

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER
READINESS COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2022

Submitted By Western Governors University Chancellor Dr. K.L. Allen

Thank you, Chairwoman Lanese, Vice-Chair Young, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am Dr. K.L. Allen, and I serve as Chancellor of Western Governors University (WGU) Ohio. My colleagues and I are honored to be a part of Ohio's work to successfully compete for business investment and jobs by increasing the number of its citizens holding trusted postsecondary education credentials and relevant skills for employment in this knowledge economy.

Our mission statement at WGU is to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity. With that being said, one of the most critical – and rapidly growing – issues facing Ohio's business community is the lack of skilled talent to fill open positions. In an economy where education beyond a high school diploma is increasingly required to land a good-paying job, we understand the role we at WGU Ohio play in helping close the skills gap.

As a not-for-profit, accredited, online, competency-based university, WGU Ohio's programs help address the state's workforce needs in nursing, business, K-12 education, and information technology.

WGU Ohio is the result of language included in HB 49 of the 132nd General Assembly which allowed the Ohio Chancellor of Higher Education to recognize or endorse a regionally accredited, private, not for profit institution of higher education that was created by the governors of several states as an eligible institution of higher education to provide competency-based education in the state.

Over nearly four years since our establishment as WGU Ohio, our enrollment here has grown to 4,400 students, and overall, since our parent university's founding in 1997, more than 7,300 Ohioans have graduated from Western Governors University. Last fiscal year, WGU Ohio provided close to \$1million in scholarships to recipients.

Currently, 1,215 Ohioans are enrolled in WGU's Business College, 931 in our Health Professions College, 953 in our Information Technology College, and 1,294 in our Teachers College – all in-demand jobs in our state. A county-by-county breakdown of WGU and our students is provided at the end of this written testimony.

For WGU Ohio, more than 70 percent of our students work full-time and more than two-thirds come from underserved populations. Nearly half of our Ohio students are first-generation college students and our average age is 35. Over 70% of our students are women and 13% are students of color.

From its beginning, WGU has followed a competency-based model of higher education, one that allows students to earn credit toward a college degree by demonstrating their mastery of a subject, rather than counting how many hours they've been sitting in a classroom.

Students complete their programs at WGU by staying on schedules that fit their lives, accommodating work and family obligations. They can advance toward their accredited bachelor's or master's degree as soon as they demonstrate that they have mastered the subject matter, not by waiting to accumulate "seat time" to fit a one-size-fits-all requirement. To help our students succeed, WGU faculty members work with students one-on-one as mentors, offering guidance, support, and individualized instruction.

WGU's tuition is not based on the number of credits students pursue. Instead, it is a flat rate for an entire term (6 months), and students have the chance to take as many courses as they'd like during that time. This approach gives students the ability to move through courses as they master them and helps keep costs down.

The average time it takes to obtain a bachelor's degree from WGU is 23 months, at a cost of about \$15,000. WGU graduates, on average, increase their incomes by \$12,500 within two years of graduation.

WGU collaborates with employers in the development of our curriculum, ensuring that what our students learn is relevant for today's most in-demand jobs. Degree requirements at WGU are developed in collaboration with employers so that students are being taught the needed skills for in-demand jobs. In addition, required competencies for each degree program are defined in collaboration with external program councils, which are a representation of industry and academia. This guidance helps WGU ensure that our students are learning the competencies they will need to be successful in their fields.

Additionally, WGU collaborates with our fellow higher education institutions in ways that put students' needs first. The university has agreements with great partners such as Ohio's two-year community colleges to make sure that the credits students earn at those institutions can transfer seamlessly to our programs ensuring that students don't miss a beat as they pursue their bachelor's or master's degrees. It might seem counter-intuitive for institutions that are often regarded as competitors to work together, but WGU Ohio prefers the cooperative approach, and our students benefit as a result.

We are pleased that a growing number of leading Ohio employers – including Huntington Bank, Kroger, Cleveland Clinic, Kettering, Premier, and Ohio Health – are

turning to WGU Ohio to help them create new opportunities for their employees. These partnerships help employees become students, enabling them to advance their careers.

The strengths of WGU's model have been confirmed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the customary approach to higher education. As we saw over the past two years, Ohioans earned degrees from colleges and universities by accessing their learning through online education. While schools with experience only in traditional, classroom-based instruction had to adjust to this model on the fly, WGU didn't lose a step, having been an online-only university learning from the start. Our enrollment surged 13 percent. Just as iTunes, Amazon, and PayPal used technology to fundamentally transform their industries, WGU has done the same with our online, competency-based learning platform.

I appreciate the opportunity today to share a little bit about WGU Ohio and our commitment to quality, affordability, and results.