

# News Releases

## Taking the Distance Out of Distance Education, 3/10/11

How [WGU Indiana](#) helps students stay connected and engaged

INDIANAPOLIS — For an increasing number of Hoosiers returning to college, an [online university](#) can offer the accessibility and flexibility they need to fit their busy lives while earning a bachelor's or master's degree. And, with a little research, they can find a quality, accredited institution that will allow them to achieve their educational goals without neglecting their work and family responsibilities. A prospective student can use the information available online to determine what online degree program is best for them, but once they've enrolled, one of the most daunting challenges for both the students and faculty is establishing a sense of community and maintaining interaction with the university. In other words, how do you take the "distance" out of distance education?

Formed through a partnership with Western Governors University, WGU Indiana, a non-profit, online university, offers affordable degree programs to all qualified Indiana residents. WGU Indiana was established by the state of Indiana as an online, competency-based university to expand access to higher education for Indiana residents. WGU Indiana is not only all online, but it uses a unique competency-based learning model. This competency-based approach to learning allows students to advance in their degree program by demonstrating their knowledge and skill in a particular subject area, instead of accumulating classroom hours. Rather than "attending" classes online, students have 24/7 access to a variety of learning resources for each course in their [online degree program](#). They can complete their studies on their own schedule allowing them to meet job and family responsibilities. The faculty at WGU Indiana do not teach, but serve as mentors, and provide one-on-one support, coaching, and guidance to students through their entire degree program.

Since the WGU Indiana "campus" is online, the university has more than 1,100 enrolled students who live and work across the state of Indiana. Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar universities, WGU Indiana's academic model was designed for the online environment.

Aside from using technology to teach, WGU Indiana also uses technology to keep students and faculty connected:

Each WGU Indiana student "meets" with his or her mentor by phone regularly—usually every other week—and has contact through email, instant messaging, text messaging, and telephone as needed, often even on weekends. All students have access to student communities created to help students and mentors build relationships and stay engaged. There are two types of communities:

- Program communities are focused on helping students expand their knowledge in their field of study, providing information regarding industry research and current events, and offering networking opportunities.
- Learning communities provide a virtual 'place' for students to meet to obtain subject-specific information as they work through their studies. These communities provide small group learning sessions and individual academic assistance from subject matter experts called course mentors.

Social media tools allow students, staff, and alumni to connect using platforms they work with every day. Facebook pages for Western Governors University, [WGU Indiana](#), and alumni provide the latest updates on the university as well as student and alumni accomplishments, and provide prospective students, students, alumni, and faculty with a way to exchange thoughts, comments, and ideas. WGU Indiana has its own [YouTube channel](#), [Tweets](#) news regularly, and encourages students and staff to blog and join online conversations.

WGU Indiana provides working Hoosiers who can't fit a traditional college or university into their busy schedules with a way to go further in their careers by completing their bachelor's or master's degree. With more than 50 online degree programs available, WGU Indiana recognizes that its students are individuals with different needs, and like competency-based learning, the university offers students a variety of ways to connect and be a part of its community of students and faculty. For more information about WGU Indiana, please visit, [www.indiana.wgu.edu](#), or call 1.866.225.5948.

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