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## WGU Takes Winter Commencement to Atlanta, 2/9/12



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News Brief - 2/9/12

### WGU Takes Winter Commencement to Atlanta

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**Online university takes commencement on the road for the first time; more than 2,200 to attend February 11 ceremony at Philips Arena**

SALT LAKE CITY — For the first time, online, nonprofit Western Governors University (WGU), [www.wgu.edu](http://www.wgu.edu), will hold its semi-annual commencement in Atlanta, nearly 2,000 miles from its headquarters in Salt Lake City. While the university's headquarters are in Utah, its 30,000 students live in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as military bases overseas. More than 2,600 graduates — WGU's largest class ever — will be awarded diplomas during the ceremony, which will take place Saturday, February 11, at 9:45 a.m. (EST), at the Philips Arena in Atlanta, Georgia.

Although WGU students complete their studies online, the university holds "in-person" commencement ceremonies for its students twice a year. More than 370 graduates, along with family and friends, will attend the event, traveling to Atlanta from 39 states, including Alaska. Nearly 100 of the graduates attending are Georgia residents. For those who cannot attend in person, the ceremony will be streamed live on the [WGU website](#).

John M. Steele, senior vice president of human resources for HCA, the nation's leading provider of healthcare services, will deliver the commencement address. HCA has chosen to partner with WGU to enhance educational and professional development opportunities for the corporation's employees. Nearly 300 HCA employees are currently enrolled at WGU.

"Our partnership with WGU enables our employees to advance their education affordably without interrupting their careers," said Steele. "WGU offers the rigorous, accredited degree programs that will help us ensure that we have the skilled professionals we need to serve our patients."

At Saturday's event, WGU will confer 1,583 bachelor's degrees and 1,071 graduate degrees in four disciplines: Business, Information Technology, Teacher Education, and Health Professions, including Nursing. Founded by 19 U.S. governors to expand access to higher education, WGU is designed to meet the needs of busy working adults. The average age for these graduates is 38; however, the ages range from 18 to 70. WGU's competency-based model makes it possible for students to benefit from prior education and experience by allowing them to move quickly through material they already know so they can focus on what they still need to learn. This model has garnered national attention in recent months for its potential to drive new innovations in college affordability and accessibility. In December 2011, WGU President Robert Mendenhall was one of a select group of college presidents invited to the White House to participate in a roundtable discussion about making college affordable with President Obama. On February 2, 2012, Dr. Mendenhall was invited to [testify before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions](#).

While WGU's [online degree programs](#) are rigorous and challenging, students with work and family responsibilities can schedule their studies to fit their lives. As a result the average time to complete a bachelor's degree is two and a half years.

For more information about WGU's 22nd semi-annual commencement or to watch the event live, go to [www.wgu.edu/Winter2012](http://www.wgu.edu/Winter2012) or call 1.801.428.5463.

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### NBC News Reports on WGU



"The dreams of 19 governors have become [WGU Grad Angie Gonzalez's] dream fulfilled."

—Tom Costello  
NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams

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### Featured News

Find out why Fast Company calls WGU one of the world's 50 most-innovative companies, CNN says we're "a school without boundaries," and major news outlets from NPR to Bloomberg BusinessWeek are touting WGU's "potential to transform the higher education industry."

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### Why We Are Different

WGU has an innovative learning model for helping working adults earn bachelor's and master's degrees. Learn more about how it can help you.

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