10th ceremony with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems.

Wallace is the webmaster for Slow Food Utah, having created their website as part of his Capstone Project. He's now excitedly working on a massive internet initiative. Wallace is employed by Many One networks and is the web engineer for the health portal in a project called the Digital Universe. "This is a work in progress. Conceptually, it is an encyclopedia of everything—the universe. Our job is to organize stewards and editors of what may someday be the 'Encyclopedia Galactica.' It will take many years." He says the idea is that everything will be reviewed by experts and organized in an orderly, rational way. "We are working to bring people on board, including governments, private companies, and more," says Wallace. "This project is an effort to have information screened based on its validity, not its political or corporate ramifications."

Lumina Foundation Grant to Help Study the Underserved

The Lumina Foundation, one of the nation’s most highly respected educational foundations, recently granted Western Governors University a $400,000 award to conduct in-depth research and evaluate the University’s success in providing improved access and attainment for members of underserved populations seeking degrees. More than 75% of WGU’s students fall into the underserved category, defined as students living in rural areas, members of ethnic minorities, those with household income of less than $35,000 annually, and those whose parents never attended or graduated from college.

The project will help WGU pinpoint which factors are effective for these populations and identify any necessary changes and improvements to the WGU model. WGU President Dr. Robert Mendenhall said, "With this grant, WGU will research and document the experiences of underserved students and how retention, academic progress and assessment pass rates are affected. Researchers will also compare those results to experiences and results observable at other benchmark institutions."

"You do have to be self-directed and diligent, and you cannot give up. You have to have the desire."
- Matthew Wallace, WGU Graduate

"It goes back to what you could do and you turning that into what you will do, and not looking back at what you should have done."
- Master Chief Petty Officer Tim Zernick, U.S. Coast Guard, WGU Student
Western Governors University Teachers College Receives NCATE Accreditation

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colleges, and departments of education. WGU underwent a lengthy and detailed review process, which included an on-site visit during the spring of 2006 by an NCATE Board of Examiners to determine whether WGU met six institutional standards. The examiners determined that the university successfully met all six standards. NCATE’s Unit Accreditation Board then made the final decision in favor of accreditation.

Dr. Phil Schmidt, Director of Curriculum and Instruction at WGU, feels the accreditation has resulted in a renewed perception on the part of many universities throughout the United States that the programs at WGU are of the highest quality. "In addition, given that our accreditation covers both the initial and advanced levels, it has become clear that the high quality of our programs extends to the graduate level. The national recognition granted to a number of our programs by Specialized Professional Organizations such as the NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Math) has brought the high quality of our programs to the attention of program directors throughout the country," Dr. Schmidt and Executive Director Dr. Janet Schnitz worked together to achieve the accreditation.

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challenging and rigorous, but in-depth and extremely relevant to her field of study. Joel Ellington thanked his mentor and poignantly related that his father had raised 10 children on a 3rd grade education. The first in his family to graduate college, he said proudly, "So I stand before you today with a degree that no one in my family has ever been able to achieve."

WGU Awarded $3 Million Grant by U.S. Department of Labor to Aid Rural Teachers

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can travel long distances to participate in classes at traditional campuses. The competency-based programs focus on measuring what students know and can do, rather than measuring time or credit hours, and allow working adults who have competencies, for example in math and science, to complete their programs more quickly but without compromising the quality of graduates.

The WGU Teachers College is only four years old, but already has over 4,000 students, including over 1,000 students in math and science teacher education, making WGU one of the largest providers of math and science teacher education in the nation. WGU’s Teachers College continues to grow more than 40% annually.

WGU President Robert Mendenhall says, "WGU is extremely grateful to the Department of Labor for its support in expanding opportunities for rural teacher education. This initiative is crucial to filling the high-need teacher shortages in rural school districts, including retaining teachers in those communities. The quality of teachers is the single most important variable in the quality of education that we provide our youth."

Bob Mooneyham, Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association, tells us, "Grants like this are crucial to helping needy and struggling rural school districts to recruit and retain qualified teachers."

WGU Briefs

- New IT certifications include the latest industry certifications including CIW Professional and Associate, Oracle Certified Associate and Sun Certified Associate for Java, among dozens of other certifications

- Distance learning myths was the subject of an article by WGU President Dr. Robert Mendenhall, that was included in the national quarterly insert, "Distance Learning Today", featured in USA Today