



WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

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Robert W. Mendenhall, Ph.D.

President

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman, House Higher Education and Workforce Training Subcommittee
1230 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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Dear Chairwoman Foxx,

On behalf of the students and faculty of Western Governors University (WGU), I am writing to thank you for sponsoring H.R. 2117, "Protecting Academic Freedom in Higher Education" which would repeal regulations put forward by the Department of Education regarding state authorization and credit hour.

WGU supports efforts aimed at curbing abuse and bringing greater integrity to the federal student aid programs. However, given the almost total lack of evidence of a problem in either the credit hour or state authorization context, we see no basis for these two regulations that so fundamentally alter the relationships between the federal government, states, accreditors and institutions of higher learning. In practice, these regulations have proved expensive and lead to limiting student access to quality higher education opportunities.

WGU was established by the Western Governors Association in 1997 to address higher education needs in the states. The university's online, competency-based learning model is designed to provide an affordable, flexible option for earning an accredited, respected college degree. WGU has a unique model of competency-based learning that measures the student by learning and not time. This means that a person graduates when they have demonstrated all of the competencies required by their degree.

The state authorization regulation put forward by the Department of Education reflects a significant intrusion into prerogatives properly reserved to the states. It has already led to WGU incurring significant costs that will ultimately have to be carried by students. This at a time when we as an institution and hopefully as a nation are doing everything we can to try and keep tuition costs low.

Innovative models like WGU allow students to pursue a degree when they may not otherwise have been able to do so because of family and work responsibilities or location and financial constraints. Although WGU is not directly affected by the credit hour definition due to statute, it is clear that the credit hour definition will stifle innovation. At a time when we need new and more productive models of higher learning, setting into stone a definition of credit hour which locks into place current productivity rates will simply takes us backwards.

For WGU to continue to succeed, it will be important that the regulatory environment fosters innovation and allows for the delivery of low-cost quality online education to students in all states. H.R. 2117 will correct the problems with the regulations on state authorization and the credit hour.

Thank you for your leadership in sponsoring H.R. 2117.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert W. Mendenhall
President