



About WGU

News Brief - 7/15/08

Congressman Jim Matheson to Speak at Western Governors University Summer Commencement

SALT LAKE CITY -- U.S. Representative Jim Matheson (D-Utah) will deliver the commencement speech at the summer graduation ceremony for Western Governors University (WGU) on Saturday, July 19th, 2008 in Salt Lake City. Degrees will be awarded to 642 graduates from 48 states. WGU is awarding 401 undergraduate degrees and 241 graduate degrees.

WGU (www.wgu.edu) is a non-profit, online, regionally and nationally accredited competency-based university that was founded by 19 U.S. governors. With a mission to expand access to quality higher education, WGU continues to grow rapidly, having reached the 10,000 student milestone recently. Cumulatively, WGU has graduated over 3,200 students compared to about 400 only three years ago.

More than 100 graduates from 29 states are expected to travel to Utah to attend the ceremony, plus one person from the Galapagos Islands and one from Lincolnshire, England. WGU will also broadcast the ceremony live over the Internet via streaming video for graduates and family who are unable to attend in person. WGU holds graduation ceremonies twice each year.

WGU graduations can be very emotional events. Many students are thrilled to meet their fellow students and faculty face-to-face for the first time. Selected graduates are invited to speak about their WGU experiences, and they share their moving stories about the challenges or obstacles they worked through to pursue their degree.

This year, one graduate maintained her positive attitude after being diagnosed with spine cancer and was determined to complete her program despite regular chemotherapy treatments and medical illnesses. Another graduate speaker found alternative ways to communicate with remote faculty because she is hearing impaired and her primary language is American Sign Language (ASL). She will deliver her speech in ASL assisted by an interpreter.

For one Utah family, graduation will be a rare, once-in-a-lifetime experience. One daughter will be graduating alongside her father as both receive master's degrees. In the audience will be her sister and brother-in-law who are also enrolled at WGU and, if all goes as planned, will graduate next year.

A four-term Congressman representing Utah's second Congressional district, Matheson currently serves on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has the broadest jurisdiction of any Congressional committee. He has also been a strong supporter of education. Before his election to Congress, Representative Matheson worked in the energy industry for 13 years for several local companies and in his own firm.

The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. Mountain Time in Abravenel Hall in Salt Lake City.

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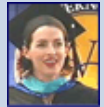
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"Competency-based..."

"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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