BOXES! WGU Goes to China

FEATURE NEWS
- WGU in Time Magazine
- Boxes! WGU Goes To China
- Mentor Spotlight: Missy Gordon
- Surviving the Credit Crisis
- The Alumni Speak
- Military Sacrifice Scholarship

HIGHLIGHTS
- Student Services Extends Hours
- Scholarship Video Contest
- Online Education Whitepaper
- The WGU Student Hall

HEALTH PROFESSIONS
- Nursing Ranks #1 in Growth
- Student Profile: Gerald Mattson
- Faculty Spotlight: Mary Anne Rea-Ramirez

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
- Student Profile: Dallan Jones
- Faculty Spotlight: Rudy Ortiz

TEACHERS
- Urban Scholarships for Teachers
- Student Profile: Joy Critchfield
- Faculty Spotlight: Sheryl Phillips

BUSINESS
- Trickle Down Vision
- Student Profile: Kelly Johnson
- Faculty Spotlight: Greg Gough

LIBERAL ARTS
- Critical Thinking
- Faculty Spotlight: Anthony Smith

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TEACHERS COLLEGE STUDENT JOY CRITCHFIELD TAKES WGU TO CHINA
Great news! WGU was featured in Time Magazine in an article titled, “Go Western, Young Man.” The article appeared in the November 14, 2008 edition of the weekly periodical. Be sure to read this wonderful article about WGU and share it with your friends and family. Also, show your school spirit and post it on your Facebook and MySpace pages.

BOXES! WGU Goes to China
By Joy Critchfield, Teachers College student

Boxes! Boxes! Boxes! I’m packing stuff inside the boxes while thinking outside the box!

Eighteen boxes of library books are, literally, taking a slow boat to China. One hundred twenty-one pounds of luggage has safely flown (in 23.5 hours) to Qingdao…and so have I! Fall is lovely here in a city sandwiched between the Yellow Sea and the Lao Shan Mountains. Yesterday, my 20 first graders and I used fall leaves as stencils to make our new reward chart. One year ago (November 2007), when I enrolled at WGU, China seemed…well, like the other side of the planet!

My first semester at WGU went well, and because WGU doesn’t limit the number of credits a student is able to complete in a semester, I was able to finish 24 credit units. The second semester began in May and was going along smoothly when reality hit “Yes! After 30 years of trying to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Education with teacher certification, this time – at WGU – I finally had all the tools to succeed!” Dreams were solidifying into reality.

Then came the second realization. With the credits accepted during transfer, I would complete Interdisciplinary Studies this semester. When my next term began in December, I would begin Foundations of Teaching and Effective Teaching Practices, including pre-clinical experiences in the classroom. Now that the time to observe in classrooms was approaching, my traditional 9-5 job wasn’t compatible with school visitation. No problem, I thought. I’m leaving soon to start my new teaching career, anyway. It’s time to take the plunge and find new employment! Once the light bulbs of realization began to turn on, a new world of ideas came into view:

Aha - WGU is asynchronous! I am not locked into working any one time of day. I can work evenings and visit schools during the day. Or, I can change time zones, and look for schools outside my present location. So, I put together a resume and gathered up my references. Then it hit me …

Aha - WGU is online! I can look for employment anywhere there is Internet access. And what better way to look for employment compatible with my online studies than to put my resume online, too! And that’s when it happened! Job offers arrived from schools, public and private, on several continents.

I’d been thinking locally and this was totally unexpected. But my current coursework is “Reasoning and Problem Solving in the Context of the Humanities”, so I decided to approach this newfound opportunity from a logical point of view.

And logically, all of these are possibilities at WGU … if you are willing to ignore the boxes. (Of course, you wouldn’t be at WGU if you didn’t already know how to look beyond traditional in your search for excellence!) And logically, there is no better time and place to study the world of education than with WGU, anywhere in the world.

So, I grabbed the opportunity, threw my belongings into boxes, and here I am, at Korean International School in Qingdao, China. What started as “How am I going to visit in the classroom and still work full time?” - led to an “Aha!” moment, which then led to another Inspired by WGU’s unique educational model, I’ve leapt outside the box and landed at a fantastic school, on the other side of the planet! I’m working full time while observing highly qualified teachers from all over the world, and I am studying education at the finest university in the world! From my perspective, I’ve found the best of both worlds.
Mentor Spotlight: Missy Gordon
Teachers College
Missy Gordon grew up in rural Utah, and today resides in Salt Lake City. She loves everything that involves her 7-year old Lhasa Apso (Brandy), yoga, and relaxing at home with a good book.

Missy has been with WGU for three and half years. She started as an enrollment counselor for WGU and a year and a half ago became a mentor for WGU’s Teachers College. Prior to joining WGU, she was working in Educational Research focusing specifically on children with disabilities.

When asked about working for Western Governors University, Missy tells us: “I am excited to work for an organization whose mission statement includes providing access to education to students who might not otherwise be able to pursue their education through traditional means. It never ceases to amaze me what my students are able to accomplish while having a full-time job, a family and other commitments. As a current WGU MBA student myself, they inspire me. I feel very fortunate to work with WGU students to help them achieve their goals, so that someday they will have a classroom of their own.”

Surviving the Current Credit Crisis
by Mike Fibonacci, College of Business student

Getting a college degree doesn’t have to be expensive or achieved solely through a mountain of credit card bills. With a wide variety of options available, today’s college student can avoid the trap of becoming burdened by overwhelming educational debt.

Mainstream media sometimes focuses on graduates who owe about as much as a mortgage or who have forked over six figures for a PhD and can’t find a job other than working at the local coffee shop. This biased portrayal of the ratio of rising college expenses to scarce job opportunities has created unnecessary panic among college students to the point where some are dropping out for fear of piling on long-term and worrisome debt. In actuality, the opportunity for getting an affordable degree – without plunging into colossal debt - is available for the first time to an unprecedented amount of people.

At one time, it was assumed that college degrees were reserved only for those who were “privileged” or “gifted.” The truth is that college-entry barriers are diminishing and any person who truly desires to earn a degree now has that opportunity. The current credit crisis is not going to stop students from getting the money needed to fulfill their educational goals. Recent laws passed by the federal government can actually help a greater number of students to pursue degrees, this being a logical and sensible course of action to take while waiting out this current crisis and its accompanying increase in hiring freezes.

In addition to passing H.R. 6889 (this extends the authority of the Secretary of Education to purchase guaranteed student loans for an additional year), Congress has increased the budget and availability of financial aid funds to low-and middle-income earning students. Federal financial aid offers Pell grants and low-interest loans that are completely backed by the government, which means that a credit score is not the deciding factor in borrowing the funds.

The tuition at WGU is relatively affordable at about $5,780 per year. For students who qualify for financial aid, the maximum amount of Pell grant that could be received per year is $4,731. This leaves a balance of $1,730, which may be covered completely through financial aid loans.

Financial aid won’t allow a student to borrow enough funds to live a lavish lifestyle while in school but whom are we kidding? Eating beans and giving up the mocha-lattes are all part of “paying the dues” in the real career world.

In the worst-case scenario, for those students who don’t qualify for financial aid or have the excellent credit rating required to borrow their tuition from a bank, a part-time job would realistically cover the full WGU tuition. Taking into account a worst-case scenario and earning the bare minimum wage of $6.55, then multiplying that by working a 20-hour week, one would slip by with enough cash to pay for WGU’s tuition. WGU also offers cash-paying students a “two payment” plan and accepts checks and major credit cards. There are also a number of private scholarships available to some students through WGU and www.finaid.org/scholarships.

To sum it all up, the good news is that with WGU’s affordable tuition, students don’t really have that much to worry about when it comes to going to school during the current credit crisis.

The views and opinions expressed in the above article do not necessarily reflect those of WGU.
How do you juggle all of the obstacles that stand in your way as you pursue your dream of a college degree? Is your situation anything like this husband and wife’s story?

You and your spouse both work. She is working full time, mostly afternoons and nights, and you work early in the morning. Your children are young; one is in Pre-K and the other is still in diapers. It is a daily struggle to find the time to accomplish everything that your family needs you to do, but you are highly motivated and up to the challenge.

How many tasks are left? Take a moment to imagine yourself submitting that final Taskstream task. It is one of the motivating factors that keeps you moving ahead. Just watching that number diminish reminds you that you are making progress. You know that as long as you keep pushing and working it will happen—you will graduate with that coveted WGU degree. Until then though, you just keep smiling and plugging away.

Before you know it, it is time to pick up your Pre-K child from school. Your spouse has your only car, so you will have to walk to school to pick them up. An hour later, you are back home working on tasks. The kids play happily while you are working and still have one ear listening for them. Soon, it’s time to make dinner. After everyone eats, the kids play as you clean up, then it’s bath time. After baths, they like to watch a favorite cartoon; just enough time for you to finish and submit a task. After the cartoon, it is quiet time. You sit on the couch with a precious child on either side, relaxing and enjoying the chance to just sit and hug the babies as they fall asleep.

Just about the time you are exhausted and ready to go to bed, your spouse arrives home after a long day at work and she too is exhausted. She is also a WGU student, and she barely has enough time to keep up with her studies while working full time. It’s not much fun to see each other for only a few minutes each day, but you know that when you graduate from WGU, hopefully, all of this will change for the better.

Does this scenario sound familiar? It is very familiar to me and my wife. This was our story from October 2004 - March 2006, while we were both WGU students. It wasn’t easy, but we both knew that as long as we kept at it, we could hope for a better life for our family. Now, we are both teachers with no more working nights, weekends, or holidays. Our hard work paid off and we stayed the course.

You can do it too.
Never give up.

Larry and Tiffany Manch

WGU Recognition for Military Sacrifice
Scholarships For Severely Injured Service Members and Their Spouses

Western Governors University is pleased to offer the WGU Recognition for Military Sacrifice Scholarship. This scholarship is designed to help severely injured service members, their spouses, and the spouses of service members killed in action (KIA) attend college online or earn their degree online to improve their education and their employability.

The WGU Recognition for Military Sacrifice Scholarship is valued up to a maximum of $2,000. The scholarship will be credited at the rate of $500 per six-month term, renewable up to four terms.

This new expansion of scholarships will allow applicants to earn a degree online in any discipline offered by WGU in its Colleges of Business, Education, Information Technology or Health Professions. These new scholarships are made available through funds from Western Governors University. Over the past 12 months, WGU has awarded over 170 scholarships to veterans, military, and military spouses.

The WGU Recognition for Military Sacrifice Scholarship is a competitive program so applications should be submitted as soon as possible. To view eligibility requirements and to learn more about the WGU Recognition for Military Sacrifice Scholarship, please visit www.wgu.edu/militarysacrifice

Refer a friend to WGU and we’ll give you both a little “Thank You.” First, we’ll waive your friend’s application fee (a $65 value). Second, once they enroll and complete Education Without Boundaries, we’ll send you a $50 gift certificate to Amazon.com to spend on everything you enjoy.

Share your WGU experience! We all know someone who talks about continuing their education. Take a moment and visit www.wgu.edu/refer to learn more about how you can give a gift to a friend – the gift of saving money on a quality education – and get a gift from us.
Do you need help late at night or during weekends?

Help is now available!

The Student Services Department now has extended hours. You can reach us by phone at 877-435-7948 ext. 3119 from 6 a.m.-midnight, Monday-Friday, and 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturday and Sunday MST. (Please remember to press the # sign before entering the extension number).

We understand that many students are busy juggling work, family, and their education. We also recognize that you may need help and support in the morning, evening or on weekends. Consequently, we are offering the extended hours as a pilot project to gauge your interest and need. Based on your usage of these extended hours, we will make a decision at the end of the trial period on whether to make these hours permanent.

The goal of the Student Services Department is to help you navigate WGU systems, processes, and procedures, resolve issues or concerns, and to provide you with answers for general questions. We will also continue outreach efforts to students on term break and connect with inactive students, or those who are considering a withdrawal. This will not replace the existing academic support you receive from your mentor or community facilitators. Our objective is to provide guidance and support to help you be successful in your program and graduate.

Again, you can reach us by phone toll free at 877-HELP-WGU (877-HELP-WGU) ext. 3119 or by e-mail at studentservices@wgu.edu.

Winning the Scholarship Video Contest

By Carissa Martos, Teachers College student

Carissa Martos, a student in the Teachers College, submitted a video that gave viewers an intimate look at the struggles her family has worked through, hoping to earn their vote. Defeating 36 entries and earning hundreds of votes, Carissa’s video, “If I told you this without pictures, you’d call me a liar”, won her a $7,500 scholarship and a $500 cash prize.

I paid my way through both the California community college and the UC system, earning small scholastic scholarships, but relying, like most students, on loans. I took a semester-long hiatus to give birth to my son, and worked odd tutoring and babysitting jobs and sub-let a room to my younger brother in 2007 to save up for WGU. I was slated to begin classes on January first.

However, as the video pointed out, my son needed a $70,000 skull surgery at seven weeks of age, so I changed my start date to March. My semester was going smoothly, despite two kids under three, due to my wonderful WGU advisor, Allison Pomeroy, and the parent-friendly way that WGU is setup. Then, as finals rolled around, we got a double-dose of bad news.

On July 14, we learned my son would need a second skull surgery and soon. Then, a week later, the landing on the staircase leading up the back of our apartment building collapsed, dropping my 2-year-old daughter and 22-year-old brother three stories to the ground. They were holding hands when the rotten wood gave way. My brother pulled my daughter to his chest and pushed away from the building, and crashed through a support beam before he hit the ground below. He broke his spine in five places, shattered a wrist and banged up his head. My daughter, who landed on his chest, came away unscathed.

I did meet my minimum requirements for classes despite all of the urgent medical matters, but then I took four months off in order to move, get through my son’s surgery, my abdominal surgery and my brother’s adventure. He came home from the hospital on October 4, 75 days after he fell. His medical bills have topped a million dollars. He’s now a paraplegic, with no control of his body below his armpits, and needs 24-hour care. As he now has no income, we’re relying on the county to get him care, and have been told they may not be able to send anyone until late March. This means that I am doing 24-hour care for him as well as caring for my kids. Since my brother and daughter both have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, this is not the easiest thing in the world to do, and so I had considered dropping out of WGU. There was just too much to do, and I could no longer afford the tuition.

This scholarship opportunity means I won’t be totally drained every semester; it encouraged me to call my advisor and sign up to start in December. I’m still going to achieve my dream of becoming a middle-school history teacher, and the only way I’ll be able to do school at this time is through WGU. I can do homework at doctor’s appointments, the county office, and while my children nap. Having won this scholarship, I am now determined to graduate before it runs out.

Thank you so much.
Online Education is Making the Grade with Employers
A New White Paper on Employer Acceptance of Online Degrees

Online degrees are no longer causing red flags on resumes for employers. In fact, many attributes of the online learner are what employers seek. They want lifelong learners, self-motivated workers, and critical thinkers—all of which apply to online learners.

In a new, free white paper titled “Online Degrees Make the Grade: Employer Acceptance Now Common,” researcher George Lorenzo, publisher of Educational Pathways, reveals that online education now receives wide support among businesses. “As corporations continue to see an increase in job candidates who have earned their degrees online,” writes Lorenzo, “the word has spread among executives, human resource professionals and hiring managers that online higher education graduates are focused employees with strong work ethics.”

Online learning has become widely accepted. Online courses and degrees are widely available through both traditional and online universities. Both students and employers are less apprehensive; hence, the quality of online education is seldom an issue. “If you ask employers about their sense of the quality of online education—is it of equal quality to traditional—the response you typically get is a growing adherence to it being of equal quality,” says Richard Garrett, a senior research analyst for Eduventures, an education research and consulting firm.

Flexibility is a key attribute of online education valued by employers and workers. According to Lorenzo, “Employers realize that the flexibility and convenience of online teaching and learning modalities are a great fit for busy adult learners seeking to improve their workforce skills and advance their careers.”

WGU students are featured in the accompanying case study, which was commissioned by Western Governors University.

Bob Roark was in his late 30s, married with two daughters, and was working as a technical solutions manager. “My position required a bachelor’s degree, but they hired me because of my capabilities and experience as long as I finished my degree,” he says. He looked at many institutions, both traditional and online, and chose WGU because of its flexibility, convenience, reasonable cost and accreditation. Completing his coursework for his bachelor’s gave him the confidence to continue his education to the next level and he began his MBA at WGU. While studying for his master’s, he interviewed for another manager position. “WGU came up in the interview and the interviewer told me at that point he would rather hire me as a director than a manager,” Roark says. Several weeks later he was offered the director position and received a 32 percent salary increase.

“Bob had a more educated view of business in general than his peers,” said Bob’s former boss. “The online curriculum I think helps to force individuals to become quick studies and to become well read.” According to employers, the main considerations are the quality of the education a particular job candidate receives and how prepared he or she is for real-world challenges.

To view the complete white paper free of charge, visit www.wgu.edu/makethegrade.

The WGU Student Hall
By Shawn Guy, Business College student

Sometimes, students would like a place to talk and vent about things where they are not monitored by school “authorities.” We all want to be heard and have a neutral place to speak about what is on our minds, even if it isn’t always loaded with sugary goodness. It’s also nice to have a place where students can chat about other things than school. Students might want to discuss who’s voting for what football team and why, or share a recipe or two. The solution WGU students have found is the WGU Student Hall. The WGU learning communities provided by the school are there to help us succeed. They also give us the ability to interact and bond with other students. While the WGU communities offer this socializing venue, it’s nice to have a student-monitored community where students can go and simply talk about what’s “bugging” them or about the new addition to their family without feeling like someone is keeping an eye on them. The WGU Student Hall offers forums and blogs where you can make your voice heard.

If you browse the WGU Student Hall, you will find topics ranging from education to simple fun. Students are cheering each other on as they pass assessments, discussing new web tools that can help them hone their writing skills, enlightening other people about their administrative experiences at WGU, and talking about the surprising amount of snowfall in their state. There is a good sense of support and camaraderie among the regular contributors. Take a few minutes to join and start looking around. Meet your fellow students and rev up some WGU spirit. As the introductory page indicates, “The world of distance education can be a lonely, cold one…” The WGU Student Hall and WGU Learning Communities will help you realize you’re not the only WGU student out there—truly, you’re not.

The link to the WGU Student Hall is http://valvetrades.net/. The site is not created, maintained nor endorsed by WGU. It is solely managed by students. There is not a lot of tolerance for negativity and when registering, users are required to agree to a code of conduct. See you in the forum!
A U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report ranks four health professions in their top ten list of occupations with the largest employment growth. The report, originally released in 2006, spans ten years, includes thirty occupations, and is updated annually. Measured criteria for the rankings include the total number of jobs in each occupation and a calculated percentage-based increase or decrease. Nursing currently holds the top rank with home health aides, personal care aides and nursing aides (also in the top ten).

Even though the U.S. healthcare industry is often in a state of political scrutiny and flux, one constant remains: the need for healthcare professionals continues to grow.

Current and prospective students should note that Western Governors University offers a number of degrees in health professions including Nursing, Health Informatics, Healthcare Management, and more. For more information, please visit http://www.wgu.edu.

Faculty Spotlight: Mary Anne Rea-Ramirez
Director, Nursing Programs

Where are you from? Originally from Richmond, Virginia but I have lived in California and Massachusetts.

What do you enjoy about WGU? It is exciting to be involved in the beginning of a university. Since I came, I have seen such growth in the number of students and programs. For many years, I conducted research on how people learn and now I have really been able to use what I learned. I guess my greatest love is program development and I have had plenty of opportunity at WGU.

How do you see WGU’s programs different from traditional universities? I think the programs are much more rigorous. Because we are competency-based, we expect a great deal from our students that I didn’t see in traditional education. Too often, my students at the university could do little and still pass. Many times they just expected to get an A even though you didn’t see competency. You also get to know your students much more at WGU than I ever did in the traditional university. Even though we may never meet face-to-face, all the contact we have allows us to become quite involved in each student as a person. Things also move very quickly at WGU. This is not something that often happens in traditional universities. We don’t allow ourselves to get hung up on committees that go on forever.

What are your leisure activities? Leisure??? What is that??? When I have time I like to garden, read, birdwatch and just walk at the beach. I love science so science museums are really fun for me especially with my grandchildren. It is great to see young people get excited about science.

More on Mary Anne: Mary Anne received her doctorate from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, specializing in math, science, and instructional technology education. She has been actively involved in college teaching, educational research, professional development, software development, grant management, and educational consulting for the past eight years. Prior to this, she taught elementary and middle school and holds life science, ESL, and multi-subject credentials from California. Her research in education involves in-depth study of cognition and learning, particularly in the area of model-based learning and teaching and has been supported for the last eight years through grants from the National Science Foundation. This has resulted in international presentations, journal publications, and books.

Dr. Ramirez comes with a varied background in medicine and education, having practiced nurse-midwifery for 15 years and taught at the elementary through college levels.
Student Profile: Dallan Jones
College of Information Technology
Dallan Jones was born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. His parents never believed in standard schooling, so at an early age he was enrolled in Montessori style education. For many years he pressed on, passing tests years ahead, gaining experience ahead of his time and expanding his ideas and opinions. At age 11, he was enrolled in Kimber Academy, a private high school. To graduate, a student must write a thesis and pass the GED diagnostic tests at a college freshman level. At age 14, Dallan completed his thesis on ancient history through modern times, spotlighting major events in between. After finishing the last of his 160 page thesis and passing his tests at college sophomore and junior levels, he graduated early.

Now 17 years old, he is wrapping up his third year of his bachelor's degree at Western Governors University. Dallan started WGU in November 2005. About his WGU experience, Dallan says, “I love the fact that I am able to have my full-time job and social life, as well as earn a degree. The program is challenging and I feel accomplished after every assessment. The fact that I can speed up the process as much as possible is also a large benefit.” After WGU, he says, “I plan to move on to my master’s degree in the medical field at the University of Utah. I plan to have my doctorate degree before 25 and my career plans are leaning towards the medical research field.”

With such an extensive effort devoted to an advanced education, Dallan makes time for leisure activities too. He tells us, “Living in Utah means plenty of outdoor activities, such as snowboarding, camping, and hiking. I regularly enjoy golf, a good chess game, and playing bass guitar with my band.”

Faculty Spotlight: Rudy Ortiz
College of Information Technology
Where are you from? I’m originally from Corpus Christi, Texas and lived there for about 45 years off and on. I also lived in Great Falls, Montana for 3 years while in the Air Force as a young man, and spent 4 years in Durango, Colorado where I lived before moving to Salt Lake City.

When did you join WGU? I joined WGU about 5 months ago, coming from the Small Business Development Center at Salt Lake Community College- Miller Campus.

What do you enjoy about WGU? I enjoy working with a lot of very bright people. I also enjoy mentoring students and helping them succeed in acquiring their degrees. As a first generation college graduate myself, I know how difficult it can be to balance family, money, and time to acquire one’s education, so I have a real appreciation for what students are going through.

How do you see WGU’s programs different from traditional universities? Great question. I’m a product of community colleges where I was able to strengthen the areas of weakness I had due to the weak K-12 educational environment I came from. This allowed me to go on to Texas A&M University to acquire both my bachelor and master degrees. Because of this experience, I have always felt community colleges were “where the rubber meets the road” for a lot of people. This was further demonstrated to me having taught at community colleges both in the Four Corners area and here in Salt Lake City.

Now that I’ve been exposed to the wonderful mission of WGU, I can clearly see where the University is helping those who have a lot of the same challenges, plus some additional ones, to accomplish their goal of acquiring an education. This ability exists because of the University’s ability to provide that education regardless of time and space and at a cost significantly lower than standard “bricks & mortar” educational systems. That’s the key!

What are your leisure activities? I don’t know much about leisure activities, but I have been very active in outdoor activities, such as sea kayaking, hunting, mountaineering, ice climbing, and backpacking into remote areas in the recent past. My life is a little more sedate at this time, but I still spend as much time as possible in the outdoors.

Favorite vacation spot: Whenever I can get away for just a few days, I go to Colorado which I consider home. Utah has a lot of beautiful areas to go to, as well. Alaska is spectacular! Outside of the U.S., my favorite areas are Northern Italy, Southern Spain and Switzerland. From the little I’ve seen of Switzerland, it is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Cozumel and Isla de las Mujeres in Mexico are great if you just want to relax and see beautiful water and beaches.

More on Rudy: Rudy Ortiz is currently the program manager for the College of Information Technology. Most recently, he was assistant director of the Salt Lake Region Small Business Development Center as well as director of the Small Business Assistance Center in Corpus Christi, Texas.

His academic background consists of an M.B.A. in International Business and a B.A. in Management, both from Texas A&M. He has taught various business courses at a number of community colleges.

He served as chair of the Texas Senate’s sub-committee on Trade and Technology in Corpus Christi and was appointed by the Corpus Christi City Council as a board member of the city’s Business Opportunity Committee. Mr. Ortiz provides business consulting services through his company, Strategic Business Solutions, in the areas of marketing, management, international business, intellectual property, operations, strategy, and business plan development.
Student Profile: Joy Critchfield

Teachers College

**About Joy:** Born in Oregon, Joy first attended college at Western Oregon State and met her Canadian husband while attending a conference. While he earned his doctorate, they lived in Indiana, Utah, Louisiana, and California—the states in which their four children were born. Outside of work and school (and raising kids), Joy is a master folk artist and loves creating handmade lace.

**On WGU:** "Why WGU?" First and foremost, I wanted an accredited and quality education ... in Education. When I learned about WGU's competency-based model, plus its flexible pace, time and place, I knew I'd discovered the ideal school for me. My first term began December 2007 with 24 units completed. This term - with a move to China - will be less. Next term, the sky (i.e. satellite connections) is the limit! My goal is dual certification in Special and Elementary Education, and a future position teaching in a virtual charter public school.

Once while playing "Pick Your Super Hero", my teens queried "Hey, Mom! If you could pick a super power, what would it be? And what would you call yourself?" In jest, I said "Call me 'Tude'. I want the super-human ability to adjust attitudes of insolent/indolent teens!" In retrospect, my own attitude is the biggest obstacle to my success at WGU. Unsure of my ability to complete a new task, I find myself procrastinating. Once I 'adjust my attitude' and get started, I'm surprised at how quickly I'm done and how much I learn in the process!

What's my favorite aspect of being a WGU student? Being assigned my very own Super Hero! WGU calls them mentors. Tracy Too is the real 'Tudeinator'! She cannot only adjust an attitude; she tirelessly encourages and supports from half way around the planet!

Faculty Spotlight: Sheryl Phillips

Teachers College

**Where are you from?** I am originally from Birmingham, Alabama and still have family living there. However, I've lived in Salt Lake City, Utah for most of my life. My Utah friends who are natives tell me it's time to say I'm from Utah. So, I guess I'm from Utah with strong Southern roots.

**When did you join WGU?** I joined WGU two and a half years ago and came from a traditional university background. WGU was a shock at first. So much was different here and I was unfamiliar with all the acronyms. It took me awhile to learn them, but now I can AAP, AAV and RCD with the best of them. Currently, I am the director of field experiences for the Teachers College.

**What do you enjoy about WGU?** WGU has many things to recommend it, but one of the things I like best is being able to work in a place that is on the cutting edge of education. We do things that few other universities are doing with competency-based education. Plus, I love the energy of the place. There is so much always happening that it's impossible to be bored. I also believe in our mission and am always impressed by, and enjoy working with, our students. So many of them are juggling work, families and school all at once.

**How do you see WGU's programs different from traditional universities?** WGU differs significantly from both brick and mortar and other online universities. Several of these differences are striking. I think one of the biggest differences is that students who do well at WGU must be engaged in the learning process. They have to take actions to understand their courses of study and to explore all of the learning resources available to them. They cannot simply “show up” and have information recited to them. To be successful, they have to actively seek information and strive to learn.

**What are your leisure activities?** I have a number of leisure activities that include gardening, skiing, reading, movies, and travel. My favorite activity of the moment is taking an online Spanish course. It's a little bit like WGU. I can go at my own speed, I have a number of online tasks that I have to complete that are graded, and I have a tutor. I e-mail my tutor frequently in Spanish and talk to her over the Internet once a week. I even have the time zone problems many of our students have since my tutor lives in Spain and it is eight hours later there, then here.

**More on Sheryl:** Sheryl graduated from the University of Utah with an M.A. in English and a Ph.D. in Education Administration. She has worked in higher education for most of her career and has had the opportunity to hold many varied and interesting positions. She has worked in enrollment, student records, student services, information technology, and now teacher education at WGU.

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**WGU Offers Scholarships for Urban Math and Science Educators**

Western Governors University is helping to place highly qualified teachers into classrooms, especially in the high needs areas of math and science, by offering the WGU Scholarship for Urban Mathematics and Science Educators. These scholarships are designed to help working adults attend college online to become mathematics or science teachers in America’s urban schools.

These scholarships are specifically aimed at individuals living in urban communities who wish to earn a license teaching math or science in their area schools. Also eligible for the scholarship, are licensed teachers living and teaching in urban areas who want to earn a master’s degree. Each scholarship is valued up to $3,000.

Multiple scholarships will be awarded. However, since this is a competitive program, scholarships will be awarded based on a candidate’s academic record, readiness for online study at WGU, and current competency. For more information on the WGU Scholarship for Urban Mathematics and Science Educators, please visit www.wgu.edu/urbaneducator
In a time where corporate greed and penny-pinching has run amok, some companies actually hire new employees with the expectation that they will walk into their brand new job ready to work miracles. Older employees or those re-entering the workforce may remember a distant time when a long-lost benefit known as “paid training” was offered to all new hires.

Nowadays, the bean-counter mentality has replaced training with a cost-saving procedure called “orientation.” Orientation usually lasts a few hours to a full 8-hour day, sometimes with a free sandwich for lunch, and is basically a guided tour of the company’s building and then a long sermon on the company’s rules and regulations. When finished, employees are given a stack of forms to sign acknowledging that they understand that once a rule is broken, the company can either discipline or fire them without being sued. The new employees are then led to the restrooms and given a plastic cup to provide a urine sample for the drug test. The day is over by sending everyone home until the drug-testing results have been received.

With passing drug-test results, the employee is finally able to start their new job. There is very little “training” provided other than a quick gloss-over of what to do while they are being thrown into the daily-task whirlpool. “Learn as you go” is the standard advice given by managers who, due to understaffing and unreasonable workloads, just don’t have the time to fully explain the standard operating procedures. The simple truth is that when there is no adequate training, mistakes are going to happen. Unfortunately, in today’s work world, finding a scapegoat to “blame” the blunders on and then terminating them on-the-spot as an “example” to others is a much more common practice than trying to figure out what exactly went wrong. When a genuine problem exists, fixing it could help other employees to avoid the same mistake in the future. But in a fast-paced job that relies on cutting corners in order to get instant results, nobody has the budget or time to figure out what exactly went wrong. It’s easier to fire the culprit being held accountable for the error and simply call in the next applicant from the pool of unemployed hopefuls and then expect them to work the hoped-for miracles.

What can WGU graduates do when finding a new – and hopefully long-lasting - corporate job? Look for those companies that have a strong “vision.” Vision is what helps to determine the company’s strategy and can be found on a company’s website in their “about” page or synopsized as a “mission statement.” A competent hiring manager at a company that is “on the ball” should be able to explain the company’s mission statement during the interview if they are asked. Asking about the company’s mission statement also demonstrates that one is interested in working for the company without sounding desperate for a paycheck.

When the executives at the top have a solid sense of vision, they are more willing to provide the resources – perhaps even training – that will help their employees develop their ideas into reality. Bill Gates of Microsoft fame and fortune didn’t build his fruitful empire by firing every employee that made a mistake. Executives that are committed to their vision help to create an atmosphere of high morale that can be demonstrated by overall employee productivity. Fortune Magazine ranked Google as the “Best Company to Work For” in 2008. Google has been one of the most profitable performing stocks in history and offers its employees stock options, which may have been part of the motivation for them to help fulfill the company’s mission. When executives have realistic goals and can also clearly visualize how those goals will be achieved, there is a greater likelihood that they will furnish their employees with all that is necessary to get the job done - all the way down to the bottom.

The views and opinions expressed in the above article do not necessarily reflect those of WGU.
Faculty Spotlight: Greg Gough
College of Business

Where are you from? I currently live in Salt Lake City, Utah, but grew up traveling with my family throughout the United States. My home base was Seattle, Washington. I attended 26 different schools before graduating from high school in Great Falls, Montana. I attended Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah and that is where I met my wife. We have four children and four grandchildren.

When did you join WGU? I joined WGU in April 1998. We were a very small group of employees back then. I was hired as the marketing communications manager and helped develop the branding of WGU. I could not pass up the opportunity to be part of this new initiative in Higher Education. I have held a variety of positions throughout the past 10 years, but mentoring students is by far my favorite.

What do you enjoy about WGU? I’m very proud to be a part of WGU’s faculty. There is no better feeling than seeing your students progress and eventually graduate. Our students have so much on their plate and WGU offers them the flexibility they need to be successful.

How do you see WGU’s programs different from traditional universities? WGU’s competency-based model is “top notch” in every way! I love the fact that students can move through their degree program more quickly if they come to us already competent in certain disciplines. I like the fact that students can work ahead and combine school with their busy lives. It’s the best system out there!

What are your leisure activities? I take private water color classes every week and enjoy painting scenes from places I have visited. I especially enjoy scenes from Italy. I also enjoy cooking and love Italian food. Some of my specialties are: Italian pizza, sourdough rustic Italian bread and gnocchi.

Favorite vacation spot: My favorite vacation spot outside the U.S. is the Liguria Riviera and the Cinque Terre in Italy. Our family also loves Newport Beach, California.

More on Greg: Greg started with Western Governors University prior to its “virtual” opening in 1998. He has served in a variety of positions at the university including marketing communications manager, director of enrollment, director of partnerships, director of customer satisfaction/student liaison, and now serves as a faculty mentor for business.

Prior to his career at WGU, Greg worked for the University of Phoenix, Utah Campus, as the director of enrollment and marketing for eight years. Before venturing into the education arena, Greg worked in the consumer products industry and worked for Prince Matchabelli, a fragrance and cosmetics company, and also worked for Revlon. Greg has a bachelor’s degree from Brigham Young University and a master’s degree in Organizational Management from the University of Phoenix.

Student Profile: Kelly Johnson
College of Business

Where are you from? I was born in Palo Alto, California and now reside in Morgan Hill, California.

Why did you pick WGU? WGU offered me the opportunity to complete my degree at a pace that worked with my work and home life. I really liked the idea that WGU was competency-based and had an online program that I could virtually work and study from anywhere. This was really important to me as I need the ability to study and work at a time convenient to me, since my schedule is often early mornings and late nights.

Your favorite aspect of being a WGU student: The flexibility I have in working with others in a community and having a mentor that is very responsive. It is really nice to have that connection and support when you are working through a program like this.

Obstacles as a student: Discipline. I travel globally as part of my job, so often I will need to study and complete course work on the road, in the plane, or in another country. It takes a lot of discipline and I have to really concentrate on staying focused and pushing through to meet my goal.

What do you think about the WGU competency-based model? It is great. It is the main reason I was attracted to the program. Given how busy my life is between working full time, being married and a mom, I saw the competency-based model as a way that could work for me. It was the opportunity I needed!

What are your plans after you finish your degree? I will continue working as I am now; however, the difference is that along with my 20 plus years of work experience, I will have the formal educational background that makes me even more competitive in the industry I am in, should I choose to do something else. I am also really looking forward to more time with my family and less time at the computer.

Outside of work and WGU, what do you like to do? I enjoy reading, wine tasting, going to the beach, and hanging out with my family.

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Share your WGU experience! We all know someone who talks about continuing their education. Take a moment and visit www.wgu.edu/refer to learn more about how you can give a gift to a friend—the gift of saving money on a quality education—and get a gift from us.
What Benefit Do We Get From Becoming Critical Thinkers?

By Richard Harmston, Liberal Arts College Mentor

Whatever you set out to do in life, progress toward your goals will be determined by the quality of your thinking. This is the underlying premise of WGU’s College Level Reasoning and Problem Solving (CLRPS) domain. Since WGU began in the late 1990s, CLRPS has been a Liberal Arts requirement for all undergraduate degree candidates across the university.

Critical thinking can help you in numerous ways. It can help you to recognize ineffective thinking, make better decisions and find more effective solutions to problems. It can also help you avoid being manipulated by others. However, to use thinking strategically, you need to be conscious of your thoughts. The problem is: much of our thinking takes place on an unconscious level. Learning to think critically will prompt you to become conscious of your thinking and its consequences. It will also introduce you to practical skills anyone can learn - analysis, evaluation, and rethinking.

Historically, our thinking has been focused on routine or habit. We learned how to do a job, and then used what we learned over and over. However, the world we now inhabit requires that we continually re-learn, and that we regularly rethink the way we live and work. In a world of uncertainty and change, our ability to engage in self-reflection will increasingly determine the quality of our lives.

Consider the frequent experience of many American workers. We can no longer anticipate the knowledge or skills we will need to succeed at a particular job, because we can no longer predict how our jobs will change. Also, the rate at which the workplace changes is only growing. The world is increasingly identified with rapid change, complexity and danger. Consider the possible consequences of global warming, energy consumption, diminishing water resources, the skyrocketing rise in living costs, a breakdown in healthcare delivery, the economic crisis, and political instability worldwide. The question of how to survive in this world confronts us all. The only way to cope may be to adopt sound thinking practices - and a good starting point is surely the study of critical thinking and its application.

Faculty Spotlight: Anthony Smith

Program Coordinator, Liberal Arts College

Where are you from? I was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas, went to college in Minnesota, and since then have lived in Texas and Massachusetts.


What do you enjoy about WGU? WGU is unlike any educational institution I have been involved with. Students have lots of different goals, but they are distinguished by the very fact that they are all goal-oriented. Everyone knows why they are here and what they want to get out of their educational experience. This makes it all the more exciting to see students succeed (something that I feel privileged to see happen on a daily basis).

How do you see WGU’s programs different from traditional universities? The focus on competency changes everything. At a traditional university, or a small college, there is a tendency for students to dwell on a few areas of professional or personal interest. Yet, traditional schools also aim to provide students with a broad education. This does not always work out. Students in a traditional setting are often able to skate through courses outside their areas of interest; yet they retain very little from these courses and a lot of valuable time is wasted. When the focus is on competency across the curriculum, however, everyone receives a broad education that reflects real work. In the Liberal Arts, for example, I often find students in one domain of study making connections to what they have learned in another domain. At WGU, knowledge is retained and re-applied because it was earned through the hard work of demonstrating competency.

More on Anthony: Anthony Smith is the program coordinator for Liberal Arts-Social Sciences and Reasoning and Problem Solving. He facilitates the Liberal Arts Ethics Learning Community. Anthony’s academic background is in history, which he has studied at Carleton College, Brandeis University, and Harvard University. He focuses his research on the history of social science, philosophy, and ethical thought, particularly in the United States. He is currently writing about some of the unusual ways that Sigmund Freud’s influence has been felt in American philosophy.