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WGU News – For Immediate Release

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Western Governors University and Carnegie Mellon University Partner to Develop AI-Enabled Career Guidance Technology

National Science Foundation awards universities \$700,000 grant to kick off 3-year research project

SALT LAKE CITY — (October 15, 2018) The National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded Western Governors University’s [Center for Applied Learning Science \(CALs\)](#) and Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) a grant to support a project partnership designed to help students navigate the increasingly complex employment landscape. The \$700,000 grant will be awarded to the two institutions over three years.

Bringing together leaders in human-computer interaction, machine learning, AI, and education, the project partnership strives to forge acceptable and effective paths toward career growth, community connection, and wellbeing within a constantly changing career landscape. Data-driven learning about the student experience will inform the development of “Intelligent Coaching Agents,” trained to guide students to practical resources, including human career coaches and peers, in order to lead them to decisions that ultimately improve their chances for success.

“WGU is one of the nation’s largest online universities, serving a population of working individuals seeking career transitions in the face of a dramatically changing career landscape,” said Dr. Carolyn Rosé, Professor of Language Technologies and Human-Computer Interaction at CMU. “We’re building a sociotechnical solution that can have a real-world impact on decision making. This partnership offers the opportunity for tremendous impact with populations who need the support most.”

The aim of the project is to make career guidance more readily available to students by augmenting human effort with AI-enabled insight into data from past students who completed WGU degree programs. It builds on a foundation in computational modeling informed by theories of human behavior, embodied within a novel paradigm of Socially-Sensitive Reinforcement Learning (SSRL). Ultimately, the goal is to enhance, not replace, the support students receive from career counselors and fellow students.

“WGU is thrilled to be working in partnership with the team at Carnegie Mellon. Their track record for creating new paradigms that leverage technology to advance human learning aligns perfectly with WGU’s mission and model,” said Jason Levin, Executive Director of CALs at WGU Labs. “We have the opportunity to design a scientifically sound, data-driven model that improves the student experience and, most importantly, outcomes.”

The project is designed to facilitate transition of the research directly into practice at large scale through deployment to WGU students. While the project will be housed inside WGU systems, the resulting innovations have the potential to transform how technology is used to deliver career guidance within institutions of higher education, as well as in a workplace setting.

About CALS at WGU Labs

The Center for Applied Learning Science (CALS), as part of WGU Labs, was launched in July of this year. Focused on improving student outcomes by combining technology, design thinking, and rigorous research methods, CALS collaborates with other institutions and organizations, leveraging the knowledge and experience gained through WGU's 106,000 enrolled students and 121,000 graduates.

Established in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors with a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable higher education, online, nonprofit Western Governors University (WGU) serves students in all 50 states. Driving innovation as the nation's leading competency-based university, WGU has been recognized by the White House, state leaders, employers, and students as a model that works in postsecondary education. Learn more at www.wgu.edu/cals.

About Carnegie Mellon University

Carnegie Mellon (www.cmu.edu) is a private, internationally ranked research university with programs in areas ranging from science, technology and business, to public policy, the humanities and the arts. More than 13,000 students in the university's seven schools and colleges benefit from a small student-to-faculty ratio and an education characterized by its focus on creating and implementing solutions for real problems, interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.