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THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION'S COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: INNOVATIVE EDUCATION DELIVERY MODELS

TESTIMONIAL
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Members of the Commission, distinguished guest and fellow students, I bid you good afternoon. My name is Jerry Davis and I am a 37 year old student from Sterling, Virginia. I hold degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate level and I am currently working on a second graduate degree. I am honored that I have been given this opportunity to exchange dialog with you in regard to the many innovations in education that I have witness and experienced as a life long student, father of two college bound students, spouse and a full time member of our country's workforce.

For any high school student exercising the option to attend an institution of higher education is a daunting task that is over shadowed only by the voluminous choices in institutions and the stress of acceptance and accessibility, which is forever punctuated with the impediment of cost containment. I am an adult who has never truly left the higher educational system and as such, those same stressors that weight intensely on the minds of the college bound high school student weight even heavier on the adult student. Adult students must also contend with conflicting and competing priorities and professional and personal responsibilities, all while making an attempt to acquire the fabled balance between work and life. Finding an institution to attend that is amenable to a student of this sort is an arduous undertaking.

My reason for choosing to be a life long learner is rather simple; I enjoy the benefits derived of possessing knowledge. But the continued acquisition of knowledge through a structure program of study for the adult learner must be attained through a program that is pliable enough to conform to the lowest common denominator and fully satisfy navigating what I express as the triple constraints of true educational innovation. This program must; be accessible on demand, provide measurable and tangible value and be economically feasible.

Western Governors University (WGU) is one such institution that answered the call of the triple constraint. WGU's innovative approach to delivering a quality degree program through its competency-based format is long over due. The extreme pliability of WGU's program provides options that are not normally seen in degree granting virtual learning environments and is not available in the traditional learning environment.

WGU's program was my logical choice because I was able to structure my studies around my lifetime requirements and commitments instead of the reverse. The competency-based format fully promotes the student's control and management of time. Courses were available to me, as I needed them, on demand. This removed the regulation of having to be somewhere at some predetermined time when time, as it seems, is rarer than money.

At WGU the student drives success. WGU allows for as much or as *little* interaction with the appointed mentor or with other students as the *student* needs or desires, implicating unfettered accessibility and traversing yet another constraint. The method of proctored testing is not new; however, the implementation of proctored testing

in the competency-based format is powerful. Test results are provided near real time and a passing score reinforces to the student that the course material had been adequately assimilated. This is immediate proclamation of value add, measurable and tangible learning.

The tuition structure that WGU offers is savvy and smart. The tuition is built around spans of time vice per credit fees. This structure combined with the competency-based format is highly synergistic and incentive based, meaning that if I worked quickly in demonstrating the required course competencies, then the quicker I could complete the program while expending a minimal amount funds. I completed my course of study in business with a concentration in IT security in just around five months. WGU is the only higher learning institution that I have attended, and I have attended many, where I actually have had funds returned.

As the Chief Information Security Officer for the US Department of Education, I am required by law to possess the requisite experience and education needed to carry out the duties of the position. There is an overarching and critical need to acquire professionals who are well trained and who own the relevant education and WGU substantiated my employment and provided me with some additional tools and skills that I am able to leverage in my current role.

To this end I will close my remarks with a few recommendations for the Commission:

- Drive home the ideology that an innovative education delivery model is not based solely on technological attributes, but rather on innovations that address

and enable accessibility, promote measurable and tangible results and aggressively support cost containment.

- Continue to evaluate virtual competency based post secondary education programs in an effort to expand their ranks
- Continue to evaluate solutions to ensure that virtual learning institutions remain cost effective and accessible to students of the lowest common denominator
- Develop solutions and programs to market virtual learning institutions and their programs
- Establish a student forum consisting of current or prior virtual learning institutions with the intent of collecting suggestions for the improvement and enhancement of the virtual learning environment

This concludes my remarks and I again would like to thank the Commission for its undivided attention and for this rare and valuable opportunity.