

2011 WGU Washington: A Retrospective

The New Year brings a fitting opportunity to highlight this launch-year for WGU Washington and to provide thanks to the many leaders, statewide, who were pivotal to this year's efforts and successes.

WGU Washington was established by the State Legislature in partnership with nationally recognized and accredited Western Governors University. The nonprofit university, which receives no state funding, was created to expand access to higher education for Washington residents. WGU Washington offers 50 bachelor's and master's degree programs in the high-demand career fields of business, information technology, teacher education, and health professions, including nursing. The university's competency-based learning model is designed to meet the needs of working adults, offering them an affordable, flexible option for earning an accredited college degree that is recognized and respected by employers.

WGU Washington's academic model is unique—rather than earning degrees based on credit hours or time spent in class, students are required to demonstrate their mastery of degree subject matter. They advance by writing papers, completing assignments, and passing exams to prove their knowledge of required subject matter. This allows students to move quickly through areas where they have prior work or academic experience and focus on the areas they still need to master.

Learning is individualized and guided by the one-on-one support of a faculty mentor. Degree programs are rigorous and challenging, but designed to allow students to schedule their studies to accommodate work and family obligations. Tuition is affordable; approximately \$6,000 per year for most degree programs, and federal financial aid is available.

Governor Gregoire Signs SHB 1822 Creating the Only State-Endorsed Online University

April 22, 2011 will have significant and long-lasting impact on the citizens of Washington: SHB 1822 was signed into law by Governor Christine Gregoire. The bill established WGU Washington, the only state-endorsed online university, to increase opportunities for Washington students, including dislocated workers and place-bound students. Prime sponsors were Senator Jim Kastama (D, 25th Legislative District) and Representative Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney (D, 46th Legislative District).



Gov. Chris Gregoire signs SHB 1822 with prime sponsors, Rep. Phyllis Kenney and Sen. Jim Kastama, and WGU President Bob Mendenhall

The new online university takes aim at the more than 950,000 Washingtonians who have some college education but have not yet received a degree. Although life's challenges may interfere for many individuals, the dream of a degree doesn't disappear. WGU Washington helps those individuals meet that dream.

Bellevue College President Jean Floten to Lead WGU Washington



Jean Floten

WGU Washington tapped Bellevue College President B. Jean Floten to serve as its first Chancellor. "I am thrilled to have this opportunity to work with Western Governors University to create WGU Washington," Mrs. Floten said. "I am committed to higher education because it has the power to improve lives and livelihoods. WGU Washington gives more Washington students access to a high-quality, affordable education."

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WGU Washington Is Launched



Sen. Kastama and Rep. Kenney

WGU Washington was officially launched on May 26, 2011, one month after being signed into law by Governor Gregoire. This new university, with its flexible, innovative learning model gives those with work and family obligations the opportunity to get the education they need.

Washington's newest university and the state's 34 community and technical colleges signed a partnership agreement designed to make it seamless for community and technical college graduates to transfer to WGU Washington to complete a bachelor's degree.



College Presidents and WGU Pres. Bob Mendenhall at the WGU Washington launch

WGU Washington Announces Advisory Board

WGU Washington selected 12 leaders in business, healthcare, education, and philanthropy to serve on its Advisory Board. The Board provides counsel on Washington state-specific needs and trends to help shape the direction and continued success of the university and its four colleges; Business, Information Technology, Education, and Health Professions.

The WGU Washington Advisory Board members include:

- Don Brunell, President, Association of Washington Business
- Phyllis Campbell, Chairman, Pacific Northwest, JPMorgan Chase & Co.
- Dr. Rich Cummins, President and CEO, Columbia Basin College
- Al Davis, Principal, Revitalization Partners
- Dr. Carver Clark Gayton, Consultant in education and workforce development
- Dr. Gary Livingston, Former Chancellor, Community Colleges of Spokane
- Steve Mullen, President, Washington Roundtable
- Hilary Pennington, Director of Education, Postsecondary Success & Special Initiatives, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Rogelio Riojas, CEO, Sea Mar Community Health Centers
- Dr. Kathleen Ross, President Emeritus, Heritage University
- Dr. Samuel H. Smith, President Emeritus, Washington State University
- John D. White, Vice President, BergerABAM

"WGU Washington offers our residents another option for finishing a bachelor's or master's degree." --Governor Chris Gregoire

"This is an important day for both WGU Washington and for all of us who are committed to improving access to quality higher education in our state. I am looking forward to working with our community and technical colleges and all of our state's higher ed leaders to bring this new educational opportunity to Washington residents." -- Chancellor Jean Floten

"The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is very pleased with our new partnership with WGU Washington," "This agreement enables many more community and technical college graduates to take advantage of WGU Washington's terrific educational opportunities." -- SBCTC Executive Director. Charlie Earl

"Once again, Washington State is becoming a national leader by creating a virtual state university that offers accreditation and accessibility to working adults. My hope is to make our state the global innovator in quality online education." -- Senator Jim Kastama

"Establishing this new university for Washington is truly a win-win—we're making it possible for more of our residents to get the degrees they need to build their careers and improve their lives, and we're doing it without adding to the burden on our higher education budget." -- Representative Phyllis Kenney



Advisory Board member Sam Smith and a WGU WA student

"Their varied backgrounds and experiences, coupled with their dedication to enriching education here in Washington, meld ideally with WGU Washington's mission to provide affordable and accessible higher education to students who will benefit, especially working adults," said Chancellor Jean Floten. "I'm thrilled to have the support and backing of this impressive group of leaders."

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The First Six Months of Operation

Opening the doors of WGU Washington's office August 1, 2011, at 1001 Fourth Avenue, Seattle, WGU Washington staff began reaching out to prospective students, increasing awareness about the university in communities throughout the state, meeting with colleges and major employers to ensure they know the high quality of its programs, and building a sense of community among the WGU Washington students and employees.



The Chancellor's office has launched RAVES, the WGU Washington Strategic Communication Campaign that will:

- Build effective *relationships* throughout the state with community leaders in business, politics, colleges and universities, industry, IT, and P-12.
- Help all of the WGU Washington community, including our students, mentors, graduates, field reps, and chancellor, become *ambassadors* for the university.
- Heighten *visibility* statewide through media, community events, conferences, professional associations, Chambers of Commerce, Rotaries and other social service organizations, tribes, military and dependents, and outreach to other special populations.



Through these efforts we *engage* with leaders, stakeholders and the speaking, thinking public and build community to help students to *succeed* in reaching their goals.

WGU Washington's RAVES initiated a great launch campaign right out of the chute – producing a strong flow of leads that have converted well into students, even better than expected. Clever television, radio and newspaper ads brought

considerable traffic to the WGU Washington website. The WGU Washington billboard ad campaign turned one billboard into a “movie star,” as it crossed the state, building awareness of the university and a sense of pride among WGU Washington students.



WGU Washington staff, meeting with businesses, colleges, and organizations and engaging in public events, has also contributed to public and prospective student awareness about WGU Washington. The strong partnership with community and technical colleges has emerged as an important avenue for reaching students.



Some key events have included the Puyallup Fair in September, student mixers, a tour of the mobile billboard during October and November, holiday parties for staff and students in December, sponsorship at sporting events, nursing and teacher conferences, speaking engagements, editorial board visits, meetings with education officials, employers and legislators, and a Billboard Commercial contest among our students.

Dr. Paula Boyum, Bellevue College, with WGU Washington students

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One Event Highlighted: “Do the Puyallup” with WGU Washington

WGU Washington sponsored WGU Washington Day at the Puyallup Fair on Saturday, September 24th, during the last weekend of the largest single annual event in the state, which drew more than one million visitors during the month of September. WGU Washington Chancellor Jean Floten, WGU Washington mentors and students were on-site to welcome fair-goers and hand out raffle tickets for an opportunity to win an iPad2 and other prizes.



“We were thrilled to have a presence at the Puyallup Fair, which always is an incredibly fun event and has such a mass appeal for Washingtonians,” said Chancellor Jean Floten. “WGU Washington’s students are hard-working, independent achievers, but they do like to have a good time and get involved. We’re happy to be able to celebrate both current and prospective students as we wind down from the last bit of summer here in Washington.”

RAVES SUCCESS

These combined efforts have yielded some great results: WGU Washington has enrolled *over 2,000 students in 2011*, attesting to the level of need identified by Governor Gregoire and the Washington State Legislature. And, more and more Washingtonians are discovering that WGU Washington is an affordable and flexible option that allows students to balance their work and family life and pursue a degree at the same time.

In addition, as student enrollments have grown, so has the employee base, contributing to job development in the state. WGU Washington employees now number 27, the majority of whom are faculty mentors.



WGU WA staff member, Meredith Donovan, with Greater Spokane Chamber execs

Who Are WGU Washington’s Students?

WGU Washington students are place-bound, rural and first-generation to college students; dislocated workers and employees who need new skills to advance in the workplace. Their average age is 37; over 60 percent are women, about 70 percent are working, 23 percent are students of color, 77 percent are enrolled in undergraduate programs, and 23 percent are pursuing a master’s degree. They live in every county in Washington, except one. Over 47 percent are pursuing degrees in business, 25 percent in teacher education, 15 percent in information technology and 13 percent in health professions, primarily nursing.

Over 1400 of WGU Washington’s 2000 students come from the state’s community and technical colleges, attesting to the much needed transfer option envisioned by the partnership with the state’s 34 community and technical colleges.



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What Our Students Tell Us

WGU is accessible

On June 2007, I graduated with an Associate Degree in Business and was immediately accepted into the University of Washington Business School. Not too long after starting my college career at the UW, a series of life changing personal events sent me into a dark path for the next few years. I was eventually forced to leave the University and attempted to start a career without an education. During this period, I tried to finish school at three different institutions. I struggled to pay tuition and never seemed to find the opportunity to finish my degree. Eventually, I gave up and settled for the job I currently hold.

This March I found out that my wife was pregnant with a girl, and things only seemed to get harder for me. It was at this point that I decided to really make a change and pick myself up for the sake of my family.



I came across the WGU website one day and immediately recognized the opportunity that was being presented. Within a few days, I completed my application, applied for financial aid, and received my degree plan. My official evaluation stated that I had exactly 13 courses to graduate. I began to prepare myself for a tough six months. Three months ago, my wife gave birth to my daughter 10 weeks early. I had only completed 5 courses. I was completely destroyed by this heartbreaking experience. My daughter is in the still in the hospital as I write this email. I began to feel like things were going to repeat themselves as they did in the past.

It is Dec. 5 and I have completed 10 courses. I am studying at a pace to graduate by the end of this month! In addition, my daughter is scheduled to come home at the end of this term. I cannot tell you happy I am to have found WGU, and I am ready to start looking for a new job!

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help WGU Washington. I really hope more people hear about this school, because it really is an amazing opportunity. I have referred several people to WGU, and I know they are excited to change their lives.

John, Business Student

WGU improves lives

WGU is changing lives on a grand scale in Washington and I hope it continues for years to come. It changed mine—for the better!

Ann, Business Student

Anytime you need someone to vouch for WGU I will be willing to do so. This has been a life-changing experience for me.

Brian, Business Student



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WGU offers accelerated learning, increasing affordability

I started the accelerated RN-MSN Education program last August. I work at the Providence Regional Medical Center. I am weeks away from completing two degrees (BSN, MSN) in 6 months at a total cost to me of \$3,600, roughly. I certainly don't expect others to make this kind of progress as I have had a ton of free time recently and have devoted myself entirely to my studies. The best news -- with PRMC's tuition reimbursement I will only be out-of-pocket \$1600!

Todd, Nursing Student



WGU creates a sense of pride

I have over 25 years business experience and have often been asked where I got my MBA. Actually, I had yet to get it, so I used answer the "School of Life". Now, I'm getting my MBA degree at the non-profit online WGU Washington, which is precisely for someone like me who already has developed several competencies and can pull through courses at my (fast) pace. I'm looking forward to answering that question where my MBA came from -- "**WGU WA!**"

Miriam, Business Student

I am completing my education for my sons who made me realize how much I needed to finish what I started for their sakes, as well as my own. Thanks WGU for making this possible.

Alaina, Business Student

I can hardly wait for the WGU Washington billboard comes to Vancouver. I will be there. I love my university.

David, Information Technology Student

WGU provides personal support



My mentor Joe was so very supportive and he helped me think about all the angles of my success at WGU!! Thanks Joe. WGU has awesome mentors... they always help you through tough times!

Catherine, Education Student

A huge shout out to Becky Crawford, my WGU Mentor. I'm one month and nine CUs into my pursuit, and I'm determined to spend next New Year's Eve as a graduate. :)

Jen, Nursing Student

Carla Lee has been my rock and the best mentor one could ask for. 4 months until I have completed my teaching certification AND my Masters in Teaching! Woo-woo!

Christa, Education Student

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The Future

WGU's national enrollment just topped 30,000 students. The innovation and quality of WGU and its competency-based learning model is not just resulting in rapidly growing enrollment, the university is also earning recognition from higher education policy leaders across the country. The university has received financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates and Lumina Foundations and was very recently featured on NPR's "All Thing Considered," in *The Washington Monthly*, *The Economist* and *The New York Times*.

Last December, WGU President Robert Mendenhall was one of a select group of college presidents invited to the White House to participate with President Obama in a roundtable discussion about making college affordable.

As we look back on the key points of last year, we are mindful of the journey that lies ahead. With each passing year, WGU Washington will build even greater momentum, helping thousands of Washingtonians to reach what they thought was an unachievable dream of earning a degree.

Thanks to everyone who has helped to make this a great launch! WGU Washington's first commencement is April 21, 2012. Students are excited to have their families join their celebration, right here, in Washington.

