

# Course Design

## EDUCATOR TESTIMONIAL WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

**COURSE:** Natural Science undergraduate course: 3,000 students annually

**USED SINCE:** 2011

**SUMMARY:** Western Governors University (WGU) wanted to improve student engagement and performance by making several changes to their Natural Sciences course: improve interactivity, update the course format and modernize the online log-in process.

### UNIVERSITY PROFILE:

Western Governors University (WGU) is a non-profit online university offering competency-based degree programs in a wide variety of subject areas. Serving more than 30,000 students from all 50 states, the university opens its doors to adult learners who need flexibility in achieving their own educational and career goals, "allowing individuals to fit their education into their lives, not the other way around."

### What challenge or problem did you want Pearson's course design services to solve?

Based on feedback from both students and other stakeholders, WGU wanted to make the following changes to the Natural Sciences course:

- Use a mix of learning resources to engage students (feedback showed that the content and concepts of the Natural Science program were on-track, but that the textbased program was too focused on reading, and that there was not enough direction given on which areas of content required extra focus).
- Fix the access issues (students reported obstacles in accessing their online platform, to the extent that many stopped visiting the site altogether).
- Diversify the learning assets to support, and facilitate learning for all students (students of diverse learning styles stated they were not able to take advantage of learning tools and delivery methods that accounted for their unique needs and preferences)

In short, lack of interactivity, an outdated course format, and an inefficient online log-in process were hindering not only student engagement, but student performance as well.

### How did you work with Pearson to develop your course?

As the course had an existing framework of competencies, WGU opted to continue using a Pearson eText while improving access to and delivery of concepts and content. The planning and implementation of the project involved numerous internal and external stakeholders, working closely with Pearson. WGU held a number of student focus groups to obtain student feedback and input about the direction of the redesign, which further helped to inform the design process. The entire process, from initial discussion to live launch, took about one year.

Pearson tapped into an extensive collection of science learning resources and over 250 unique digital assets to build a program that was appropriate and effective for all learning styles. Working closely with WGU, Pearson included diagnostic tools in each learning module of the resource, giving students the ability to self-check their progress along the way. Searchable analytics were built into the course, allowing WGU to provide valuable data on student engagement. Pearson's technology team created audio podcast assets for students, enabling them to learn science on-the-go. The new virtual learning

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environment was built to be versatile and adaptable enough that WGU could alter various elements in times of growth or change. The new program also featured a dynamic entry into the content, allowing students to accelerate as necessary, while retaining the familiar linear structure that many expect from a science course. The entire finished product was rolled out with enough time built in to allow faculty members and mentors to explore and become familiar with the program. An extensive communications plan delivered the details of the program and launch to the student and faculty populations. Students who were familiar with the existing program were given the option to continue using it for the duration of the course, but most chose to move to the newly redesigned program because of its appealing and user friendly benefits.

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## The newly redesigned WGU Natural Science course now features:

- Interactive media/tutorials
- Upgraded interactive e-texts (with note taking, highlighting, bookmarking capabilities and more)
- 250 unique digital assets
- Audio podcasts, giving the student increased mobility without losing engagement
- Faculty recorded webinars
- Ability to accommodate ongoing updates
- Versatility for launch in any LMS
- Streamlining of all learning resources in one place, with a single log-in

## What benefits have you seen from using Pearson's course design services?

The first cohort of students completed the redesigned course in the spring of 2012. Early results are promising, in regards to student learning, and student feedback. Early qualitative data shows that student engagement is significantly improved from the previous



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iteration, coupled with a decrease in negative student feedback. Early student performance metrics look encouraging as well. The new virtual learning environment is functioning to the needs of the faculty and the students at WGU, and students are benefiting from the accommodation of multiple learning modalities within the program.

With the addition of audio and video assets, students are no longer locked into their computers for text-based learning, but can learn in a mobile environment, which will help engagement and retention in the longer term. Engaging virtual attributes bring course concepts to life for students in a dynamic environment. For example, a virtual "science museum" allows students to interactively tour their course, as one might tour an actual science museum, without ever leaving home. A streamlined single log-in means students are no longer struggling to access the program, but can sign on easily from within the framework of their existing WGU account.

