



About WGU

News Brief - 4/23/08

USDLA Recognizes Western Governors University with Two Major Distance Learning Awards



SALT LAKE CITY -- The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) has presented 2008 International Distance Learning Awards in two categories to Western Governors University (www.wgu.edu) and its executive director of the WGU Teachers College, Dr. Janet Schnitz. The awards were presented April 22nd in conjunction with the 2008 National Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. Since 1987, USDLA has been the world's premier distance learning association. The USDLA International Awards program honored outstanding individuals and organizations for excellence in the field distance learning, education and training.

Western Governors University received the 21st Century Award for Best Practices in Distance Learning, in recognition for WGU's achievements as the nation's first competency-based online university and its success in expanding access to higher education for adults seeking bachelor's and master's degrees. Founded in 1996 by 19 U.S. governors, WGU now offers more than 40 programs to more than 10,000 students nationwide.

Dr. Janet Schnitz, executive director of the WGU Teachers College, received the award for Outstanding Leadership by an Individual in the Field of Distance Learning. Since 2004, Dr. Schnitz has led the rapid growth and development of the WGU Teachers College, which currently enrolls more than 5,500 students in 22 programs. The college currently enrolls 5,000 students in programs that lead to initial teacher licensure, helping develop highly qualified K-12 teachers in such high-needs areas as mathematics, science, and special education. In 2006, the WGU Teachers College became the first and only online teacher education program to receive accreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

"As a premier organization for the entire distance learning profession, we are honoring Western Governors University and Dr. Janet Schnitz as leaders in the industry," said Dr. John G. Flores, CEO of USDLA. "Western Governors University has raised the bar of excellence and we are truly honored by WGU's contributions to the distance learning industry."

"We are very honored to have received these two awards from the USDLA," said WGU President Dr. Robert Mendenhall. "WGU has been committed to our mission to provide access to higher education through distance learning and our competency-based learning model. We've succeeded in large part because of the dedication of individuals such as Dr. Schnitz. Her unparalleled leadership has guided our Teachers College to many 'firsts,' such as our NCATE accreditation, and it has become one of the premier teachers colleges in the nation."

These prestigious international awards are presented annually to organizations and individuals engaged in the development and delivery of distance learning programs. The USDLA awards were created to acknowledge major accomplishments in distance learning and to highlight those distance learning instructors, programs, and professionals who have achieved and demonstrated extraordinary results through the use of online, videoconferencing, satellite and blended learning delivery technologies. In addition, winners will be recognized in an edition of USDLA's Distance Learning Today quarterly supplement, which appears in USA TODAY's top-tier markets for distance learning and is read by 3.5 million professionals. The section will also be featured on the USDLA Web site, which averages 2.6 million hits per month.

Reggie Smith III, USDLA board member and chair of the awards committee, noted that, "We look forward to seeing how WGU will inspire the 2009 award entries as they are recognized in Distance Learning Today and via their participation in National Distance Learning Week (<http://www.ndlw.org>), November 10-14, 2008."

About United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA)

The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) is a non-profit association formed in 1987 and is located in Boston, Massachusetts. USDLA promotes the development and application of distance learning for education and training and serves the needs of the distance learning community by providing advocacy, information, networking, and opportunity. Distance learning and training constituencies served include preK-12 education, higher and continuing education, and home schooling as well as business, corporate, military, government and telehealth markets. The USDLA trademarked logo is the recognized worldwide symbol of dedicated professionals committed to the distance learning industry.

<http://www.usdla.org>

PR Contact:

Gwen Castaldi
WGU Director of Public Relations
801-290-3600
gcastaldi@wgu.edu

Enrollment Contact:

1-866-225-5948

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"Competency-based..."

"I like the idea of a competency-based program. In some areas I already had expertise and skills so I could take an independent study class and build the portfolio and take the exams. In other areas I needed more instruction."

—Gretchen Burr, WGU graduate, high school teacher

"I am an expert..."

"Western Governors has raised the bar for online courses. Instead of graduating from their courses and saying, "I have passed all of the requirements," they want their students to say, "I graduated from WGU and I am an expert in the field of..."

—Jeffrey Cravy, WGU graduate student

"Competency-based..."

"Google has pioneered the idea of access to information. The reason Google thinks WGU is such a good idea is because WGU has pioneered the concept of competency-based education whenever you want it."

—Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google Inc.

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