Western Governors University: Implementation of the vision

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This session will review factors that have impacted higher education and were considered by the governors of 17 states as they agreed to join the consortium to create Western Governors University. The institution was incorporated in Utah in January of 1997 and has since made significant progress toward implementation of the motivating vision of providing competency-based learning, using technology as a medium of delivery. Since its inception, WGU has been described as a metaphor for the future of higher education.

Implementation has included moving forward on such issues as developing competencies for both an Associate of Arts degree and an Associate of Applied Science degree as initial academic offerings, securing financial aid for students enrolled in a competency-based curriculum, seeking accreditation of an institution without an instructional faculty of its own, overcoming state licensure and registration barriers, and developing an appropriate fee structure for students and institutions providing academic content. Other issues include the imposing challenge of dealing with various constituencies in 16 states and 1 territory, creating a National Advisory Board of representatives from interested industries, and considering various non-profit/profit structures for creating the necessary financing options for this private, educational institution.

Following a computer slide show presentation, session participants will have the opportunity of discussing additional issues and questions of interest.

Factors Impacting Higher Education
- Increasing demand for access
- Increasing costs
- Disappearing education monopoly
  - Distance education by traditional providers
  - Non-traditional providers of content
- Focusing on competency-based education
Factors Impacting Higher Education
- expanding access to technology
  - technologically literate students
  - quality enhancement of instruction
  - flexibility for individual learning styles
  - availability of information resources
- moving from campus-centric to consumer-centric (competition or choice)
- changing role of faculty and staff

Brief Background

Goals
- expanding access through technology (wide variety; not just Internet)
- providing formal recognition of acquired skills and knowledge by focusing on competencies of students
- minimizing the costs of replication and duplication; not a replacement for traditional campus

Academic Services Provided
- full spectrum of WGU credentials based on competencies and learning outcomes
- brokered programs and courses based on credit hours for transfer to a traditional institution
- WGU will not grant credit, be a credit bank, or award a credit-based credential

Academic Content
- WGU will not employ teaching faculty and will not develop its own courseware
- all academic content, both for the WGU credential and the brokering function, will be furnished by other providers through a solicitation process
- providers must meet WGU quality standards

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Initial Academic Offerings
- WGU competency-based associate of arts degree (general education component)
- WGU competency-based associate of applied science degree for electronics industry
- Brokering of credit hour programs and courses for transfer

Traditional Faculty Functions
- Curriculum Design/Oversight
- Instructional Delivery
- Developmental Advising
- Assessment of Student Performance
- Academic Planning and Coordination

WGU Counterparts
- WGU Program Councils
- Education Providers
- WGU Advisor/Mentors
- WGU Assessment Council
- WGU Associate Academic Officers

Next Two Phases
- 21 pilot institutions; providing content and/or enrolling students; February 1998
- Test systems and integration; provide input on policies and procedures
- Solicit content from providers; early 1998
- Open WGU to broader audience of providers/students later in 1998

Response to Vision and Goals
- 16 states and 1 territory in consortium; others expressing interest
- Interest from multiple states and countries
- Business/industry support
- Reduced barriers
- A metaphor for what is coming

States
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Colorado
- Guam
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Others
- Nevada
- New Mexico
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Texas
- Utah
- Washington
- Wyoming

International Interest
- Collaborative agreements with institutions in:
  - Great Britain
  - Japan
  - British Columbia
  - Mexico
- Discussions with Korea, Russia, China, Malaysia
Accreditation/ Federal Financial Aid
- four associations for the participating states
- joint accreditation/inter-regional accrediting committee
- common standards and requirements for eligibility, candidacy, and accreditation
- DoEd willing to work with WGU through experimental site status for financial aid

Market for Academic Content
- English 101 from many qualified providers
- WGU will not choose a best provider; rather will list all English 101 courses
- WGU will provide information to student: tuition, technology, success rate, schedule
- student makes informed choice; resulting in market for academic content

The Business Enterprise
- incorporated with administrative offices in Utah; academic offices in Colorado
- board of trustees created; 4 governors, 3 higher education officials, and 7 business leaders
- staff appointments as appropriate; transitioning from contractors to staff

Outsourced WGU Functions
- instructional delivery
- assessment
- bookstore
- information resources
- administrative (“backroom”) functions

Initial Revenue Sources
- state amounts received/committed $1,700,000
- foundation grants: $750,000
- corporate donations (cash and in-kind): $3,600,000
- $3 million curriculum development grant from Colorado
On-Going Revenue Sources

- tuition—determined by providing entity
- fees from students
- fees from providers
- fees and revenues from local center
- fees from other business services

Partners

- IBM*
- Sun Microsystems*
- Micron
- AT&T*
- International Thomson Publishing*
- Microsoft*
- 3COM*
- Apple Computer*
- US West
- Matrixx Marketing
- KPMG*
- Novell*
- Sloan Foundation*

*members National Advisory Board

Industry/Business Interest

- believe in vision of WGU
- desire competency-based education for in-house education and training
- anticipate revenue opportunity with WGU

Issues and Considerations

- tuition (resident/non-resident)
- financial aid (state/federal)
- state licensing/registration barriers
- state subsidy for WGU students
- strategic use of WGU services

Issues and Considerations

- communicating to various constituencies
- WGU corporate structure for various services
- business planning and strategy (central and local)
- business partnerships (nature and form)

For additional information:
www.westgov.org/smart/vu/vu.html
Thank You!