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Missouri rolls out new online-degree program

WGU is a nonprofit school that offers credit for what you already know.

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Springfield, Mo. -- Mellow music and the quiet click-clack of a computer keyboard are the only sounds you'll hear during naptime at ABC Beginnings, a northside daycare.

"After I did everything backwards and was married and had my children, it felt like I would never be able to do that," said Amelia Peters, the owner of the daycare.

Peters was an unemployed single mom of three, four years ago, when she first heard about Western Governors University. The nonprofit school online offered her a chance for a better future.

"When I had to make a decision on what I was going to do ,because I was going to be primary provider for my children for a while, it made sense. Especially the online school, because I never had to take time away from them," Peters said.

Peters is studying elementary education. It's one of the 50-plus degree programs offered by W-G-U.

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon rolled out the program in Missouri a couple months ago with a series of commercials paid for by the university. A community development block grant and money from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation helped provide startup money for the school in Missouri.

"You get credit for what you learn in real life," said Beth Johns, a senior recruiter for Penmac in Springfield.

Johns sees the system as a way for some of the 750,000 Missourians, who've already earned some college hours, to complete their degrees.

"A degree program like this would give credit to those people that have that real world experience and help them get their degree at the same time," Johns said.

However, Johns admits many hiring managers still prefer degrees earned at traditional brick-and-mortar schools, like Missouri State or Drury.

"When we're placing for HR positions or sales positions, they want that bachelors degree in human resources businesses or accounting," Johns said.

The average WGU student is 37 years old and already in the workforce, and like Peters, for many traditional learning just isn't an option.

"It feels good. It's an accomplishment, and it's something my children can be proud of me for, because I did work hard for them to give them better," Peters said.

According to the Missouri Governor's office, 37 percent of Missourians have college degree. It is the goal of the Nixon administration to see that number jump above 60 percent, and Nixon and his staff members see the new program as one way to get there.

The [WGU website provides more information](#) on the programs offered online as well as the costs.

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