

Western Governors University 2021 Alumni Survey



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Introduction

As COVID-19 continues to disrupt a third academic year for thousands of college and university students — resulting in a 3% decline in undergraduate enrollment in fall 2021 — more Americans are questioning the value and viability of completing a four-year degree. This is likely to be particularly true for adult learners: In a recent study, Gallup found 47% of parents who dropped out of a postsecondary program did so because of childcare responsibilities, and 30% dropped out due to program costs, both of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

For 25 years, Western Governors University has been committed to delivering an online, competency-based education that allows students — particularly those from underserved populations, including parents, students of color and first-generation college students — to complete their degree on their own schedule, and at their own pace. Currently, WGU students graduate at higher rates than their peers at comparable institutions and are half as likely to default on their student loans.

Gallup surveyed more than 1,200 WGU alumni who completed their program between 2016 and 2020 to measure how WGU's most recent graduates are faring in comparison to bachelor's degree holders nationally. The survey collected feedback on graduates' experiences while enrolled as students, as well as critical postgraduation metrics like employment and wellbeing. When their outcomes are compared with those of more than 1,000 national bachelor's degree holders from the Gallup Alumni Survey, WGU alumni are thriving at significantly higher levels than their peers.

All responses from Western Governors University alumni were collected Nov. 17-Dec. 12, 2021. Comparisons with national benchmarks refer to 1,000 bachelor's degree holders who received their degree between 2016 and 2020 and responded to one of four waves of the Gallup Alumni Survey.

TABLE 1

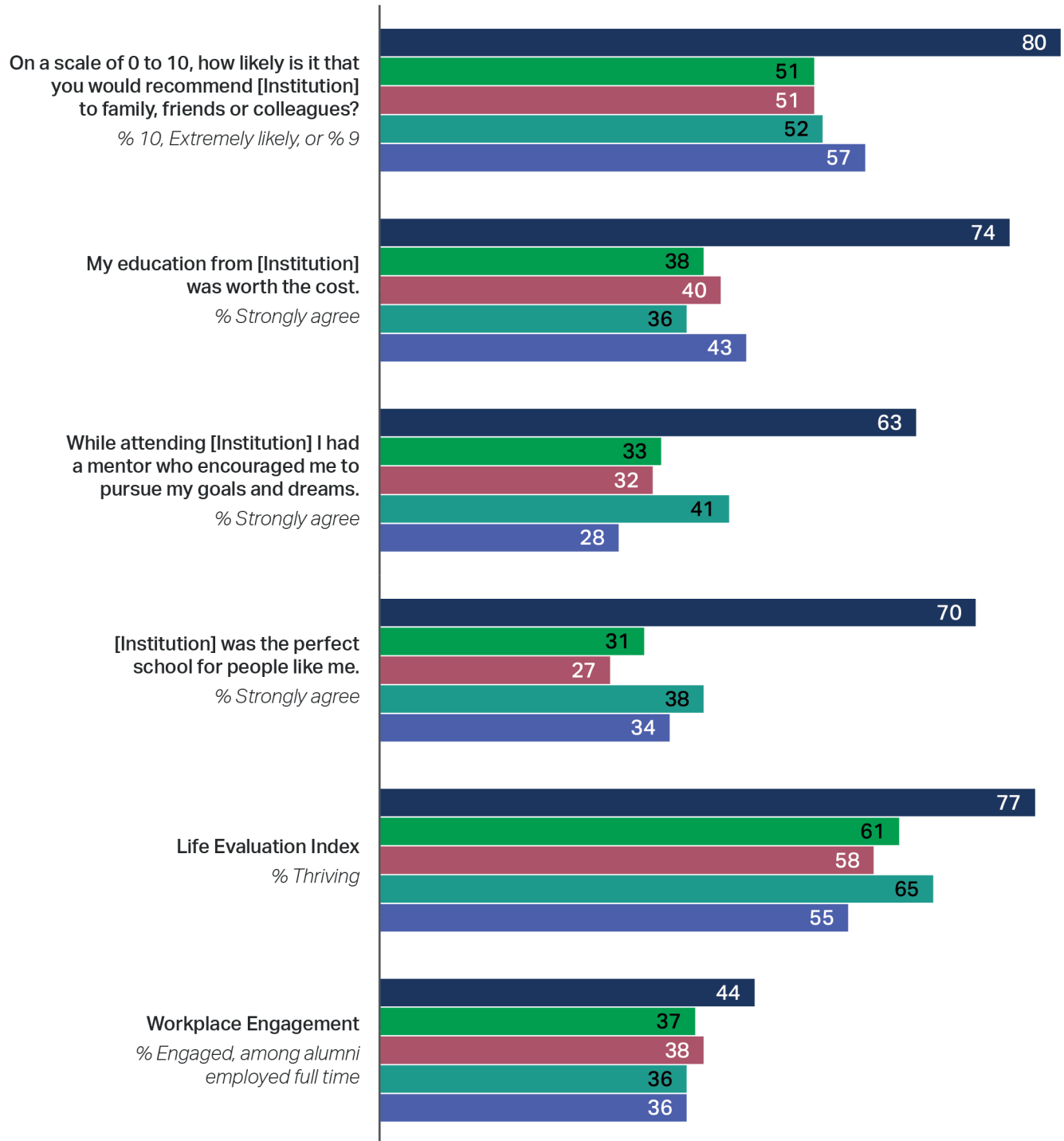
Demographic Profile of Respondents

	WGU GRADUATES	National graduates	Public university graduates	Private, not-for-profit graduates	National graduates, age 25+ at graduation
Total respondents	1,238	1,000	551	368	293
Median age	45 years	26 years	26 years	25 years	34 years
Median undergraduate loan amount	\$3,420	\$11,600	\$7,140	\$14,280	\$15,470
Female graduates	64%	51%	48%	55%	49%
First-generation graduates	66%	34%	35%	27%	56%
Graduates of color	21%	28%	29%	23%	29%



Key Findings

CHART 1



■ WGU graduates
 ■ National graduates
 ■ Public university graduates
 ■ Private, not-for-profit university graduates
 ■ National graduates, age 25+ at graduation



An Educational Experience That Alumni Would Overwhelmingly Recommend

After graduating from Western Governors University, alumni express high levels of satisfaction with their experience, and the overwhelming majority say they would recommend the experience to others. One metric used across industries — including higher education — to quantify this sentiment is **Net Promoter Score**.

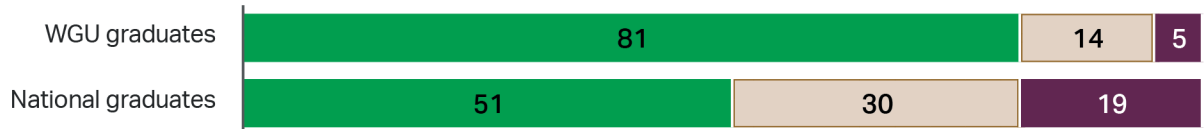
The metric asks students how likely they would be to recommend their university to friends, family and colleagues on a scale of zero to 10. Those who respond with a nine or 10 are considered “promoters,” while those who choose a seven or eight are considered “passively satisfied,” and those who rate their experience with a six or below are “detractors.”

Importantly, all students at WGU report this exceptionally high level of satisfaction, including students from historically marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as students of color, first-generation students and those who live in rural or exurban areas.

When asked how likely they would be to recommend Western Governors University, 81% of WGU alumni are "promoters," making them highly likely to recommend their experience to others. This is 30 points higher than bachelor's degree holders nationally.

CHART 2

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are not at all likely and 10 means you are extremely likely, how likely is it that you would recommend [Institution] to family, friends or colleagues?



■ % Promoters (9-10) ■ % Passives (7-8) ■ % Detractors (0-6)

Net Promoter Scores



Moreover, just 5% of WGU alumni are considered detractors of the university, compared with 19% of alumni nationally.

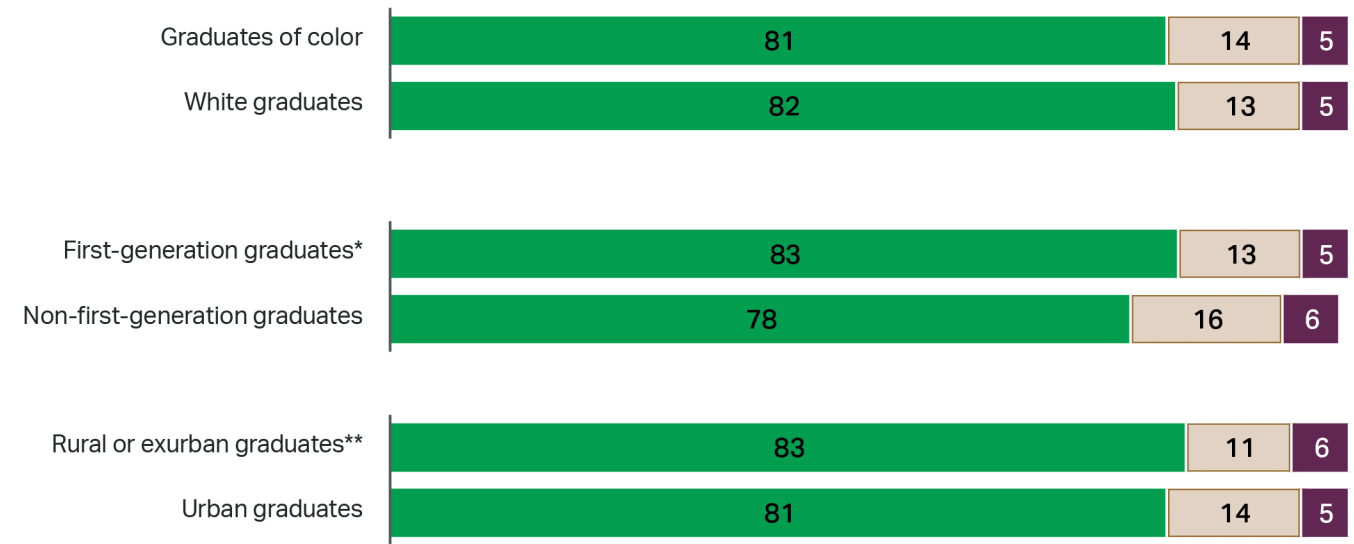


Importantly, all students at WGU report this exceptionally high level of satisfaction, including students from historically marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as students of color, first-generation students and those who live in rural or exurban areas.

CHART 3

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are not at all likely and 10 means you are extremely likely, how likely is it that you would recommend [Institution] to family, friends or colleagues?

Among WGU graduates



■ % Promoters (9-10) ■ % Passives (7-8) ■ % Detractors (0-6)

*Respondents are counted as first-generation graduates if neither of their parents have completed a bachelor’s degree

**Respondents are categorized as rural or exurban if they reside in a non-metro county, or a metro county of fewer than 250,000 residents, as classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

Note: Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/-1 percentage point.

In each of these cases, students from key underrepresented groups are at least as likely as their peers to recommend WGU.

Results from WGU alumni suggest, in addition to measuring enthusiasm for and loyalty to their alma mater, Net Promoter Score is strongly related to whether alumni had critical educational experiences during their program — such as having a mentor or being supported by the institution. Further, alumni who are highly likely to recommend WGU are also more satisfied with their postgraduation lives.

These key experiences fall into four large categories, which represent the cornerstones of what differentiates a Western Governors University education from those of other universities nationally:

1

Institutional care
and support

2

Faculty and staff
care and support

3

Academic rigor and
career preparation

4

Postgraduation
outcomes

In each of these areas, Western Governors University gives students a positive experience above and beyond its competitors.



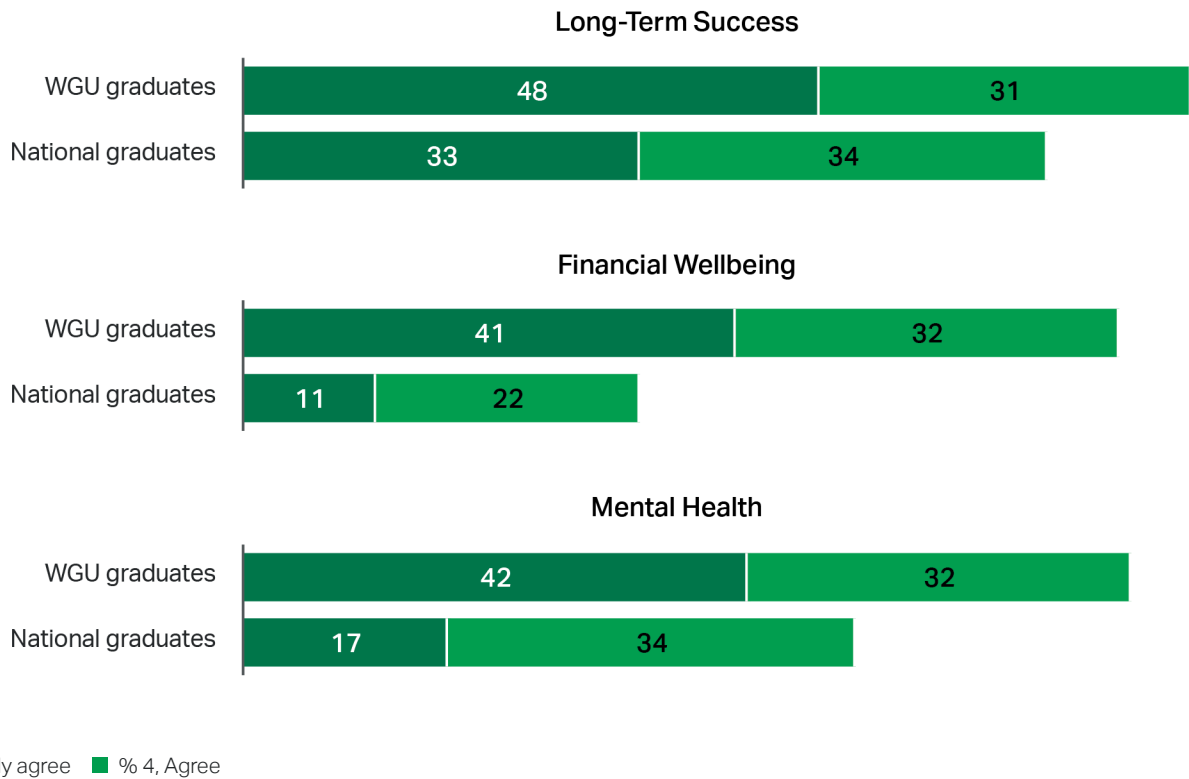
An Institution That Passionately Supports the Whole Student

In its mission to create pathways to opportunity for students, Western Governors University places student centrality at the core of its educational approach. This includes ensuring students have access to the resources they need during their program, providing flexibility in both scheduling and pace of coursework, and supporting its students' wellbeing. According to the university's alumni, their approach is succeeding.

Gallup asked alumni about their university's commitment to students' long-term success, financial wellbeing and mental health. In each of these areas, Western Governors University alumni were notably more likely than alumni nationally to say their alma mater was passionate about their success and wellbeing.

CHART 4

[Institution] is passionate about the _____ of its students.



Graduates of Western Governors University are especially likely to say the university cares about aspects of their personal wellbeing. Forty-one percent strongly agree WGU cares about their financial wellbeing — about four times higher than the national average (11%) — and 42% say the same of their mental health. This is likely due in part to the university’s Responsible Borrowing Initiative and willingness to build degree programs around, rather than in place of, students’ other responsibilities as parents, caregivers, members of the military and full-time employees.

Part of ensuring students feel cared for by the institution is providing the resources they need to be successful, including administrative and academic support and advising. In both respects, Western Governors University surpasses the national average; WGU alumni are about twice as likely as the national average to say the availability of student support services was “excellent,” and 17 percentage points more likely to strongly agree they had access to necessary academic resources while at the university.

CHART 5

Please rate the availability of student support services while you were a student at [Institution].

% Excellent



I had access to the resources I needed to be successful academically while completing my undergraduate degree at [Institution].

% Strongly agree



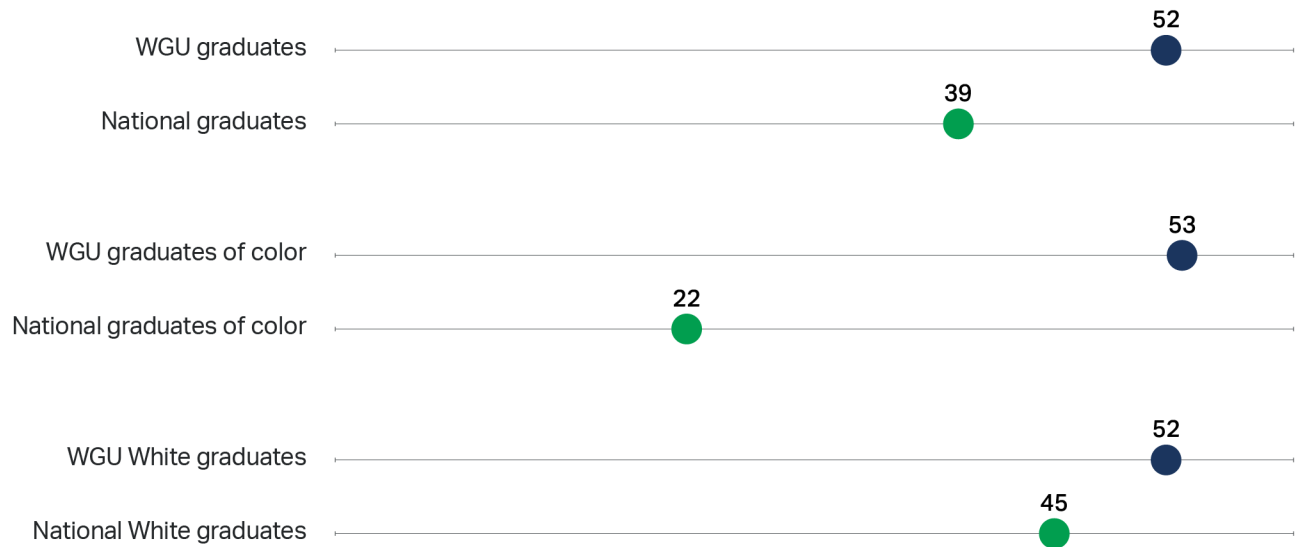
First-generation students, who may be more reliant on these services than students whose parents completed a college degree, rate the support apparatus at WGU more positively than non-first-generation students. This again suggests the university’s intentional approach to providing support to its students — 99.8% of whom began their degree at another institution, but did not complete that degree — is producing benefits for the students who need it most.

Finally, graduates of Western Governors University agree the university builds an inclusive, accepting community that students feel part of, despite completing their degree online.

CHART 6

I felt as if I belonged at [Institution].

% Strongly agree



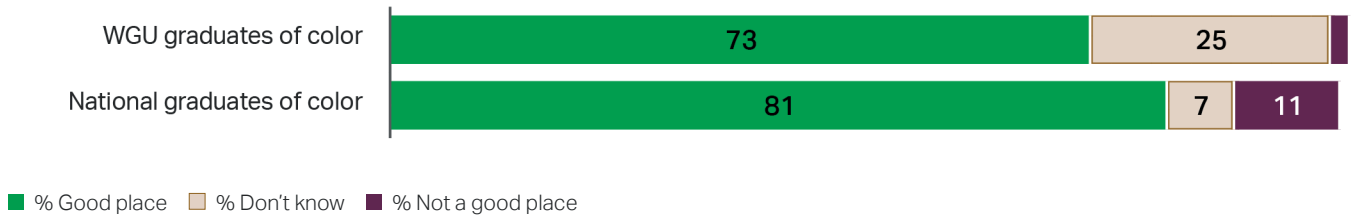
WGU graduates are 13 percentage points more likely to strongly agree they felt a sense of belonging at their university than bachelor's degree holders nationally.

The environment at Western Governors University is also inclusive. At the national level, graduates of color are about half as likely as White graduates to strongly agree they belonged at their university. By contrast, WGU graduates of color are one point more likely than White WGU alumni to strongly agree they felt a sense of belonging, and more than twice as likely as national alumni of color to strongly agree.

These sentiments may be underpinned by a belief that Western Governors University is institutionally committed to creating a diverse and equitable environment. When asked if WGU is a good place or not a good place for students who are members of racial and ethnic minorities, 73% of WGU graduates of color say it is a good place, while just 2% say it is not a good place. Additionally, WGU alumni of color are three times as likely as alumni of color nationally to strongly agree their institution would have fully investigated any issues of discrimination they raised.

CHART 7

Is [Institution] a good place for students who are members of racial and ethnic minorities?

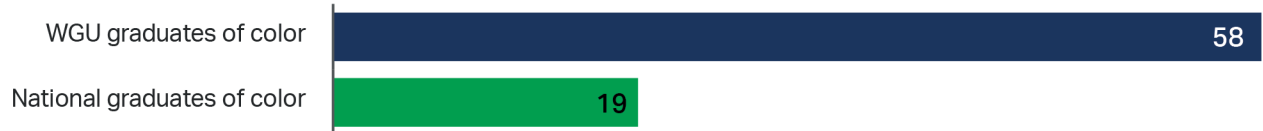


Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/- 1 percentage point; percentages shown when >4%.

CHART 8

If I had raised an issue of discrimination, I am confident [Institution] would have fully investigated it.

% Strongly agree



This institutional trust may also reflect the university's commitment to being student-centered. Because students feel the university is working on their behalf in other aspects of their education and wellbeing, they trust the university would do the right thing if one of its students faced unfair treatment.

In addition to feeling cared about by the institution, Western Governors University alumni report strong relationships with their faculty, who provide individualized support to students throughout their academic journey.

WGU alumni are nearly twice as likely as graduates nationally to say they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals.

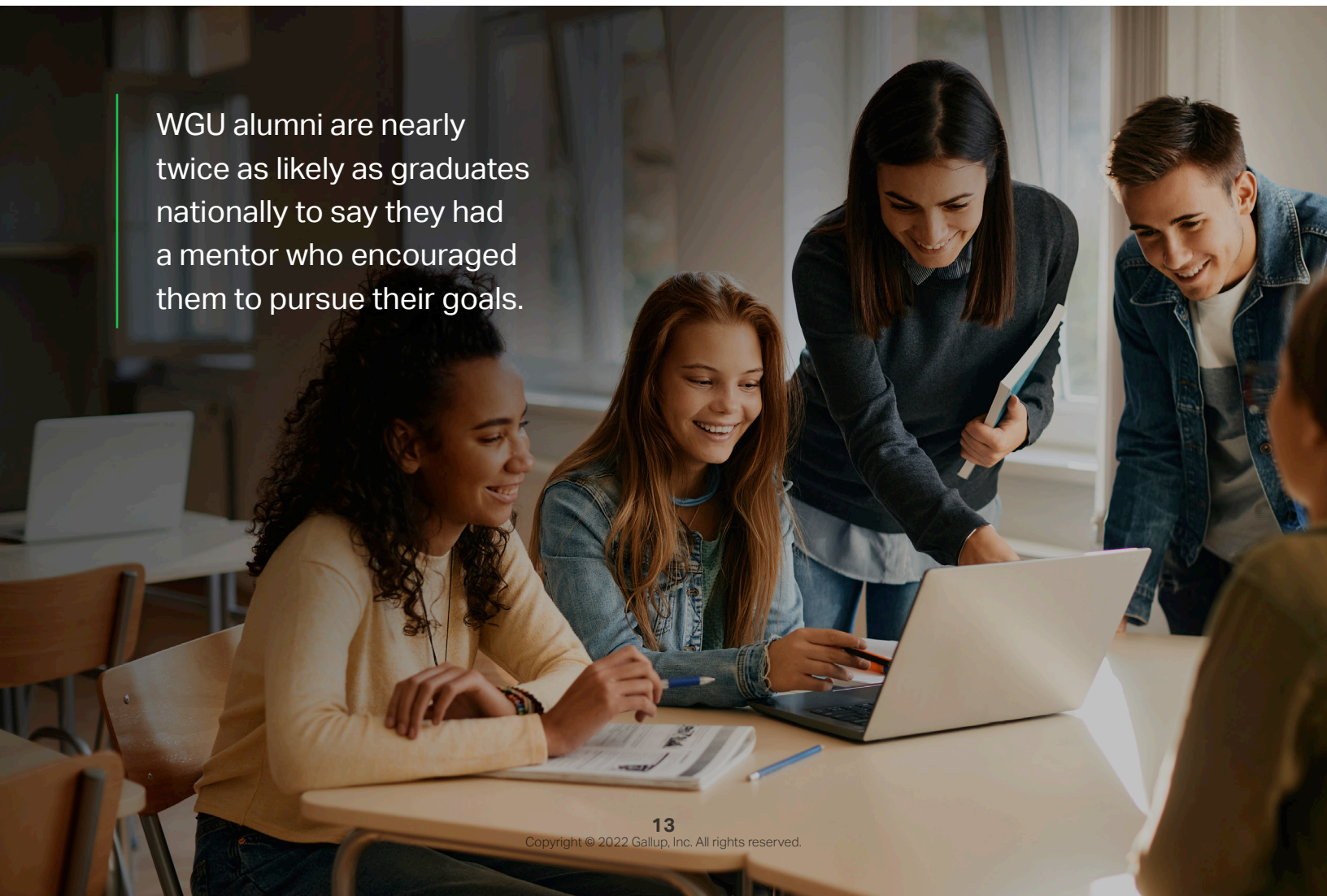
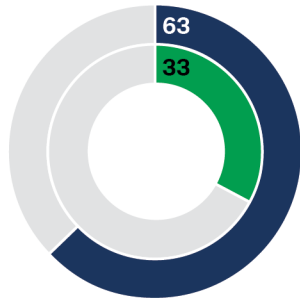


CHART 9

Student Support Measures

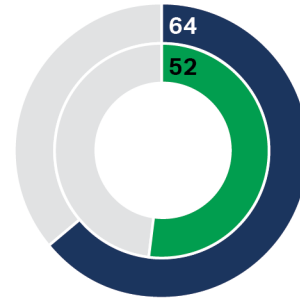
While attending [Institution] I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams.

% Strongly agree



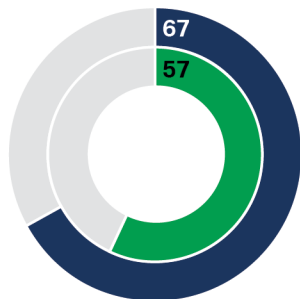
I was treated with respect by faculty members while obtaining my undergraduate degree at [Institution].

% Strongly agree



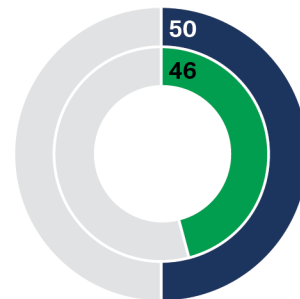
I was treated with respect by staff members while obtaining my undergraduate degree at [Institution].

% Strongly agree



Please rate the quality of the following while obtaining your degree at [Institution]: Availability of faculty members outside of schedule class time.

% Excellent



■ WGU Graduates ■ National graduates

This, too, is likely a result of intentional programming by Western Governors University. Upon enrollment, every WGU student is assigned a Program Mentor who assists the student in every aspect of their experience through graduation.

The expectation that students will receive the support they need, when they need it, extends not just to their assigned Program Mentor, but throughout the faculty and administrative offices they encounter. Western Governors University graduates are more likely than the national alumni population to say their faculty were available outside of class time and that they were treated with respect by the faculty and staff they interacted with.



A Rigorous, Skills-Driven Curriculum

Though Gallup finds **institutional support is a strong predictor of students' confidence** they will succeed in the workplace, this must be coupled with a curriculum that provides students with the knowledge and skills they need to do so. In this respect, WGU alumni are as likely as their peers nationally to say the quality of their instruction was excellent, while being more likely to say their program was academically challenging.

CHART 10

Academic Quality and Rigor

Please rate the quality of each of the following while obtaining your degree at [Institution]:
Quality of instruction.
% Excellent



I was challenged academically at [Institution].
% Strongly agree



■ WGU Graduates ■ National graduates

In addition to finding their program academically challenging, WGU alumni are notably more likely than the national average to say their program provided them with practical knowledge and skills, which many alumni are using in their current jobs.

CHART 11

Career Relevance of Curriculum

% Strongly agree



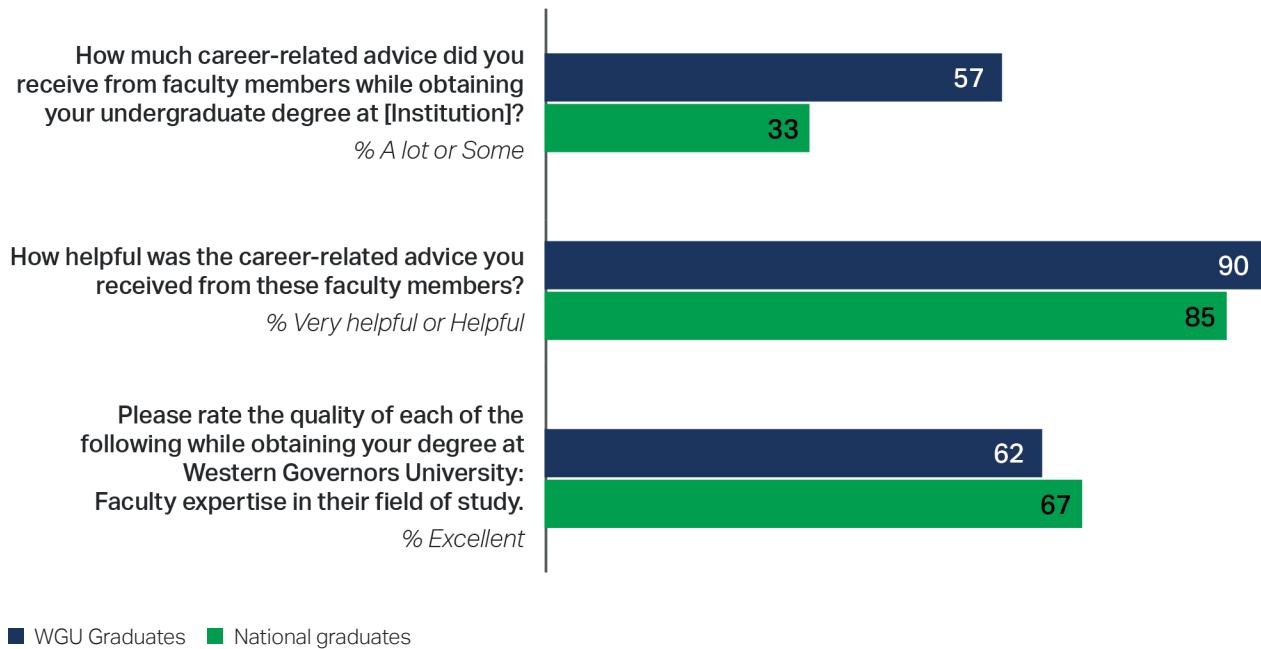
■ WGU Graduates ■ National graduates



The focus on practical, skills-based education, combined with WGU's competency-based education model, ensures students are learning and being assessed on knowledge that will be relevant to their future careers. This is further enhanced by the support faculty provide students in their coursework and in navigating a career path in their field. WGU graduates are 24 percentage points more likely than graduates nationally to say they received "some" or "a lot" of career advice from faculty members and are slightly more likely to report that advice was "helpful" or "very helpful."

CHART 12

Faculty Career Support



Gallup research finds the career advising faculty provide is more helpful than that provided by career services and suggests more WGU alumni received that critical guidance than graduates nationally. In combining these elements of a Western Governors University education, graduates of WGU are likely better prepared to enter the job market and find engaging, meaningful work.



Proven Postgraduation Outcomes

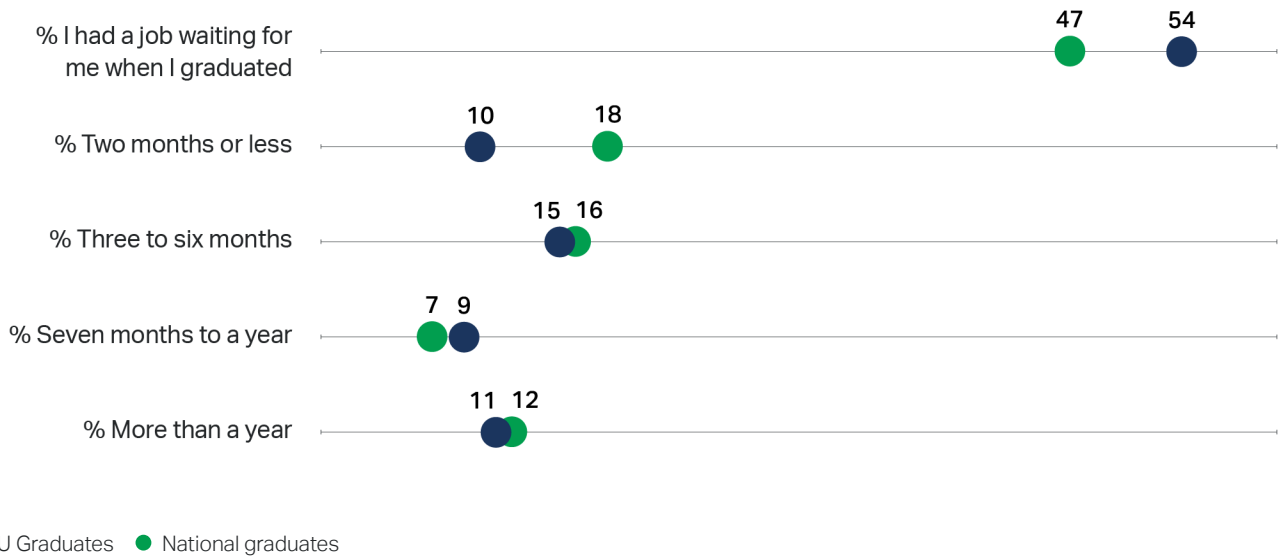
One measure of WGU graduates' career preparedness is the amount of time it took them to secure a good job after completing their program. While half of WGU alumni were not seeking employment when they graduated, more than half of those who were looking for a job said they had obtained one by the time they graduated — about seven percentage points higher than the national average.

More than half of WGU graduates seeking employment after graduation had a job waiting for them at graduation.

CHART 13

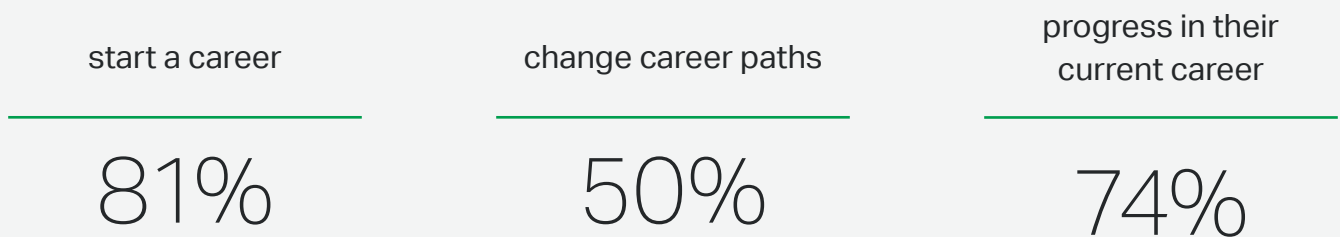
About how long did it take for you to obtain a good job after you completed your undergraduate education at [Institution]?

Among those seeking employment



Still, most alumni of WGU did not pursue their bachelor’s degree to start or change careers; rather, 70% of graduates say they enrolled in their program to progress in their current career. For that group, their education has also paid off: 74% of students who pursued a bachelor’s degree to progress in their career say they have done so since graduation.

Among WGU alumni who said they enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program to ...

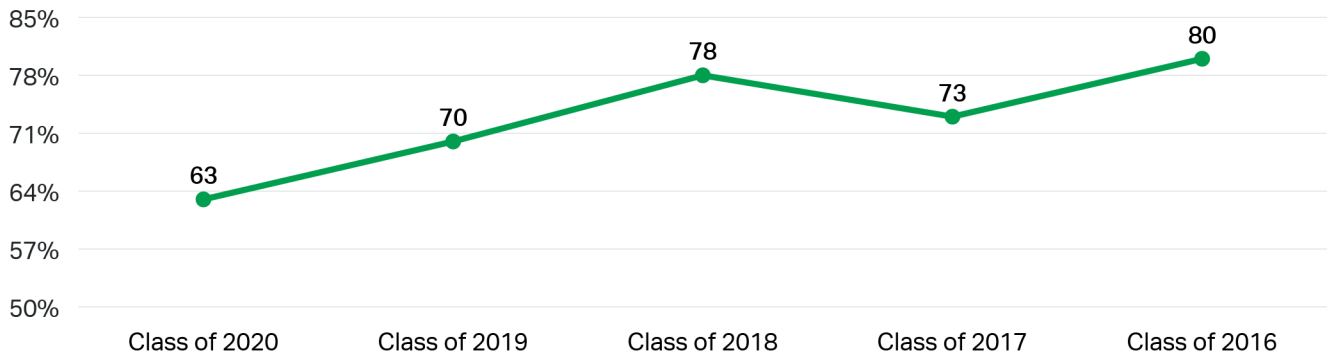


... say they have done so since graduating.

Students' success in achieving their goals also improves over time. Five years after graduation, 80% of WGU alumni say they achieved their main reason for pursuing a bachelor's degree — whatever that reason was.

CHART 14

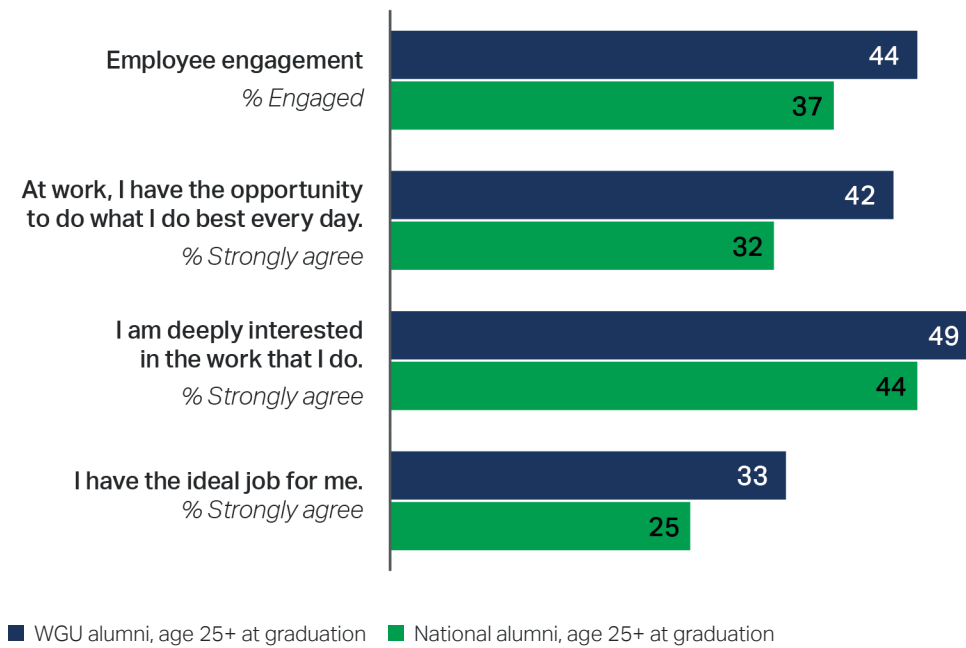
Percentage of WGU Graduates Who Have Achieved Their Main Reason for Enrolling Since Graduation



Gallup also collected responses around the workplace engagement of alumni, which measures the extent to which employees feel their organization and managers give them a sense of purpose, invest in their professional development, care about them as a person and create a collaborative environment. Whether they intended to start, change or advance their career, WGU graduates are finding interesting, fulfilling jobs at a rate that surpasses that of their peers. Moreover, while Gallup finds engagement at work increases with age, WGU graduates who completed their degrees at age 25 or older are still more likely than their similarly-aged peers to say they have the ideal job for them, or to be engaged in their jobs. This suggests WGU's engagement advantage is not only because its alumni have more workplace experience when they graduate than the national average.

CHART 15

Employee Engagement and Workplace Satisfaction



WGU graduates evaluate their career and financial wellbeing — as well as their overall lives — significantly more positively than bachelor’s degree holders nationally.

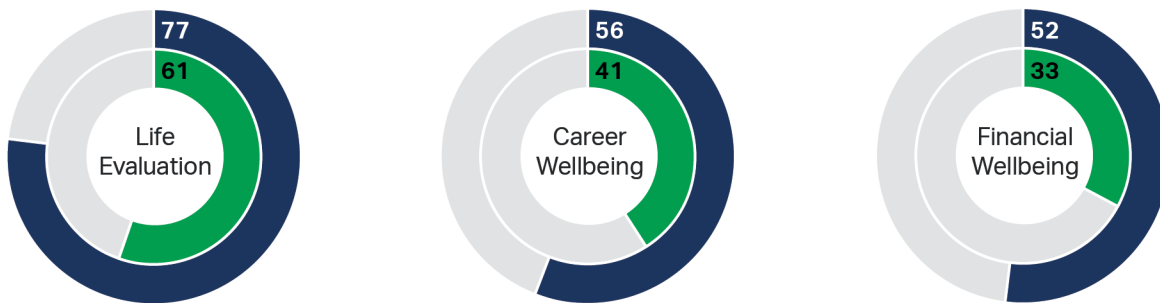
Importantly, Gallup’s employee engagement index does not just quantify employees’ personal satisfaction with their jobs, but whether workers are enthusiastic about and committed to their job and organization. As a result, the benefits of helping alumni find engaging work are not limited to the graduates themselves: Gallup research finds adults who are engaged in their work produce better results for their organizations and are about half as likely to be looking for another job as their less-engaged peers. High levels of employee engagement also positively influence many aspects of an individual’s wellbeing.

Due in part to these positive career outcomes after graduation, as well as their university’s commitment to its students’ mental and financial wellbeing, WGU graduates evaluate their career and financial wellbeing — as well as their overall lives — significantly more positively than bachelor’s degree holders nationally. Using the Gallup Net Thriving Index, which asks respondents to rate their current lives on a scale of zero to 10, as well as how they think they will rate their lives in five years, 77% of WGU alumni are considered “thriving,” compared with 61% of graduates nationally.

CHART 16

Life Evaluation and Wellbeing

% Thriving



■ WGU Graduates ■ National graduates



An Exceptional Return on Investment

When considering the highly individualized support that Western Governors University alumni received from all levels of the institution, the positive impacts of their education on their careers, and the thriving lives that most of them are leading after graduation, it follows that WGU graduates would be far more likely than their peers to agree their degree was worth the cost. In fact, 74% of WGU alumni strongly agree their degree was worth the cost, nearly double the percentage of bachelor's degree holders nationally (38%).

This is brought into sharper focus when considering the difference in cost between a WGU degree and a degree from an average national university. Undergraduates at WGU borrowed a median \$3,420 in loans to pay for their bachelor's degree, less than one-third of the median \$11,600 borrowed by the national bachelor's degree holders. Additionally, more than 40% of WGU alumni did not take any loans to pay for their bachelor's degree.

74% of WGU alumni strongly agree their degree was worth the cost, nearly double the percentage of bachelor's degree holders nationally.

Median Undergraduate Loan Amount

Graduates of
Western Governors University

\$3,420

Graduates nationally

\$11,600

Graduates of public universities

\$7,140

Graduates of private,
not-for-profit universities

\$14,280

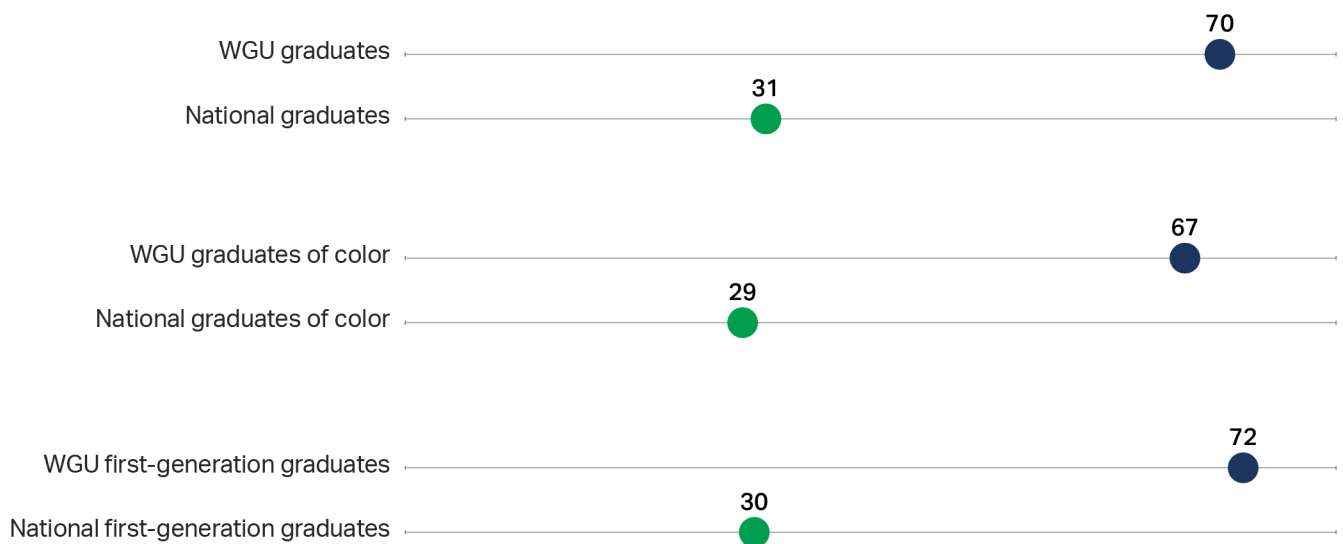
For most WGU alumni, the journey to a bachelor’s degree began — and stalled — at another university. While most of these students do report a high-quality educational experience for a significantly lower cost than their national peers, the monetary cost-benefit ratio is just one component of the overall “value” of a WGU education.

For many, affordability is complemented by Western Governors University’s commitment to expanding access to education for those who may not otherwise be able to achieve it. As of 2020, 82% of WGU students worked while completing their degree, and 69% were members of one or more traditionally underserved populations, such as students of color, first-generation college students or rural residents. This may explain why the overwhelming majority of WGU graduates, including alumni from these underserved populations, strongly agree Western Governors University was the perfect school for people like them, more than double the percentage of national graduates who say the same of their alma mater.

CHART 17

[Institution] was the perfect school for people like me.

% Strongly agree



Graduates of WGU qualitatively confirm this sentiment of multifaceted value. When asked to describe their experience in three words or short phrases, **the five most commonly cited descriptors were “affordable,” “challenging,” “flexible,” “convenient” and “efficient.”** Taken together with quantitative data presented in this report, it appears alumni from all walks of life agree Western Governors University is making good on its mission statement:

“We change lives
for the better by
creating pathways
to opportunity.”



Methodology

Results from this study are based on 1,238 web survey responses from Western Governors University alumni who received their undergraduate degree between 2016 and 2020. Gallup conducted the survey from Nov. 17-Dec. 12, 2021. Western Governors University provided the sample of alumni email addresses. Alumni were included in the study if the institution had an email address on file.

Results from the national study used for comparison purposes — the Gallup Alumni Survey — are based on 1,000 web surveys from respondents who received a bachelor's degree between 2016 and 2020, are aged 18 or older, have internet access, and live in one of the 50 U.S. states or the District of Columbia. Of these, 551 graduated from public universities and 368 graduated from private, not-for-profit universities. There were 293 graduates from the national sample who were age 25 or older at graduation. These data were collected over multiple fielding periods, including Aug. 22-Oct. 11, 2016; April 25-June 3, 2018; Oct. 21-Nov. 4, 2019; and Nov. 18-Dec. 1, 2021.

All reported margins of sampling error for the Gallup Alumni Survey include the computed design effects for weighting.

For results based on the total sample of 1,238 respondents with a bachelor's degree from Western Governors University, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the 1,000 respondents from the Gallup Alumni Survey with a bachelor's degree conferred between 2016 and 2020, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the 551 respondents from the Gallup Alumni Survey with a bachelor's degree from a public university conferred between 2016 and 2020, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the 368 respondents from the Gallup Alumni Survey with a bachelor's degree from a private, not-for-profit university conferred between 2016 and 2020, the margin of sampling error is ± 6.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For results based on the 293 respondents from the Gallup Alumni Survey with a bachelor's degree conferred between 2016 and 2020 when age 25 or older, the margin of sampling error is ± 5.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.



About Western Governors University

Western Governors University (WGU) is a competency-based, 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 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 graduation 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 132,000 students and more than 268,000 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 partners with higher education institutions to improve the employee experience and student experience through advice and analytics about the university culture, employee engagement among faculty and staff, and the curricular and programmatic experiences in which students engage.



GALLUP®

World Headquarters

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

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.888.500.8282

www.gallup.com