

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, March 09, 2023

TIME: 2:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Dunn (Carlson), Nichols, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Herndon

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the Committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Lent** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 2:00 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Den Hartog** moved to approve the Minutes of January 26, 2023. **Senator Lenney** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Den Hartog** moved to approve the Minutes of February 13, 2023. **Senator Semmelroth** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Ward-Engelking** moved to approve the Minutes of February 16, 2023. **Senator Lenney** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: **Who We Are - Western Governors University (WGU) - Idaho.** **Lyn Harry White**, Director, Government Relations, said WGU was founded in 1997 when 19 governors, of which Idaho Governor Phil Batt was one, committed at least \$100,000 from each state to establish the not-for-profit university. The vision for WGU was to have it solidify the higher education-to-workforce pipeline by making education accessible and affordable for the working adult, with the transition to a 100 percent online platform and a tuition rate that was 60 percent less than the national average.

WGU had four colleges, which included Health Professions, K-12 Teacher Education, Information Technology, and Business to prepare students for the most in-demand professions in the workforce, and offered competency placement, so students with prior experience and knowledge could test into classes that matched their proficiency. After 26 years, WGU has expanded to all 50 states. To accommodate the schedules of working adults, WGU did not establish a semester or quarter system, and instead opted for a continuous offering of courses. Average completion of an otherwise conventional four-year degree at WGU was two-and-a-half years, and six-to-eight months for Master's degrees, depending on how fast students were able to advance through their curriculum. All students were assigned mentors that had received Ph.D.'s in that subject matter to serve as liaisons between students and faculty or the administration, and also to advise on matters such as course selection. **Ms. White** cited a Gallup poll figure that WGU graduates, on average, earned \$20,300 after graduation, while the national average was \$8,200 (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION: **Senator Semmelroth** asked what was the definition of an underserved graduate. **Ms. White** said underserved graduates were those from rural, low-income, or minority demographic groups.

Vice Chairman Toews asked for clarity on the post-graduation pay comparison between WGU graduates and others. **Ms. White** said that was in reference to increases in pay at their jobs, not total compensation.

Chairman Lent asked what percentage of students that enrolled completed their degree. **Ms. White** said that rate was about 63 percent, which was nearly double the national average. She credited WGU's flexible curriculum and the affordability for the higher-than-average degree completion rates.

Senator Dunn (Carlson,) asked if there was a timeframe or limitation on credits that were eligible for transfer from a student's past higher education. **Ms. White** said WGU had no limitation. She said WGU's admission's staff worked very hard with applicants and students, many of whom went to school many years prior, to find any and all transferable credits because they paid for and earned them, and WGU's wish was to respect those past commitments.

Senator Nichols asked if WGU had any internal racial quotas for admissions. Ms. White said WGU had none.

S 1153 **Schools - Adds to existing law to establish provisions regarding teacher spending accounts.** **S 1153** was removed from the agenda due to Senator Herndon's absence.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 2:25 p.m.

Senator Lent
Chair

Linette Grantham
Secretary

Kieran Sprague
Assistant Secretary