

Western Governors University <www.wgu.edu>



"The Western Governors University is a stake driven into the virtual educational ground by a group of governors determined to seed a host of new possibilities for workers to acquire and certify the acquisitions of the competencies demanded by industry in the western states." (Heifetz, R., Educom Review, September/October, 1997 p. 27)

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Clearly there are new expectations for higher education. We have all heard about the need for life long learning. Life long learning has become necessary to adapt to our ever changing roles in our Information Society. Working and learning are becoming the same thing. We have all heard about the need to offer student centered learning which is time and location independent. Certainly a major change in higher education has been the explosion in enrollment. Higher education is available to more people than ever before in history. A college degree is an expectation rather than an exception.

One factor in offering higher education to more people is the popularity of distance education. Distance education has expanded in step with the increase in enrollments. Today students enrolled in distance education programs can earn degrees from more than 300 colleges and universities. It is estimated that two-thirds of all institutions of higher education and more than five million students are involved in some form of distance learning. The market for distance education is global.

The Western Governors University started enrolling students in September 1998. The WGU web site currently lists nearly 300 courses being offered by 13 institutions of higher education. What makes WGU unique? Why is it different from other distance education programs?

The Western Governors University shares a common vision with all distance education programs, that is to expand access to higher education by utilizing appropriate educational technologies to deliver courses. WGU seeks to expand the educational marketplace to accommodate learners who find it difficult to enroll because of economic, geographical, physical or time constraints. There are also several unique aspects of WGU. WGU wants to minimize the costs of

duplication in higher education by serving as a broker for distance education programs. WGU is also trying to establish new mechanisms for the formal recognition of learning by promoting competency-based educational programs. As a vehicle for change in higher education, WGU seeks to shift the focus of education to the actual competence of students, away from seat time or counting the hours in the classroom. Finally, WGU recognizes that comprehensive library resources and services are critical elements in supporting distance education programs.

Steve Rollins <srollins@unm.edu>, **Nancy Dennis** <ndennis@unm.edu> and **Barbara Rosen** <brosen@unm.edu> from the University of New Mexico will speak about the unique aspects of WGU and about the management of the Central Library web site. The presentation will include a description of the Central Library's electronic resources and what traditional services are needed to support the WGU electronic library.