Governors Announce Plans to Establish
WGU Missouri & WGU Tennessee

In January, Governor Jay Nixon of Missouri and Governor Bill Haslam of Tennessee announced plans to partner with Western Governors University to establish WGU Missouri and WGU Tennessee. Both governors made the announcements during their state of the state addresses.

At an event in Kansas City on February 15, Governor Nixon signed an executive order officially establishing WGU Missouri and making it part of the state’s higher education system. In addition, Governor Nixon and President Bob Mendenhall signed a memorandum of understanding creating a partnership between the state and Western Governors University.

“WGU Missouri and WGU Tennessee will follow the models currently in place in Texas, Indiana, and Washington. The new state-based universities will have physical offices in the states, and each will be led by a chancellor who resides in the state.”

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon
signs the executive order for
the creation of WGU Missouri.

WGU Ranks #28 on Fast Company’s List of World’s Most Innovative Companies

One of the leading progressive business publications in the world, Fast Company included WGU on its list “for showing public schools another way to do business.”

Fast Company highlighted WGU’s success in using innovative technologies to improve learning while keeping tuition affordable. The magazine also noted that WGU leads the nation in master’s degrees in math education and that WGU’s programs are developed with input from leading employers. “While public university tuition was rising by about 5% a year, WGU’s has held steady at $6,000 since 2008. It keeps the fees so low through technological efficiencies, such as replacing in-person test centers with virtual ones,” the Fast Company article reads. “And it obsessively tracks metrics like this one: 95% of employers say WGU grads are as good as or better than those from anywhere else.”

Fast Company describes its Most Innovative Companies issue as its “most significant, high-profile editorial effort of the year. The editorial team spends months gathering and sifting data to identify those enterprises that exemplify the best in business from across the economy and around the world.”
At most universities, it’s, ‘Show up and get a degree. ’ At Western Governors, it’s, ‘Show me what you got and get a degree, ’” said former Florida Governor Jeb Bush during his keynote address at WGU’s 24th semi-annual commencement. The event, which was held February 9 at the Philips Arena in Atlanta, was attended by more than 375 graduates from 36 states, including one who traveled to Georgia from a military assignment in Japan.

Governor Bush, who is an advocate of innovation in education, currently serves as the chairman of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, a national organization focused on education reform. He commended WGU for establishing and proving the efficacy of its competency-based learning.

“Learning is not measured by time. Accomplishment only comes with struggle,” Bush said.

“This is a record-setting class,” said WGU President Bob Mendenhall. “It includes 4,134 graduates from all 50 states.”

During the ceremony, the university awarded 2,596 bachelor’s degrees and 1,538 graduate degrees in business, information technology, teacher education, and health professions. The average age of the graduates was 39, but ages ranged from 17 to 74.

Four graduates spoke during commencement: Monica Virgil, a wife, mother, and full-time teacher from Montgomery, Alabama, earned an M.A. in Mathematics Education. Cora Edwards, a military wife, mother, and nurse from Tampa, Florida, received an M.S. in Nursing—Leadership and Management. Nicki Nelson, an H.R. manager, wife, and mother from Rochester Hills, Michigan, graduated with a B.S. in Human Resource Management, and Christopher Dann, a father, husband, and IT professional from Port Orange, Florida, was awarded a B.S. in Information Technology.

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"By enrolling at WGU, and completing a degree here, you’re on the leading edge of education … you’re a revolutionary.”

—The Honorable Jeb Bush
Former Governor of Florida
WGU Indiana Establishes Scholarship to Honor Former Governor Mitchell Daniels

To honor the contributions of its founding governor, WGU Indiana has created the Mitchell E. Daniels Jr. Go Further Scholarship. The first-of-its-kind scholarship recognizes the governor’s vision and innovation in establishing WGU’s first state-based university as well as the success and progress of WGU Indiana since its founding.

The first scholarship recipient is Ann Marie Walker from Griffith, Indiana, who is completing her bachelor’s degree in elementary education. The scholarship, which is valued at $3,000, will cover all her tuition and fees for one six-month term.

“This is the first time WGU Indiana has presented a scholarship for the final term of a student’s degree program, demonstrating Governor Daniels’ vision for not only helping Hoosiers go back to college, but helping them complete a degree,” WGU Indiana Chancellor Allison Barber said.

“When Ann Marie’s husband, a U.S. Army veteran, lost his job, her family found themselves homeless and were forced to live with relatives. “My husband worked in sales, and after the economy took a hit, so did our paycheck,” Ann Marie said. “I was attending another college at the time, but after losing our home, with no car to attend classes in person and four kids to care for, I thought all was lost. Then a prayer was answered almost three years ago when WGU Indiana came into existence. I have an opportunity to follow a dream of becoming a teacher and supporting my family. I will never again be forced to rely on anyone but myself.”

Since Governor Daniels created WGU Indiana in June 2010, calling it “Indiana’s eighth state university,” the nonprofit, online university has grown to more than 3,000 students and 500 graduates from across the state.

Seattle Times Recognizes WGU Washington as “Government’s Smart Innovation of Higher Ed”

Earlier this year, The Seattle Times published an article about WGU Washington titled “WGU: Government’s smart innovation of higher ed.” Washington’s primary newspaper mentioned WGU’s innovative model, affordable tuition, and impact as a complementary member of the higher education landscape in the state.

In January, a Kirkland, Washington-based publisher named WGU the top online college in the nation. SR Education Group, an independent firm started by a former Microsoft executive, based its rankings on reviews from former students combined with the measurement of several factors including quality of degree programs and affordability. No other schools in the state made the top-10 list.

WGU Washington’s Chancellor, Jean Floten, was also recently named to the “Most Influential People in Seattle 2012” list by Seattle Magazine. The list was assembled by a panel of experts who chose 62 of the boldest and brightest movers and shakers from the past year. Chancellor Floten was named as the most influential person in the Education category.

WGU Texas Addresses Nursing Shortage with Pathways Program

In an effort to address the expanding demand from healthcare providers in Texas for registered nurses with baccalaureate credentials, WGU Texas and Lone Star College System have announced a collaborative, dual-admission program for nursing students.

The RN to BSN or RN to MSN Guaranteed Pathway provides qualified nursing students who agree to follow a prescribed curricular path and meet set progression thresholds with a dual-admission degree pathway. Lone Star College System will market the program as local, fast-track access to bachelor’s and master’s degrees for their highly qualified students. Lone Star College’s nursing program is the first of what is expected to be numerous Guaranteed Pathways across the state in the coming year in nursing and IT.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, the state is facing a shortage of 71,000 nurses by 2020.

The Guaranteed Pathway program is designed by teams of curriculum and industry experts at both institutions. It is offered in addition to WGU Texas’ existing statewide transfer agreement and partnership with the Texas Association of Community Colleges.
**GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT:**
**Cora Edwards, M.S. in Nursing—Leadership and Management**

At the age of 24, Cora Edwards moved from England to the United States with her American husband and one small daughter in tow. She worked a variety of minimum-wage jobs to help support her growing family while her husband, a member of the U.S. Air Force, took assignments away from home.

One of Cora’s many jobs was working the night shift at a donut shop and diner, filling donuts from 1:00 to 6:00 am. It was while she filled donuts that she dreamed of starting a meaningful career, and she spent any free time she had researching different career paths. “The more I helped customers in the diner, the more I realized I’d make a great nurse,” Cora said.

After several years, numerous moves to different states, and many long commutes to school and work—all while caring for her four children—Cora finally earned a bachelor’s degree in nursing. At her bachelor’s commencement, she looked at the master’s degree candidates and thought she would never be able to attain such a goal, especially with two teenage daughters still at home and working full time. “Then I discovered Western Governors University, and for the first time I counted myself among one of the prospective candidates to obtain my master’s degree in nursing,” Cora said.

“Western Governors University has prepared me to meet this tremendous chapter in my life. I am now part of the future of nursing and have a credible voice. This degree has made the earlier struggles in my life all worthwhile,” Cora said. “This goal was not possible without the constant support of my husband, children, and my various mentors at WGU. It always seemed like there was always someone available to help.”

Cora says that WGU has made her a truly qualified candidate for a master’s-prepared nursing role. Since completing her master’s degree, she has been appointed as a clinical education specialist for a hospital in Tampa, Florida.

**GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT:**
**Nicki Nelson, B.S. in Business—HR Management**

Despite the fact she was a straight-A student preparing for college, Nicki Nelson dropped out of high school and began working to support her child. In her 20s, she waited tables or worked the cash register at a local grocery store. Nicki longed for a career that meant something, but she didn’t know how to get the education she needed. “I was the perfect example of the nontraditional student,” Nicki said.

Nicki always did well in math and eventually earned a certificate in accounting from a local college. She began working in a payroll and personnel position at a local factory, and over the years, Nicki took on increasingly responsible positions in human resources. It wasn’t until she was working in the HR department at a local meat-packing factory that she realized it was getting harder and harder to move up the management ladder without a bachelor’s degree. “It was now or never if I wanted an education. But I did not have time to dedicate to a full-time school schedule, and attending school part time, it would take me 10 years to get the education I needed,” Nicki said.

She began a search for a school that would fit her needs, and she found WGU. She was impressed by the competency-based approach—her experience would help her get through the material she already knew and enable her to accelerate through her program.

A military wife and mother of three teenagers and two step-children, Nicki worked full time to help support her family while earning her B.S. in HR Management at WGU.

At commencement, Nicki said, “For the first time in my life, I’m in a cap and gown—it feels great! I did it without sacrificing time with my family or income from leaving a job to go to school. WGU gave me the tools I needed to succeed in my education. I now have a great career at Global Titanium in Detroit as a human resources manager, and I love it.”