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WGU Celebrates First 15 Years, 7/10/12



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News Brief - 7/10/12

More than 33,000 Students, More than 16,000 Graduates—WGU Celebrates First 15 Years

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Founders join online university to celebrate at special event July 13 and during summer commencement July 14

SALT LAKE CITY — The founders of Western Governors University (WGU), www.wgu.edu, including former Utah Governor and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt, former Colorado Governor Roy Romer, and former Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, are joining the nonprofit, online university as it celebrates its 15th anniversary this week in Salt Lake City. WGU faculty, staff, and honored guests will mark this milestone at a special commemorative event on July 13 at 3:30 p.m., at the Grand America Hotel. On Saturday, July 14, the university will recognize more than 3,200 graduates at its semi-annual commencement, which will take place at the Jon M. Huntsman Center beginning at 9:45 a.m.

At Saturday's event, WGU will award 2,036 bachelor's degrees and 1,199 master's degrees to graduates who reside in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, as well as military personnel working overseas. Governor Leavitt, who led the group of governors who created WGU, will be the featured speaker at the university's 23rd semi-annual commencement. Governor Romer and four students will also address the graduates, faculty, and guests. Governor Geringer will confer honorary degrees to four individuals who were integral to WGU's success (bios available upon request):

- Max A. Farbman, WGU Vice President of Development, 1996-2004
- Dr. Douglas "Chip" Johnstone, WGU Provost, 1999-2006
- Dr. Janet W. Schnitz, Dean of WGU Teachers College, 2003-2007; Associate Provost for Assessment, 2008-2010; and WGU Provost, 2010-2012
- William "Bill" Simmons, WGU Government Affairs Representative, 1999-present

Four graduates will also speak at commencement, sharing their experiences as WGU students:

- Jonathan Allen, B.S. Marketing Management, from Streamwood, Illinois
- Elaine Pacoy, B.S. Nursing, from Van Nuys, California
- Sapan Desai, M.D., Ph.D, MBA Healthcare Management, from Durham, North Carolina
- Valerie Velez-Hall, B.A. Special Education, from Taylorsville, Utah

Although WGU students complete their studies online, the university holds "in-person" commencement ceremonies for its students twice a year. More than 450 graduates, along with family and friends, will attend the event, traveling to Salt Lake City from 39 states, including Alaska. For those who cannot attend in person, the ceremony will be streamed live on the [WGU website](http://www.wgu.edu).

Established in 1997 by a bipartisan group of 19 U.S. governors, WGU has grown from an idea to an accredited national university with more than 33,000 students and 16,000 graduates, leading the way in competency-based higher education. The university was launched with private and government funding of approximately \$40 million, but is self-sustaining on tuition of about \$6,000 per year.



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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."

[Read about WGU in the news](#) »

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.

[Watch the video](#) »

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- WGU Tennessee

COLLEGE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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- WGU Washington