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Right-Sizing the Bachelor's Degree: WGU Wins Three National Awards in Education, Innovation, and Research

The United States Distance Learning Association's (USDLA) 2024 Awards Recognize University's Commitment to Transforming Learning Landscape

SALT LAKE CITY, UT (APRIL 16, 2024) – Western Governors University (WGU) announced today the university has won three United States Distance Learning Association's (USDLA) Awards, showcasing the university's commitment to driving innovation, research, and leadership outcomes that reimagine the higher education system. The USDLA Distance Learning Awards were created to acknowledge major accomplishments in distance learning and to highlight instructors, programs, and professionals who have achieved and demonstrated extraordinary achievements through the use of online, videoconferencing, and satellite/video delivery technologies globally.

WGU won in the following categories:

- **Trendsetter in Distance Learning (Silver):** Right-Sizing the Bachelor's Degree, Sub-120 Credit Hour Degree Programs
- **Outstanding Research (Gold):** WGU Labs, [CIN EdTech Student Survey](#)
- **Outstanding Leadership (Silver):** Michelle Jungbauer, [Environmental Barriers Program](#)

“WGU believes deeply in creating personalized pathways to success that can be traveled by any individual,” said WGU Chief Academic Officer and Provost Courtney Hills McBeth. “The work being done to right-size the bachelor's degree and by Michelle's Environmental Barriers Program embody this core organizational value. We also congratulate WGU Labs' work in the CIN EdTech Student Survey. This research will continue to inform instructional strategy for years to come, both within our university and across the distance education landscape.”

For WGU's Right-Sizing the Bachelor's Degree Initiative, the university collaborated with accreditors to reduce required coursework and renew focus on a competency-based approach where students can move on as soon as they are able to demonstrate competency in a given subject. The result is an academic program that in many cases requires less than 120 credit hours to train students to industry standard.

The EdTech Student Survey – conducted by The College Innovation Network at WGU Labs and the program that won Gold in the Outstanding Research category – has been tracking the student experience in an increasingly tech-enabled higher education system for the last three years. The resulting data, from over 3,000 students, revealed more technology in higher

education can be valuable for expanding access and engagement to learners from underserved groups – particularly first-generation college students.

“The insights gleaned directly from students in this survey are key to improving the student experience in a tech-driven educational future,” said Betheny Gross, Director of Research at WGU Labs. “To be recognized for our work is an honor, and we hope that our work will inspire new solutions that improve the learning experience whether students are learning entirely online or using tech in classrooms.”

Michelle Jungbauer – the 2024 Distance Learning Awards Silver Award winner in Outstanding Leadership and the creative mind behind WGU’s now award-winning Environmental Barriers Program – designed the program to collaborate across the WGU student support network, minimizing students’ environmental academic barriers due to tornadoes, wildfires, hurricanes, floods, pandemics, and other major public safety events. Jungbauer is a Senior Manager of Student Wellbeing, under the university’s Specialized Student Services department.

WGU will accept the awards at this year’s USDLA National Conference. For more information about WGU’s degree programs, Michelle Jungbauer, or the Environmental Barriers program, contact us (publicrelations@wgu.edu) or visit www.wgu.edu. To learn more about the CIN EdTech Student Survey, contact Labs at info@wgulabs.org or visit www.wgulabs.org.

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About Western Governors University (WGU): A nonprofit, online university established in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors with a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable higher education, WGU now serves more than 170,000 students nationwide and has awarded more than 360,000 degrees to nearly 320,000 graduates in all 50 states. Driving innovation as the nation’s leading competency-based university, WGU has been recognized by the White House, state leaders, employers, and students as a model that works in postsecondary education. In less than 30 years, the university has become a leading influence in changing the lives of individuals and families, and preparing the workforce needed in today’s rapidly evolving economy. WGU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, has been named one of Fast Company’s Most Innovative Companies, and has been featured on NPR, NBC Nightly News and CNN and in The New York Times. Learn more at wgu.edu and wgu.edu/impact.