



**Testimony of Patrick Baker, Western Governors University  
Kansas Senate Committee on Commerce**

March 9, 2023

**Introduction**

Chair Erickson and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Patrick Baker and I have the pleasure of serving as Government Relations Director for Western Governors University (WGU).

I'm pleased to write in support of HB 2292.

As I visit with legislators across the country, it is clear that workforce is foremost in their mind. Securing pathways to opportunity for adult and non-traditional learners was on the minds of 19 governors when they created WGU 25 years ago. These governors wanted to harness the power of a new technology – the internet – to establish a bold new model of higher education. They created WGU to be nonprofit, 100% online, affordable, and with an exclusively competency-based learning model. In short, WGU was created by states, for states. As some of you may be unfamiliar with WGU, I've included an overview of our university at the end of this statement.

**Support for HB 2292**

The bill before you today would reduce workforce barriers and create pathways to opportunity for Kansans - particularly working adult learners. WGU is especially excited about the registered apprenticeship grant program for teachers contained in the bill.

In November 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor approved the "K-12 teacher" occupation as eligible for a registered apprenticeship. This means any state in the country can launch their own teacher apprenticeship program since the occupation is now federally recognized.

HB 2292 would establish the Kansas Educator Registered Apprenticeship Grant Program. This program would allow school districts to establish a registered apprenticeship program for teachers and, in partnership with higher education providers, to apply for grant funds to support non-licensed staff in their district to get a degree and teacher license. The grant funds would provide up to \$2,750 per year for tuition as well as support continued payment of wages during their student teaching experience. Importantly, the program design would also ensure grant recipients can pursue their teaching degree and license while not leaving their existing school jobs.

According to the Kansas Department of Education, there are more than 1,600 vacant teaching positions in the state. One of the most effective strategies that states have embarked on to address teacher shortages, particularly in rural communities, is to upskill non-licensed staff who are already working in

the district and living in the community. Registered apprenticeship programs have been a tool adopted by several of these states. The state of Iowa, for instance, last year [committed \\$46 million dollars](#) to establish a para and teacher apprenticeship program where they expect to train 1,000 new paraeducators and teachers using a registered apprenticeship model.

Ensuring appropriate support and access for paraeducators who want to move to the front of the classroom needs to be a high priority. The Kansas Educator Registered Apprenticeship Program can be an especially powerful tool in Kansas's efforts to close the teaching gap. WGU is particularly well-suited to support state efforts to address the gaps in teaching. Nearly 200 Kansans are currently in our teachers college – 70% of whom are adults, and, even more importantly, the majority of them are living in rural communities.

WGU is happy to strongly support HB 2292. The bill is consistent with best practices adopted by several states and will unlock pathways to opportunity for hundreds of Kansas adults and be a critical tool in the state's workforce toolbox.

WGU is ready, willing, and able to be a part of much-needed solutions in Kansas to remove barriers to opportunity and to improve the benefits of education so our neighbors and constituents attain better jobs and a higher quality of life. Thank you for your time and consideration.

### **Overview of Western Governors University (WGU)**

Over 25 years ago, a bipartisan group of 19 governors of western states and territories founded WGU as a solution to meet a growing need for a college-educated workforce – a need that was not being fully met by traditional higher education. From the beginning, WGU was designed to be different. Our founding governors knew that the college student of the 21st century would be very different from students in the past. For millions of working adults, the dream of pursuing a college education could only become a reality once the boundaries of time and place could be removed.

With the emergence of a new technology – the internet – Americans were able to get online and the possibility of an “anywhere, anytime” education became a reality. These governors founded WGU to be nonprofit, affordable, 100% online, and with a focus on working adult learners. As such, WGU utilizes an exclusively competency-based learning model. Simply put, this model measures skills and learning rather than time spent in the classroom. We hold learning constant, and time variable allowing students a more flexible and faster path to degree.

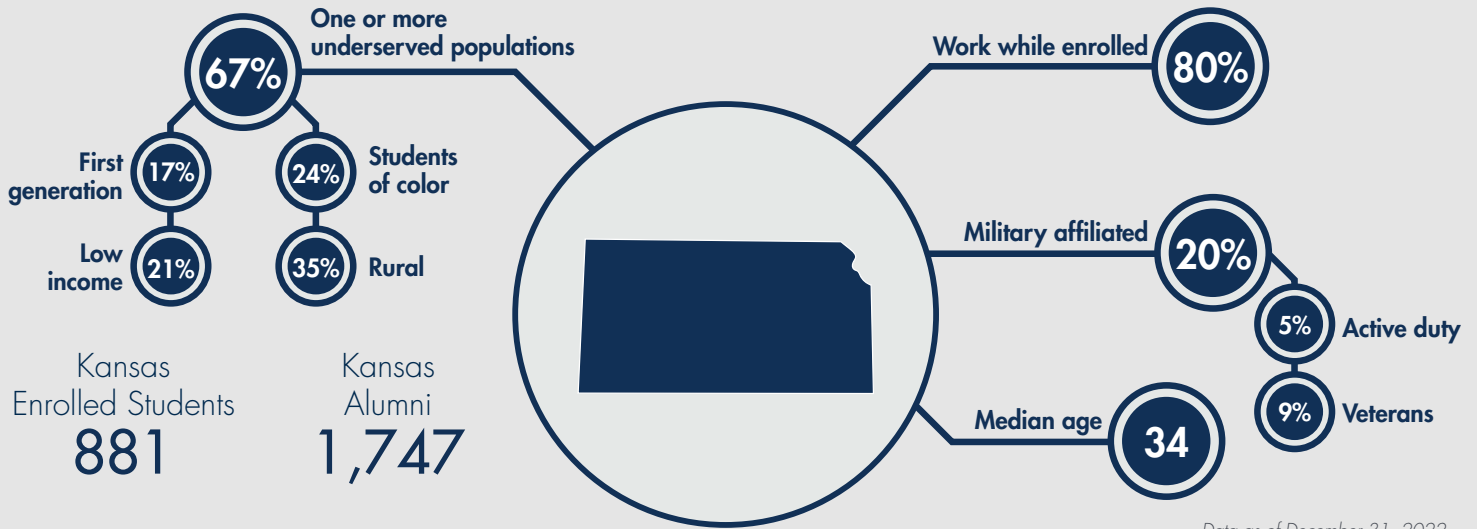
Today, WGU offers programs at the bachelor's and master's degree levels in four high-need areas of workforce development: Teaching, Health & Nursing, IT, and Business. WGU is the largest nonprofit university in the country with more than 140,000 full-time students across all 50 states, including nearly 900 right here in Kansas.

WGU students in Kansas are unique and distinguish us from our peer in-state institutions – 87% of them are over the age of 25, 80% work while enrolled, and 67% represent one or more underserved populations. Most of our students have tried traditional brick & mortar options before coming to WGU. In short, WGU was created by states, for states to complement – not compete with – state systems of higher education.

WGU students will on average take a little over two years to get their bachelor's degree at a cost of just over \$15,000. Within four years of graduating, wages of an average alumni increase by \$26,000 annually. With more than 300,000 graduates – more than 1,700 of whom reside in Kansas – WGU alumni have earned a cumulative \$261 billion more than they would have without their degrees. That is real money driving family success and economic impact. I've attached a one-pager to this testimony that provides further insight on WGU as well as our student body in Kansas.



# WGU and Kansas



Data as of December 31, 2022

## Kansas and WGU at a Glance

**381,941**

Kansas residents with some college but no credential as of July 31, 2020<sup>1</sup>

**\$7,452**

Average annual cost in 2021 for WGU undergraduate programs, compared to a national average of \$12,112<sup>2</sup>

**\$143,033**

Amount of WGU scholarship funding awarded to Kansas students in 2021

<sup>1</sup>The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, <sup>2</sup>The Institute for College Access & Success

## Top Employers of WGU Graduates in Kansas

University of Kansas Health System, Blue Valley School District, Olathe Public Schools, Irwin Army Community Hospital, United States Air Force, Wichita Public Schools, AMC Theatres, Amazon, Amberwell Health

## WGU Colleges Enrollment



**196**

Students

enrolled in the Leavitt School of Health



**179**

Students

enrolled in the School of Education



**256**

Students

enrolled in the College of Information Technology



**250**

Students

enrolled in the College of Business

## Education Benefitting Adult Learners

WGU was founded by governors to help solve unmet workforce needs in high-demand career fields like nursing, teaching, and IT. Today, WGU is a key solution to states' efforts to meet all learners where they are and provide flexible, competency-based education programs that meet the needs of employers while contributing to stronger communities and a healthier economy.

139,116

Total Enrolled Students

305,044

Total Alumni

Data as of December 31, 2022

## A Better Return on Student Investment

\$17,388

Average total cost to earn a bachelor's degree at WGU

+\$18,200

Within two years of graduation

+\$25,900

Within four years of graduation

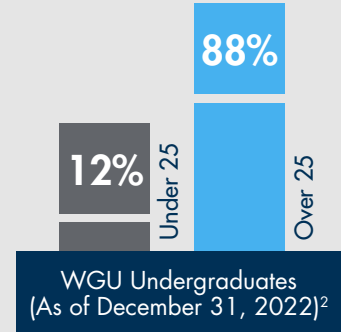
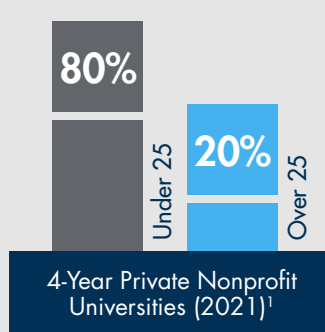
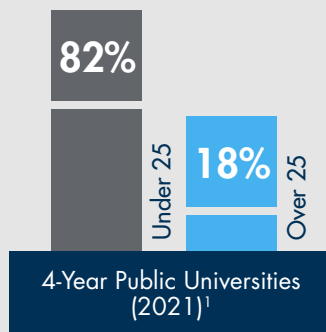
Average income increase for WGU graduates

Source: 2021 Harris Poll

\$826,000

Average increase in lifetime earnings for individuals who earn a bachelor's degree at WGU

## Age Distribution of Undergraduates In the U.S.



<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component final data (2003 - 2019) and provisional data (2021)., <sup>2</sup>WGU demographic data.

## Partner with Us

WGU works with policymakers, industry leaders, and community organizations to make higher education accessible, affordable, and accountable. Learn more about our policy priorities and vision for the future of education at [wgu.edu/impact](https://wgu.edu/impact).



[wgu.edu/impact](https://wgu.edu/impact)

[WGU Public Policy](#)

[@wgu](#)