



About WGU

News Brief - 1/8/09

Online Degrees Now Widely Accepted by Consumers and Employers

High quality and cost-saving make online education increasingly attractive

Consumer acceptance of online education is now at an all-time high. Convenience, flexibility, and eliminating costly commutes to a campus have broadened the appeal of getting an online degree for busy adults. Over the past five years enrollments in online courses and online degrees have been growing over ten times faster than traditional higher education.

What about employer acceptance? Are employers reluctant or hiring graduates of online schools?

It depends, basically, on the individual job seeker. Does the candidate possess the requisite skills and knowledge to perform the job at a high level? Did he or she get the real education needed, not just a piece of paper?

These days online graduates are no longer at a disadvantage, if they ever were. According to George Lorenzo, publisher of *Educational Pathways*, hiring managers "have come to realize that the vast majority of online higher education graduates are adult lifelong learners who are self-disciplined, reliable and have a knack for applying practical, experience-based knowledge in the workplace."

Lorenzo is the author of "[Online Education Makes the Grade: Employer Acceptance Now Common](#)," a white paper sponsored by non-profit, award-winning [Western Governors University \(WGU\)](#). According to the special report, "Most employers will look at prospective employees who have online degrees on a case-by-case basis and will not make a radical yes or no judgment simply because of an education delivery mode."

Richard Garrett, senior research analyst for Eduventures, an education research and consulting firm headquartered in Boston, notes, "If you ask employers about their sense of the quality of online education—is it of equal quality to traditional education?—the response you typically get is a growing adherence to it being of equal quality."

"Quality will continue to be a major concern," according to Patrick Partridge, vice president of WGU. "And rightly so. Students should be even more concerned about quality than employers. They need to realize that the skills and knowledge they learn are more important than the diploma itself if they are going to excel in their careers."

WGU is on a non-profit online university founded by 19 U.S. governors to expand access to quality online education for working adults. In 2008 WGU was awarded the national "Best Practices in Distance Learning" award from the U.S. Distance Learning Association. [TIME Magazine recently featured WGU](#) as "the best relatively cheap university you've never heard of." (Nov. 2008)

WGU's special strength is its rigorous "competency-based" model that focuses on demonstrating knowledge rather than seat time. The approach relies upon challenging assessments, including actual industry certifications at no extra cost, to measure a student's academic progress. Students who have prior expertise, study hard, and put in extra time can accelerate their programs and save dramatically on tuition. That's because WGU's modest tuition is charged at a flat rate every six month term, not per credit. Part of WGU's mission is to keep online education affordable for working adults. "The value was phenomenal," said IT graduate Sean Onion. "I would have paid thousands more at other schools." WGU students are also eligible for federal financial aid.

Today there's a good chance employees at a large corporation are themselves online students, maybe even the hiring manager. In a 2007 research study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) over 70 percent of the respondent companies offered tuition reimbursement for online degrees from regionally accredited colleges. According to Gerry Crispin, who was a member of the SHRM Technology and HR Management Special Expertise Panel, "There are many more adult learners out there who are getting their degrees online, and many of them are now hiring managers." In fact, most college transcripts never indicate if the degree was earned online or not.

The world has changed and online education no longer creates worries. Just the opposite. When Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, was asked the question, "Would you hire someone with an online business degree?" his answer was revealing. "To count out a candidate based on an online degree may be shortsighted," he responded. "People working all day and studying online all night have the kind of *grrrr* most companies could use."

The [complete white paper](#) provides more analyses, data, and case studies about employer acceptance of online degrees. For more information about [WGU's online degrees](#), visit the website at www.wgu.edu.

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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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