WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

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# Program Guidebook

## Master of Arts, English Language Learning

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*The Master of Arts in English Language Learning (PreK-12) is a competency-based degree program that prepares already licensed teachers both to be licensed to teach in English Language Learning (ELL) settings and to develop significant skills in ELL curriculum development, design, and evaluation. All work in this degree program is online and includes ELL Content and Methodology, Research Fundamentals, and Instructional Design. All students complete a capstone project.*

## Understanding the Competency-Based Approach

How do competency-based programs like those offered at Western Governors University (WGU) work? Unlike traditional universities, WGU does not award degrees based on completing a certain number of credit hours or a specific set of required courses. Instead, you will earn your degree by demonstrating your skills, knowledge, and understanding of essential concepts.

Progress through a degree program is measured not by the amount of time you spend in class but by your ability to demonstrate competency as you complete required courses along a Standard Path. To help you acquire the knowledge and skills you need to demonstrate competency and complete your courses and program, WGU provides a rich array of learning resources. Your program mentor will work closely with you to help you understand your program's requirements and help you create a plan for completing your courses. You will also work closely with course instructors as you engage in each course. As subject matter experts, course instructors will guide you through the content you must learn to demonstrate competency through the course assessments.

The benefit of this competency-based system is that it enables students who are knowledgeable about a particular subject to make accelerated progress toward completing a degree, even if they lack college experience. You may have gained skills and knowledge of a subject while on the job, accumulated wisdom through years of life experience, or already taken a course on a particular subject. WGU will award your degree based on the skills and knowledge you possess and can demonstrate—not the number of hours spent in a classroom.

## Accreditation

Western Governors University is the only university in the history of American higher education to have earned initial accreditation from multiple regional accrediting commissions at once—earning simultaneous accreditation from ACCJC, HLC, NWCCU, and WASC. The university’s accreditation from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) was reaffirmed in March of 2024. In addition to institution-level accreditation, each school has at least one program that is accredited by a programmatic accreditor. All programmatic accreditations are managed by the Academic Engagement department. Contact compliance@wgu.edu for additional information.

## The Degree Plan

The focus of your program is your personalized Degree Plan. The Degree Plan is a detailed blueprint of the courses you will need to complete in order to earn your degree. The Degree Plan also lays out the accompanying learning resources and assessments that compose your program. The list of courses in the Degree Plan is often referred to as the standard path. The amount of time it takes to complete your program depends on both the amount of new information you need to learn and the amount of time you plan to devote each week to study.

Students vary widely in the specific skills and information they need to learn. For example, some students may be highly knowledgeable in a particular subject matter and would not need to engage in new learning opportunities. Other students may find that portions of the program require them to learn new information and that they need to take an online class or participate in a study module to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill program competencies in that area. Some individuals may be able to devote as little as 15–20 hours per week to the program, while others may need to devote more time. For this reason, pre-assessments are there to help your program mentor form a profile of your prior knowledge and create a personalized Degree Plan.

## How You Will Interact with Faculty

At WGU, faculty serve in specialized roles, and they will work with you individually to provide the guidance, instruction, and support you will need to succeed and graduate. As a student, it is important for you to take advantage of this support. It is key to your progress and ultimate success.

Upon your enrollment, you will be assigned a program mentor—an expert in your field of study who will provide you with regular program-level guidance and support from the day you start until the day you graduate. Your program mentor will set up regular telephone appointments (weekly at first) with you, which you will be expected to keep. The mentor will review program competencies with you and work with you to develop a plan and schedule for your coursework. Your program mentor will serve as your main point of contact throughout your program—helping you set weekly study goals, recommending specific learning materials, telling you what to expect in courses, and keeping you motivated. In addition to regular calls, your program mentor is available to help you resolve questions and concerns as they arise.

For many of the courses at WGU, you will be required to complete performance assessments. These include reports, papers, presentations, and projects that let you demonstrate your mastery of the required competencies. A separate group of faculty members, called evaluators, will review your work to determine whether it meets requirements. Evaluators are also subject matter experts in their field of evaluation. If your assessment needs further work before it “passes,” these evaluators, who review your work anonymously, will provide you with instructional feedback to help you meet evaluation standards and allow you to advance.

## Connecting with Other Mentors and Fellow Students

As you proceed through your Degree Plan, you will have direct contact with multiple faculty members. These communications can take a variety of forms, including participation in one-on-one discussions, chats in the learning communities, and live cohort and webinar opportunities. As a WGU student, you will have access to your own personal MyWGU Student Portal, which will provide a gateway to your courses of study, learning resources, and learning communities where you will interact with faculty and other students.

The learning resources in each course are specifically designed to support you as you develop competencies in preparation for your assessments. These learning resources may include reading materials, videos, tutorials, cohort opportunities, community discussions, and live discussions that are guided by course instructors who are experts in their field. You will access your program community during your orientation course to network with peers who are enrolled in your program and to receive continued support through professional enrichment and program-specific chats, blogs, and discussions. WGU also provides Student Services associates to help you and your program mentor solve any special problems that may arise.

## Orientation

The WGU Orientation course will introduce you to the fundamentals of WGU’s competency-based education (CBE) and the expectations, policies, and protocols for students enrolled in a WGU degree program. Orientation will introduce you to WGU’s wide range of support resources and success centers. It also will provide you with study strategies recommended by current students and faculty that will help you succeed as a WGU student. Orientation ends with your first assessment at WGU, providing an opportunity to experience WGU’s performance assessment process before you begin your degree-focused coursework. The Orientation course must be completed before you can start your first term at WGU.

## Transferability of Prior College Coursework

Because WGU is a competency-based institution, it does not award degrees based on credits but rather on demonstration of competency. WGU undergraduate programs may accept transfer credits or apply a Requirement Satisfied (RS) in some cases. Refer to your specific program transfer guidelines to determine what can be satisfied by previously earned college credits. Students entering graduate programs must have their undergraduate degree transcripts verified before being admitted to WGU. In addition to a program's standard course path, there may be additional state-specific requirements.

Click here for the Student Handbook

WGU does not waive any requirements based on a student's professional experience and does not perform a "résumé review" or "portfolio review" that will automatically waive any degree requirements. Degree requirements and transferability rules are subject to change in order to keep the degree content relevant and current.

Remember, WGU's competency-based approach lets you take advantage of your knowledge and skills, regardless of how you obtained them. Even when you do not directly receive credit, the knowledge you possess may help you accelerate the time it takes to complete your degree program.

## Continuous Enrollment, On Time Progress, and Satisfactory Academic Progress

WGU is a "continuous enrollment" institution, which means you will be automatically enrolled in each of your new terms while you are at WGU. Each term is six months long. Longer terms and continuous enrollment allow you to focus on your studies without the hassle of unnatural breaks between terms that you would experience at a more traditional university. At the end of every six-month term, you and your program mentor will review the progress you have made and revise your Degree Plan for your next six-month term.

WGU requires that students make measurable progress toward the completion of their degree programs every term. We call this "On-Time Progress," denoting that you are on track and making progress toward on-time graduation. As full-time students, graduate students must enroll in at least 8 competency units each term, and undergraduate students must enroll in at least 12 competency units each term. Completing at least these minimum enrollments is essential to On-Time Progress and serves as a baseline from which you may accelerate your program. We measure your progress based onthe courses you are able to pass, not on your accumulation of credit hours or course grades. Every time you pass a course, you are demonstrating that you have mastered skills and knowledge in your degree program. For comparison to traditional grading systems, passing a course means you have demonstrated competency equivalent to a "B" grade or better.

WGU assigns competency units to each course in order to track your progress through the program. A competency unit is equivalent to one semester credit of learning. Some courses may be assigned 3 competency units while others may be as large as 12 competency units.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is particularly important to students on financial aid because you must achieve SAP in order to maintain eligibility for financial aid. We will measure your SAP quantitatively by reviewing the number of competency units you have completed each term. In order to remain in good academic standing, you must complete at least 66.67% of the units you attempt over the length of your program—including any courses you add to your term to accelerate your progress. Additionally, during your first term at WGU you must pass at least 3 competency units in order to remain eligible for financial aid. We know that SAP is complex, so please contact a financial aid counselor should you have additional questions.

## Courses

Your Degree Plan includes courses needed to complete your program. To obtain your degree, you must demonstrate your skills and knowledge by completing each course's assessment(s). You may be asked to demonstrate competency in a course in several different ways, including proctored exams, projects, essays, research papers, and simulations, among others. Certifications verified through third parties may also be included in your program as a way to demonstrate competency. More detailed information about each assessment is provided in the course of study.

## External Content &  Basic Skills Exams

Western Governors University requires that candidates pass the state-mandated content exam that aligns with their WGU program in addition to a basic skills exam (initial licensure programs only). Specific information regarding required content and basic skills exams required for each program and state can be found in the WGU Student Handbook. In many cases, it is the candidates' responsibility to register and pay for the required exams and submit their official passing score reports to WGU.

## State Licensure Requirements

Some states have specific licensure requirements that are not part of WGU programs that you will have to fulfill in addition to the degree requirements of your program. These state licensure requirements might include, but are not limited to: subject-specific licensure exams, state-specific teacher performance assessments, course work related to state history, basic skills exams, and background clearances. The WGU Student Handbook outlines the credentialing requirements of each state. Teacher candidates should consult the applicable section to become familiar with their state's expectations regarding licensure.

## Learning Resources

WGU works with many different educational partners, including enterprises, publishers, training companies, and higher educational institutions, to provide high-quality and effective learning resources that match the competencies you are developing. These vary in type, and may be combined to create the best learning experience for your course. A learning resource can be an e-textbook, online module, study guide, simulation, virtual lab, tutorial, or a combination of these. The cost of most learning resources are included in your tuition and Learning Resource Fee. They can be accessed or enrolled for through your courses. Some degree-specific resources are not covered by your tuition, and you will need to cover those costs separately. WGU also provides a robust library to help you obtain additional learning resources, as needed.

Mobile Compatibility:

The following article provides additional details about the current state of mobile compatibility for learning resources at WGU.

Mobile Access for Learning Resources

## Standard Path

As previously mentioned, competency units (CUs) have been assigned to each course in order to measure your academic progress. If you are an undergraduate student, you will be expected to enroll in a minimum of 12 competency units each term. Graduate students are expected to enroll in a minimum of 8 competency units each term. A standard plan for a student for this program who entered WGU without any transfer units would look similar to the one on the following page. Your personal progress can be faster, but your pace will be determined by the extent of your transfer units, your time commitment, and your determination to proceed at a faster rate.

# **Standard Path** *for* **Master of Arts, English Language Learning**

| Course Description | CUs | Term |
|---|---|---|
| Culture | 3 | 1 |
| Professional Role of the ELL Teacher | 2 | 1 |
| Language Production, Theory and Acquisition | 4 | 1 |
| Theories of Second Language Acquisition and Grammar | 3 | 2 |
| Assessment Theory and Practice | 3 | 2 |
| Planning, Implementing, Managing Instruction | 4 | 2 |
| Subject Specific Pedagogy: ELL | 3 | 3 |
| Research Foundations | 2 | 3 |
| Research Questions and Literature Review | 2 | 3 |
| Field Experience for ELL | 3 | 3 |
| Teacher Work Sample in English Language Learning | 1 | 4 |
| Total CUs | 30 | |

## Changes to Curriculum

WGU publishes an Institutional Catalog, which describes the academic requirements of each degree program. Although students are required to complete the program version current at the time of their enrollment, WGU may modify requirements and course offerings within that version of the program to maintain the currency and relevance of WGU's competencies and programs. When program requirements are updated, students readmitting after withdrawal from the university will be expected to re-enter into the most current catalog version of the program.

# Areas of Study for Master of Arts, English Language Learning

The following section includes the areas of study in the program, with their associated courses. Your specific learning resources and level of instructional support will vary based on the individual competencies you bring to the program and your confidence in developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities required in each area of the degree. The Degree Plan and learning resources are dynamic, so you need to review your Degree Plan and seek the advice of your mentor regarding the resources before you purchase them.

## English Language Learning

### Culture

Focuses on the nature and role of culture and the importance of cultural groups and cultural identity.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and uses knowledge of how cultural groups and students' cultural identities affect language learning and school achievement.*

### Professional Role of the ELL Teacher

The Professional Role of the ELL Teacher focuses on issues of professionalism for the English Language Learning teacher and leader. This includes program development, ethics, engagement in professional organizations, serving as a resource, and ELL advocacy.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate collaborates with and is prepared to serve as a resource to all staff, including paraprofessionals, to improve learning for all ELL students.*
- *The graduate demonstrates knowledge of design and implementation of ELL programs and models as well as the regulations affecting them.*
- *The graduate demonstrates knowledge of history, legal decisions, research, and current practice in the field of ELL teaching and applies this knowledge to improve teaching and learning.*

### Language Production, Theory and Acquisition

Language Production, Theory and Acquisition focuses on describing and understanding language and the development of language. It includes the study of acquisition theory, error correction strategies, and applied phonology.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate understands and applies concepts, linguistic theories, research, knowledge of the structure of English, and sociolinguistics to facilitate the acquisition of new language in and out of classroom settings.*
- *The graduate understands language as a system and applies this understanding to help English language learning (ELL) students acquire and use English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for social and academic purposes.*

### Theories of Second Language Acquisition and Grammar

Theories of Second Language Learning Acquisition and Grammar covers content material in applied linguistics, including morphology, syntax, semantics, and grammar. Students will explore the role of dialect in the classroom, the connections between language and culture, and the theories of first and second language acquisition.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and uses knowledge of how cultural groups and students' cultural identities affect language learning and school achievement.*

- *The graduate knows, understands, and uses the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture in language development and academic achievement.*
- *The graduate understands and applies concepts, linguistic theories, research, knowledge of the structure of English, and sociolinguistics to facilitate the acquisition of new language in and out of classroom settings.*
- *The graduate understands language as a system and applies this understanding to help English language learning (ELL) students acquire and use English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for social and academic purposes.*

## Assessment Theory and Practice

Assessment Theory and Practice focuses on issues central to assessment in the ELL environment, including high-stakes testing, standardized tests, placement and exit assessment, formative and summative assessments, and making adaptations in assessments to meet the needs of ELL students.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate knows and uses a variety of performance-based assessment tools and techniques to inform instruction of ELL students.*
- *The graduate knows and uses a variety of standards-based language proficiency instruments to inform instruction and understands the use of these instruments for identification, placement, and demonstration of language growth of ELL students.*
- *The graduate understands various issues of IQ assessment (e.g., cultural and linguistic bias; political, social, and difference between language proficiency and other types of assessment (e.g., standardized achievement tests of overall mastery) as they affect ELL student learning.*

*psychological factors) and special education testing (including gifted and talented); the importance of standards; and the*

## Planning, Implementing, Managing Instruction

Planning, Implementing, Managing Instruction focuses on a variety of philosophies and grade levels of English Language Learner (ELL) instruction. It includes the study of ELL listening and speaking, ELL reading and writing, specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE), and specific issues for various grade level instruction.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate is familiar with a wide range of standards-based materials, resources, and technologies, and chooses, adapts, and can use them in effective ELL and content teaching.*
- *The graduate knows, develops, manages, and implements a variety of standards-based teaching strategies and techniques for developing and integrating English listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and for accessing the core curriculum.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and applies concepts, research, and best practices to plan classroom instruction in a supportive learning environment for English language learner (ELL) students.*

## Subject Specific Pedagogy: ELL

Subject Specific Pedagogy: ELL integrates aspects of pedagogy, assessment, and professionalism in English Language Learning (ELL). A student develops and assesses aspects of language curriculum development including second language instruction, methods of second language assessment, and legal policy issues.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate demonstrates knowledge of history, legal decisions, research, and current practice in the field of ELL teaching and applies this knowledge to improve teaching and learning.*
- *The graduate knows and uses a variety of performance-based assessment tools and techniques to inform instruction of ELL students.*
- *The graduate knows and uses a variety of standards-based language proficiency instruments to inform instruction and understands the use of these instruments for identification, placement, and demonstration of language growth of ELL students.*

- *The graduate knows, develops, manages, and implements a variety of standards-based teaching strategies and techniques for developing and integrating English listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and for accessing the core curriculum.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and applies concepts, research, and best practices to plan classroom instruction in a supportive learning environment for English language learner (ELL) students.*
- *The graduate understands the importance of acting as a professional resource, advocating for English language learner (ELL) students, and building partnerships with students' families.*
- *The graduate understands various issues of IQ assessment (e.g., cultural and linguistic bias; political, social, and difference between language proficiency and other types of assessment (e.g., standardized achievement tests of overall mastery) as they affect ELL student learning.*
  *psychological factors) and special education testing (including gifted and talented); the importance of standards; and the*

### Field Experience for ELL

Field Experience for ELL is the field experience component of the English Language Learning program. In this experience, students are required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of video observations for both elementary and secondary levels. Additionally, a supervised teaching experience that is face-to-face with English language learners (ELL) according to the minimum time requirements of the student's state is required. The purpose of this course is to assess the ability of students, including their engagement in field experience activities, ability to reflect on and then plan standards-based instruction in ELL, and their ability to locate and effectively use resources for teaching ELL to meet the needs of their individual learners.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate knows, develops, manages, and implements a variety of standards-based teaching strategies and techniques for developing and integrating English listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and for accessing the core curriculum.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and applies concepts, research, and best practices to plan classroom instruction in a supportive learning environment for English language learner (ELL) students.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and uses knowledge of how cultural groups and students' cultural identities affect language learning and school achievement.*
- *The graduate knows, understands, and uses the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture in language development and academic achievement.*
- *The graduate understands and applies concepts, linguistic theories, research, knowledge of the structure of English, and sociolinguistics to facilitate the acquisition of new language in and out of classroom settings.*
- *The graduate understands language as a system and applies this understanding to help English language learning (ELL) students acquire and use English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for social and academic purposes.*
- *The graduate understands the importance of acting as a professional resource, advocating for English language learner (ELL) students, and building partnerships with students' families.*

## Research

### Research Foundations

The Research Foundations course focuses on the essential concepts in educational research, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed, and action research. This course also teaches students concepts about measurement and assessment, as well as strategies for obtaining warranted research results.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate analyzes different measurement scales and differentiates between reliability and validity, and their subtypes, as they relate to assessments.*
- *The graduate analyzes ethical issues and identifies appropriate procedures for educational research.*
- *The graduate analyzes the characteristics of research quality and the potential threats to the quality of results in qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and action research studies.*
- *The graduate analyzes the key aspects of action research and characterizes the major approaches to action research.*

- *The graduate analyzes the key aspects of mixed methods research and characterizes the major approaches to mixed methods research.*
- *The graduate analyzes the key aspects of qualitative research and characterizes the major approaches to qualitative research.*
- *The graduate analyzes the key aspects of quantitative research and characterizes the major approaches to quantitative research.*
- *The graduate applies and justifies appropriate research methods and design in quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios to address the research question(s).*
- *The graduate completes a research proposal.*
- *The graduate describes the purpose for a literature review and develops an organized literature review relevant to educational research topics, problems, and questions.*
- *The graduate develops clear research questions that can be investigated and hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data.*
- *The graduate differentiates among the major methods of data collection, including their strengths and limitations in the selection of an appropriate method of data collection.*
- *The graduate evaluates and selects appropriate basic data analysis techniques for quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios.*
- *The graduate evaluates the purpose, process, and practice of the generation and justification of knowledge in educational research.*

### Research Questions and Literature Review

The Research Questions and Literature Reviews course focuses on how to conduct a thorough literature review that addresses and identifies important educational research topics, problems, and questions, and helps determine the appropriate kind of research and data needed to answer one's research questions and hypotheses. Research Foundations is a prerequisite for this course.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate describes the purpose for a literature review and develops an organized literature review relevant to educational research topics, problems, and questions.*
- *The graduate develops clear research questions that can be investigated and hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data.*
- *The graduate differentiates among the major methods of data collection, including their strengths and limitations in the selection of an appropriate method of data collection.*

## Teacher Work Sample

### Teacher Work Sample in English Language Learning

The Teacher Work Sample is a culmination of the wide variety of skills learned during your time in the Teachers College at WGU. In order to be a competent and independent classroom teacher, you will showcase a collection of your content, planning, instructional, and reflective skills in this professional assessment.

*This course covers the following competencies:*

- *Begin your course by discussing your course planning tool report with your instructor and creating your personalized course plan together.*
- *The graduate applies instructional strategies that promote learning, engage students, and provide differentiated instruction.*
- *The graduate evaluates teaching experiences including the planning and implementing of curriculum and instruction through ongoing reflection.*
- *The graduate evaluates the teaching context to accommodate student differences to plan for instruction and assessment.*
- *The graduate integrates strategies to develop academic language that facilitates effective student participation and engagement in learning.*
- *The graduate plans comprehensive learning segments of instruction and assessment that align with standards and the needs of students.*
- *The graduate plans learning environments that support individual learning, collaboration, and positive social interaction.*

- *The graduate utilizes assessment data to profile student learning, communicate information about student progress and achievement, and guide and modify instruction.*

## Accessibility and Accommodations

Western Governors University (WGU) is committed to providing equal access to its academic programs to all qualified students. WGU's Student Disability Services department supports this mission by providing support, resources, advocacy, collaboration, and academic accommodations in accordance with federal and state statutes and regulations to WGU students and prospective students. Prospective and Enrolled Students may initiate the accommodation process at any time during their enrollment at WGU. To initiate the accommodation process, all potential and current WGU students must complete the secure online Accommodation Request Form located at *https://www.wgu.edu/wgu/ada_form*. The Student Disability Services team can be reached at 1-877- 435-7948 x5922 or at *sds@wgu.edu*. Additional information on accommodations can be found in the student handbook Accommodations for Students with Disabilities policy.

## Need More Information?  WGU Student Services

Student Support Services team members also assist with unresolved concerns to find equitable resolutions. To contact the Student Support Services team, please feel free to call 877-435-7948 or e-mail *studentservices@wgu.edu*. We are available Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m, mountain standard time.