

Great Jobs, Great Lives —
Gallup® Study of Recent Western
Governors University Alumni

WGU Alumni Outcomes Report 2018

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Introduction

Traditional metrics for measuring the value of a college education — namely, job and graduate school placement rates and alumni salaries — may be the simplest evaluations of alumni outcomes, but they do not fully capture the experience and impact of a college education. The conventional outcomes do not adequately reflect the missions of higher education institutions and fail to address some of the primary reasons students attend college: not only to obtain a good-paying job but to follow a career path that is particularly fulfilling to them and make a meaningful, lifelong contribution to society.

Since 2014, Gallup has surveyed a nationally representative sample of more than 70,000 college graduates to assess their post-collegiate well-being and workplace engagement, and identify potential links between these outcomes and their undergraduate experiences. This study, known as the Gallup-Purdue Index, represents a landmark effort to measure the long-term outcomes of college graduates, giving colleges and universities the opportunity to better understand their success in preparing students to lead purposeful lives and have successful careers. Gallup works with university partners to examine their graduates' outcomes and compare them with results from the national study. This provides a benchmark for college experiences and key outcomes that indicate opportunities for continuous improvement.

Many institutions across the country are applying findings from the Gallup-Purdue Index to improve the student experience in meaningful ways — for example, by placing more emphasis on long-term projects, mentoring and internship experiences linked to classroom learning and students' career goals. These schools have found research from the national Gallup-Purdue Index — as well as institutions' own findings based on the index — can provide university leaders with critical insights into how undergraduate experiences align with alumni's holistic success after college.

Executive Summary

In this study, Gallup examines WGU alumni outcomes based on Gallup's measures of workforce and life outcomes — including employee engagement, well-being and emotional attachment to the university. The study maps these outcomes back to graduates' reflections on their undergraduate experiences.

- WGU graduates' full-time employment rate exceeds that of graduates nationally, graduates of public and private not-for-profit universities and other nontraditional graduates by almost 20 percentage points, on average.
- WGU graduates are more likely than their comparison group peers to work in jobs completely related to their undergraduate studies, be engaged at work and believe they have the ideal job for them.
- WGU graduates are more likely than graduates nationally, public and private university graduates and nontraditional graduates to be thriving in their purpose, social, financial and physical well-being.
- Two-thirds of WGU graduates strongly agree that they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams — a rate substantially higher than that of graduates from comparison group institutions. And, among WGU graduates, having this type of mentor is linked with higher overall well-being.
- 72% of WGU graduates strongly agree that their education was worth the cost, a percentage that more than doubles that of private not-for-profit graduates who say the same (31%).
- 74% of WGU graduates say they are extremely likely to recommend the university to their family, friends and colleagues. Less than half of nontraditional graduates (47%) — the next-highest group — say the same.
- The 69% of WGU graduates who strongly agree that WGU was the perfect school for people like them surpasses — by 33 percentage points, on average — the percentage of their comparison group peers who hold the same view.

GALLUP MEASURED OUTCOMES OF INTEREST

This Western Governors University (WGU) study examines alumni outcomes based on Gallup's measures of workforce and life outcomes — including employee engagement, well-being and emotional attachment to the university. The study maps these outcomes back to graduates' reflections on their undergraduate experiences

GREAT LIVES: WELL-BEING

Gallup and Sharecare developed the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being 5 View to measure the important aspects of a life well-lived. Based on decades of Gallup and Sharecare global research, the index employs 10 questions that measure well-being in five, interrelated elements:

- **Purpose Well-Being:** Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals
- **Social Well-Being:** Having strong and supportive relationships and love in your life
- **Financial Well-Being:** Managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security
- **Community Well-Being:** Liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community
- **Physical Well-Being:** Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily

Gallup categorizes individuals as “thriving,” “struggling” or “suffering” in each element according to how they respond to the particular questions that relate to that facet of well-being:

- **Thriving:** Well-being that is strong and consistent in a particular element
- **Struggling:** Well-being that is moderate in a particular element
- **Suffering:** Well-being that is low and inconsistent in a particular element

GREAT JOBS: WORKPLACE ENGAGEMENT

Workplace engagement is more nuanced than simple job satisfaction. Engaged employees are intellectually and emotionally connected with their organizations and work teams because they are able to do what they are best at, they like what they do at work and they have someone at work who cares about their development. Gallup's expertise on employee engagement is rooted in more than 30 years of research on the workplace conditions that are most consistently related to employee and workgroup performance. Based on employees' responses to questions about these elements of their working lives, Gallup categorizes workers as engaged, not engaged or actively disengaged.

GREAT ADVOCATES: ALUMNI ATTACHMENT

Gallup's global research on behalf of hundreds of organizations and institutions examines the populations they serve and their emotional connection to the organizations, measuring what drives their engagement and the attributes of those who are engaged versus those who are not. Similarly, Gallup examines the emotional connection alumni have to their alma mater, determining which experiences and attributes relate to a lasting sense of connection and commitment to their undergraduate college or university.

COMPARISON GROUPS

Gallup compares WGU undergraduate alumni who received their degree between 2013 and 2017 with college graduates nationally, as well as with graduates of public and private not-for-profit universities. To ensure comparability among these groups, only those who graduated between 2013 and 2016¹ are included in the comparison groups from the Gallup-Purdue Index national database. Since WGU serves many nontraditional graduates, the report also compares WGU alumni with nontraditional alumni nationally (2013-2016) who, for the purposes of this report, graduated at age 25 or older.

Thriving in Four or Five Well-Being Elements — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

	Graduation Years	Mean Age	% Female	% First-Generation College Students	% Non-White
WGU Alumni	2013-2017	42	62%	37%	17%
Graduates Nationally	2013-2016	29	52%	42%	32%
Public Universities	2013-2016	28	52%	43%	34%
Private Universities	2013-2016	28	54%	33%	26%
Nontraditional Graduates	2013-2016	39	55%	63%	35%

Because of the university’s nontraditional model, WGU alumni are substantially older than college graduates nationally with a mean age of 42, similar to the average age of nontraditional college graduates in the national database (mean age of 39). Approximately six in 10 WGU graduates are female, slightly more than college graduates nationally and among all other comparison groups. WGU graduates are also more likely to be white than their comparison group peers.

¹ 2016 is the most recent graduation year currently available in the Gallup-Purdue Index database.

WGU Primes Graduates to Succeed in Their Careers

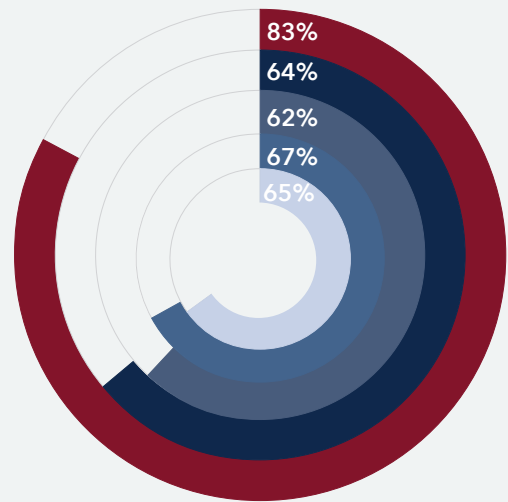
WGU GRADUATES BOAST HIGH RATES OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

More than eight in 10 recent WGU graduates (83%) report that they are employed full time for an employer, easily exceeding the full-time employment rate of their comparison group peers. In fact, the full-time employment rate of WGU graduates exceeds that of graduates nationally, graduates of public and private not-for-profit universities, and other nontraditional graduates by almost 20 percentage points, on average.

WGU GRADUATES MORE LIKELY THAN GRADUATES NATIONALLY TO BE ENGAGED AT WORK

WGU graduates' positive employment outcomes extend beyond just having a job. In addition to boasting high full-time employment relative to comparison group graduates, they are also thriving in their jobs. Just over four in 10 recent WGU graduates (41%) are engaged at work, surpassing the workplace engagement of graduates in each of the comparison groups.

Full-Time Employment (for an Employer) — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)



- WGU
- National
- Public Universities
- Private Not-for-Profit Universities
- Nontraditional Graduates

Workplace Engagement — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

41%

WGU ALUMNI

- 36% National
- 38% Public Universities
- 36% Private Not-for-Profit Universities
- 35% Nontraditional Graduates

Gallup has measured the workplace engagement of more than 6.4 million employees globally from hundreds of organizations and companies. Workplace engagement is a measure of an individual's emotional connection to and investment in their job. It is an important driver of overall well-being and a leading indicator of organizational performance such as higher profitability. Thus, compared with graduates from the comparison groups, WGU graduates are more likely to be productive employees and emotionally invested in their work.

The higher rate of workplace engagement among WGU graduates relative to graduates in the comparison groups is, in part, attributable to WGU graduates being more likely to strongly agree that they have the ideal job for them and say that their current work is “completely related” to their undergraduate studies.

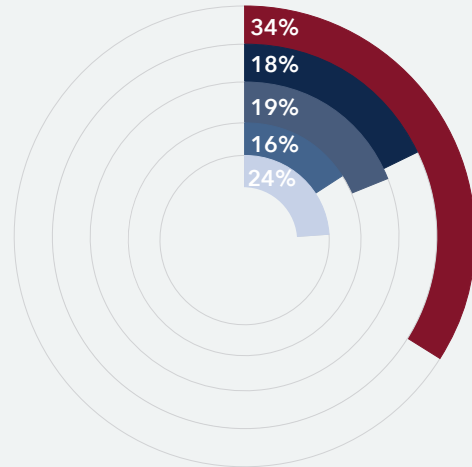
Just over a third of WGU graduates (34%) strongly agree that they have the ideal job for them — almost double the percentage of graduates nationally (18%) and graduates from public (19%) and private (16%) universities who say the same. And of the 34% of WGU graduates who strongly agree that they have their ideal job, 76% are engaged at work.

Nearly three-quarters of WGU graduates (72%) currently work in jobs that are “completely related” to what they studied at WGU. On average, this direct link between undergraduate studies and current work is 31 percentage points higher among WGU graduates than among graduates nationally (39%), graduates of public (40%) and private (38%) universities and nontraditional graduates (46%).

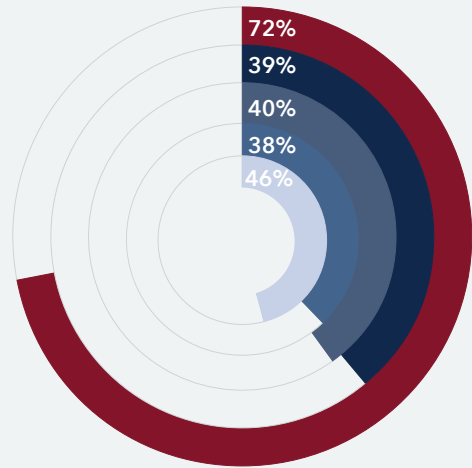
The high percentage of WGU alumni who work in jobs “completely related” to their undergraduate studies is significant because nearly half of these WGU graduates are engaged at work; whereas only about a quarter of graduates who are in jobs that are “somewhat” (27%) or “not at all” (21%) related to what they studied are engaged. This strong connection between WGU graduates’ academic studies and their jobs may, in part, stem from WGU’s students being more likely to enroll with a clear purpose and goal for attaining a degree. WGU’s competency-based approach to learning caters to people already in their career and provides specialized training that can help them advance in their current field.

Workforce Outcomes — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

I have the ideal job for me (% Strongly agree)



Current work “completely related” to undergraduate major



■ WGU ■ National ■ Public Universities
■ Private Not-for-Profit Universities ■ Nontraditional Graduates

WGU Alumni: Workplace Engagement and “Ideal Job”

76% **24%**

STRONGLY AGREE

DO NOT STRONGLY AGREE

WGU Alumni: Workplace Engagement and Relevance of Work to Studies

47% **27%** **21%**

COMPLETELY RELATED

SOMEWHAT RELATED

NOT AT ALL RELATED

WGU Graduates Thriving in Their Well-Being

WGU graduates lead well-rounded lives after graduation, excelling in all facets of their well-being. In fact, they are more likely than graduates nationally, public and private university graduates and nontraditional graduates to be thriving in their purpose, social, financial, community and physical well-being.

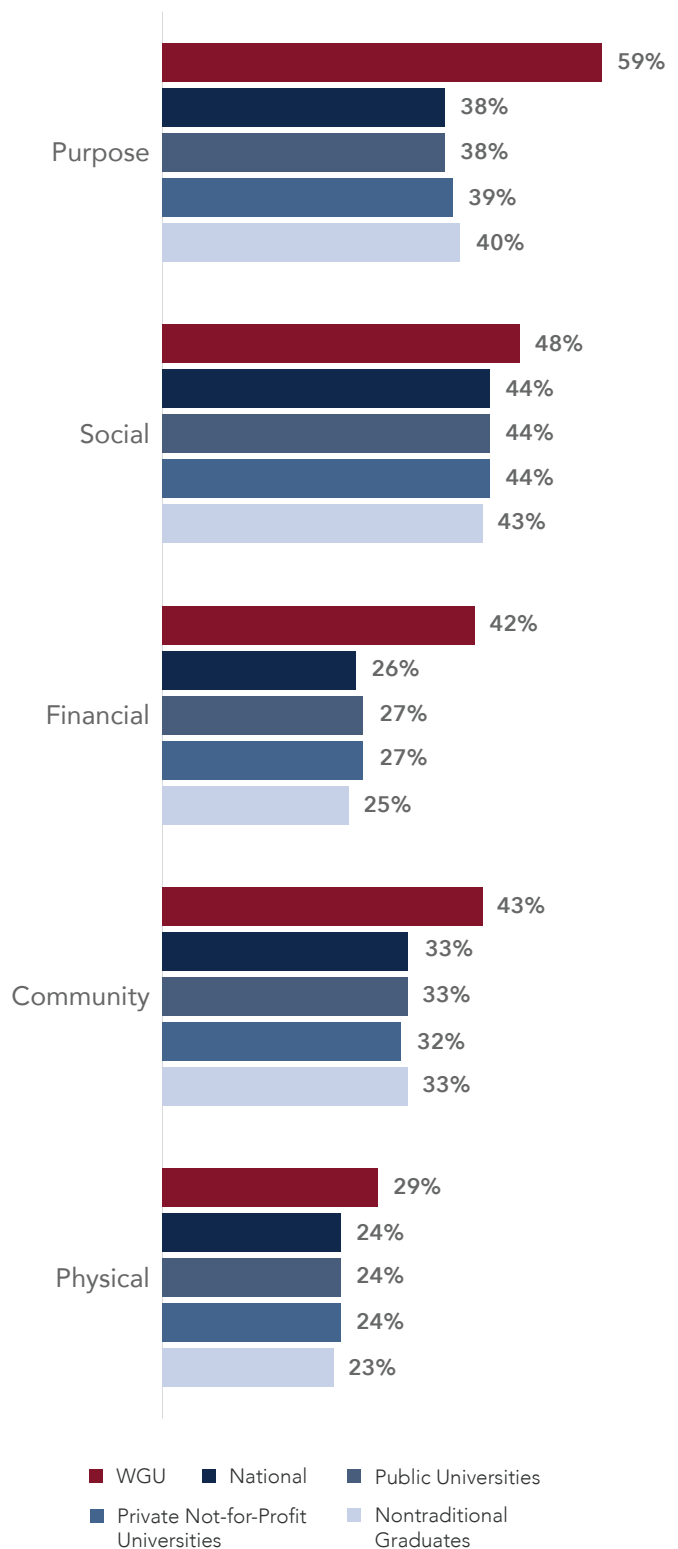
WGU graduates are particularly likely to be thriving in purpose well-being (59%), surpassing their comparison group peers in the percentage thriving in this element by 20 percentage points, on average. This suggests that WGU graduates not only enjoy what they do every day, but find ways each day to learn or engage in something that interests them.

That WGU graduates excel in purpose well-being comes as no surprise given the high percentages of WGU graduates who are engaged at work in jobs directly related to their field of study. Gallup research demonstrates a positive correlation between well-being and engagement at work. Eighty-four percent of WGU graduates who are engaged at work are also thriving in purpose well-being, and 68% of WGU graduates in jobs “completely related” to their undergraduate studies are thriving in purpose well-being.

Financial well-being is about more than the amount of money individuals have — it’s about having the financial resources for things one wants to do while also managing financial stress. In this element, WGU graduates surpass their comparison group peers with 42% thriving in their financial well-being. Only a quarter of graduates nationally (26%), alumni of public (27%) and private not-for-profit (27%) universities and nontraditional graduates (25%) are thriving in their financial well-being.

WGU graduates are also more likely than their comparison group peers to feel connected to places where they live, with 43% thriving in their community well-being. About a third of graduates nationally (33%), alumni of public (33%) and private not-for-profit (32%) universities and nontraditional graduates (33%) are also thriving in community well-being.

% Thriving in Well-Being Elements — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)



In addition to being more likely to thrive in the individual well-being elements, WGU alumni are more likely to thrive in multiple well-being elements. The percentage of WGU graduates thriving in four well-being elements (15%) is nearly double that of graduates nationally and graduates of private and public universities (each at 8%) and is more than double that of nontraditional graduates (6%). Moreover, the nearly one in 10 WGU alumni thriving in all five well-being elements also outpaces graduates in each of the comparison groups.

Thriving in Four or Five Well-Being Elements — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

	Nontraditional Graduates	Private Not-for-Profit Universities	Public Universities	National	WGU
Four Elements	6%	8%	8%	8%	15%
Five Elements	6%	5%	4%	5%	9%



Career Preparation and Well-Being Linked to Key WGU Experiences

The positive workforce and well-being outcomes for WGU graduates lead to a natural question: What is it about the WGU experience that promotes these positive outcomes? Two undergraduate experiences at WGU stand out as being critical to the success of its graduates — a focus on meaningful mentorship and job relevance.

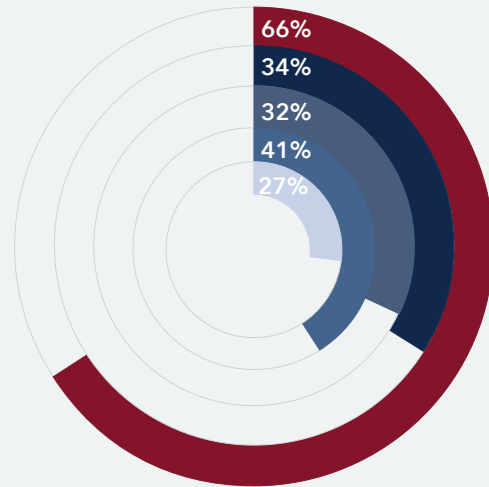
As a university, WGU prioritizes mentoring relationships between its faculty and students, pairing each student with a faculty mentor who helps guide them through their academic program. In fact, two-thirds of WGU graduates strongly agree that during their time at WGU, they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams.

The percentage of WGU graduates who had these meaningful mentoring relationships more than doubles that of graduates from public universities (32%) and nontraditional graduates nationally (27%), and is nearly twice that of graduates nationally (34%). Even compared with private not-for-profit universities (41%) — the next-highest comparison group — WGU graduates are 25 percentage points more likely to strongly agree that they had a mentor who pushed them to pursue their goals and dreams.

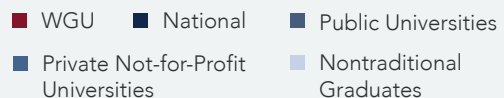
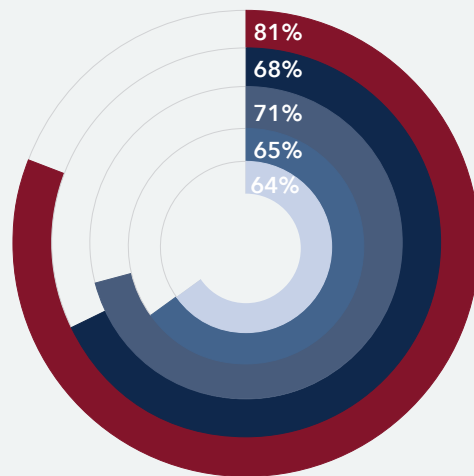
As students, WGU graduates were also able to apply their coursework in jobs or internships. Eighty-one percent of WGU graduates said they had a job or internship where they could apply what they were learning in the classroom. By comparison, about two-thirds of graduates nationally (68%), graduates from private not-for-profit universities (65%) and nontraditional graduates (64%) — along with 71% of public university graduates — had that same experience.

Mentoring and Internships — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

While attending WGU, I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams (% Strongly agree)



While attending WGU, I had a job/internship that allowed me to apply what I was learning in the classroom (% Yes)



WGU graduates who had these experiences as undergraduates are now more likely to be thriving in their well-being and their jobs. For example, WGU graduates who strongly agree that they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams are 14 percentage points more likely to be thriving in four or five well-being elements than those who did not strongly agree they had a mentor. Likewise, nearly eight in 10 WGU graduates (77%) who had a job or internship where they could apply what they were learning in the classroom say their current work is “completely related” to their undergraduate studies, compared to less than half (46%) of those who did not have a relevant job or internship.

Relationship Between WGU Experiences and Key Outcomes

WGU Alumni: Mentorship and Well-Being
(Thriving in 4 or 5 well-being elements)

29%

STRONGLY AGREE
HAD MENTOR

15%

DO NOT
STRONGLY AGREE

WGU Alumni: Relevant Job and Current Work

77%

HAD
RELEVANT JOB

46%

NO JOB

WGU Alumni Rate Their WGU Experience Highly

Likely in part because of their positive workforce outcomes and their well-rounded lives after graduation — both bolstered by key experiences during their time as students — WGU alumni rate the university very positively. These graduates see the value in the education they received, believe that the school cares about their long-term success and, in turn, report promoting the university to others and remain emotionally attached to the university.

WGU GRADUATES RATE THE VALUE OF THE UNIVERSITY POSITIVELY AND RECOMMEND IT HIGHLY

About seven in 10 WGU graduates (72%) strongly agree that their education was worth the cost. The percentage of WGU alumni who hold this view more than doubles that of private not-for-profit graduates who say the same (31%). Additionally, WGU graduates are 1.9, 1.7 and 1.8 times more likely than graduates nationally, public university graduates and nontraditional graduates, respectively, to strongly agree that their education was worth the cost.

Differences in the perceived value of their education among these groups are likely partially attributable to dramatic differences in the cost of attendance. On average, WGU alumni report that they took out \$8,981 in student loans to complete their undergraduate degree. Conversely, graduates nationally, graduates of private not-for-profit universities and nontraditional graduates report that they took out more than \$20,000 in student loans; public university graduates took out an average \$17,244 in loans to complete their college degree. The affordability of a WGU degree, relative to degrees from peer institutions, could also help explain why WGU graduates are more likely to be thriving in their financial well-being, as discussed in a prior section. Gallup research has found that higher amounts of student loan debt are associated with lower levels of well-being among college graduates nationally.



Attitudes About Institution — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

	Nontraditional Graduates	Private Not-for-Profit Universities	Public Universities	National	WGU
My education was worth the cost (% Strongly agree)	41%	31%	42%	37%	72%
My alma mater is passionate about the long-term success of its students (% Strongly agree)	34%	46%	28%	33%	48%
Extremely likely recommend alma mater to family, friends or colleagues	47%	44%	46%	44%	74%

Additionally, nearly three-quarters of WGU graduates say they are extremely likely to recommend the university to their family, friends and colleagues. Less than half of nontraditional graduates (47%) — the next-highest group — say the same. Approximately half of WGU alumni also strongly agree that the university is passionate about the long-term success of its students. This considerably outpaces the percentage of graduates nationally (33%), graduates of public universities (28%) and nontraditional graduates (34%) who hold the same view.

WGU GRADUATES BELIEVE THE UNIVERSITY IS THE IDEAL SCHOOL FOR PEOPLE LIKE THEM

Gallup measures graduates’ emotional attachment to their alma mater by asking them to assess whether their university was the perfect school for people like them and whether they can imagine a world without their alma mater. The nearly seven in 10 WGU graduates (69%) who strongly agree that WGU was the perfect school for people like them surpasses — by a wide margin (33 percentage points, on average) — the percentage of their comparison group peers who hold the same view.

Emotional Attachment — WGU Alumni vs. Alumni From Comparison Group Universities (2013-2017)

% STRONGLY AGREE

	Nontraditional Graduates	Private Not-for-Profit Universities	Public Universities	National	WGU
Alma mater was the perfect school for people like me	38%	38%	33%	35%	69%
I can't imagine a world without my alma mater	21%	28%	26%	25%	37%
Both attachment items	19%	24%	20%	21%	35%

More than a third of WGU alumni (37%) strongly agree that they cannot imagine a world without WGU. By comparison, a quarter of graduates nationally say the same, as do 26% of public university and 28% of private university graduates. About one-fifth of nontraditional graduates (21%) strongly agree that they cannot imagine a world without their alma mater.

Gallup classifies alumni who strongly agree with both of these statements as “emotionally attached” to their alma mater. The 35% of WGU graduates who are emotionally attached to WGU is 11 percentage points higher than the next comparison group — graduates of private not-for-profit universities (24%). Only about two in 10 graduates nationally (21%), graduates of public universities (20%) and nontraditional graduates (19%) strongly agree with both statements about their alma maters.



Methodology

Results from this study are based on 2,452 survey responses from Western Governors University (WGU) alumni who graduated between 2013 and 2017. The survey was conducted Nov. 3–Dec. 4, 2017. WGU provided the sample of alumni email addresses. Alumni were included in the study if the institution had an email address on file.

Results for the national study used for comparison purposes — the Gallup-Purdue Index — are based on web surveys, with a random sample of 1,724 respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher; who graduated between 2013 and 2016; are aged 18 and older; have internet access; and living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The Gallup-Purdue Index sample was recruited via the Gallup Daily tracking survey. The Gallup Daily tracking survey sample includes national adults with a minimum quota of 60% cellphone respondents and 40% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial (RDD) methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday. Gallup Daily tracking respondents with a college degree, who agreed to future contact, were invited to take the Gallup-Purdue Index survey online.

Gallup-Purdue Index interviews are conducted via the web, in English only. Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. bachelor's degree or higher population.

All reported margins of sampling error for the Gallup-Purdue Index of all college graduates include the computed design effects for weighting.

For results based on the total sample of those with a bachelor's degree, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on those with a bachelor's degree from public universities, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on those with a bachelor's degree from private not-for-profit universities, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the total sample of nontraditional graduates with a bachelor's degree, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

About Western Governors University

Western Governors University (WGU) is an online, nonprofit university founded in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors who saw advancement in technology as an opportunity to expand access to higher education by making it possible to study and learn independent of time and place. These governors saw the transformative power of competency-based education (CBE) – an academic model that focuses on measuring learning rather than time.

CBE is ideal for adult learners, who come to college with different learning styles and levels of knowledge. Rather than enrolling in semester-long courses with fixed schedules, students move through courses as quickly as they can demonstrate that they know the material. They study and learn on a schedule that fits their lives with regular, one-on-one instruction and support from faculty. Programs and courses are designed with input from academic and industry leaders to ensure their relevance to employers and the workplace.

WGU's defining principle is focus on the student – every WGU initiative is evaluated and prioritized based on its impact on student success. The efficacy of WGU's learning model and student focus is demonstrated in results – a graduate rate significantly higher than other institutions serving adult learners; student, graduate, and employer satisfaction levels that outpace the national average; dramatically lower student debt levels, decreasing annually; and better employment outcomes for its graduates.

The university offers more than 60 bachelor's, master's, and post-baccalaureate degree programs in the key workforce areas of business, information technology, K-12 teacher education, and health professions, including nursing. WGU's 96,000 students and 105,000 graduates reside in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and at military installations worldwide.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.202.715.3045

www.gallup.com