



**WGU** 

| **GALLUP**<sup>®</sup>

# Great Jobs, Great Lives — Gallup<sup>®</sup> Study of Recent Western Governors University Alumni

**WGU ALUMNI OUTCOMES REPORT 2019**

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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. Conventional outcomes do not adequately reflect the missions of higher education institutions. They fail to address some of the primary reasons students attend college: not only to obtain a good-paying job — but to follow a fulfilling career path that allows them to make meaningful, lifelong contributions to society.

Since 2014, Gallup has surveyed a nationally representative sample of more than 75,000 college graduates to assess their post-collegiate well-being and workplace engagement and identify links between these outcomes and their undergraduate experiences. This study — the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey — 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' college experiences and outcomes and compare them with results from the national study. This gives university leaders insight into where their institution is excelling and where they have opportunities for improvement.

Many institutions across the country are applying findings from the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey 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 that research from the national study — coupled with results from their school specifically — can help university leaders understand how undergraduate experiences relate to alumni's holistic success after college.

## WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY STUDY

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

The Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index measures the important aspects of a life well-lived. Based on decades of Gallup global research, the index employs 10 questions that measure well-being in five, interrelated elements:

**Career 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 examines the populations they serve and those populations’ emotional connection to the organizations. This research measures what drives 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 2018 with college graduates nationally and graduates of private not-for-profit and public universities. To ensure comparability among these groups, only alumni who graduated between 2013 and 2018 are included in the comparison groups from the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey national database. Since WGU serves many nontraditional graduates, the report also compares WGU alumni with nontraditional alumni nationally (2013-2018) who, for the purposes of this report, graduated at age 25 or older.

Because of the university’s nontraditional model, WGU alumni, with an average age of 43, are substantially older than college graduates nationally (30) but similar to nontraditional college graduates in the national database (average age of 40). Approximately six in 10 WGU graduates are female, similar to graduates of private not-for-profit universities but a higher percentage than college graduates from other comparison groups. WGU graduates are also more likely than their comparison group peers to be white.

### Graduate Comparison Groups (2013-2018)

|                                     | Mean Age  | Female     | First-Generation College Students | Non-White  |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>WGU ALUMNI</b>                   | <b>43</b> | <b>63%</b> | <b>61%</b>                        | <b>17%</b> |
| Graduates Nationally                | 30        | 53%        | 35%                               | 34%        |
| Public Universities                 | 29        | 48%        | 36%                               | 36%        |
| Private Not-for-Profit Universities | 27        | 62%        | 23%                               | 25%        |
| Nontraditional Graduates            | 40        | 49%        | 51%                               | 38%        |

## Key Findings

44%

Forty-four percent of WGU graduates are engaged in their work, meaning they are **emotionally connected** to and **energized** by the work that they do.

79%

Seventy-nine percent of WGU graduates are employed full time for an employer — **significantly higher** than the employment rate of nontraditional graduates (who completed their degree at age 25 or older) nationally (63%) and other national comparison groups of college graduates.

1/3

A third of WGU graduates strongly agree they have the ideal job for them, compared with about a quarter of their peers nationally.

5

In all areas of their well-being (career, financial, social, community and physical), WGU graduates are more likely than their peers nationally to be thriving, but particularly so in the areas of career and financial well-being.

72%

About three-quarters of WGU graduates (72%) strongly agree their degree was worth the cost — nearly double the percentage of college graduates nationally. Perhaps relatedly, **WGU graduates borrowed about half of what college graduates nationally borrowed** to complete their degree.

2

Two key experiences define the WGU education: having a mentor who encourages students to pursue their goals and dreams (67% of WGU alumni strongly agree that they did) and having a job or internship while enrolled at the institution that allows students to apply what they are learning in their curriculum (81% of WGU alumni did).

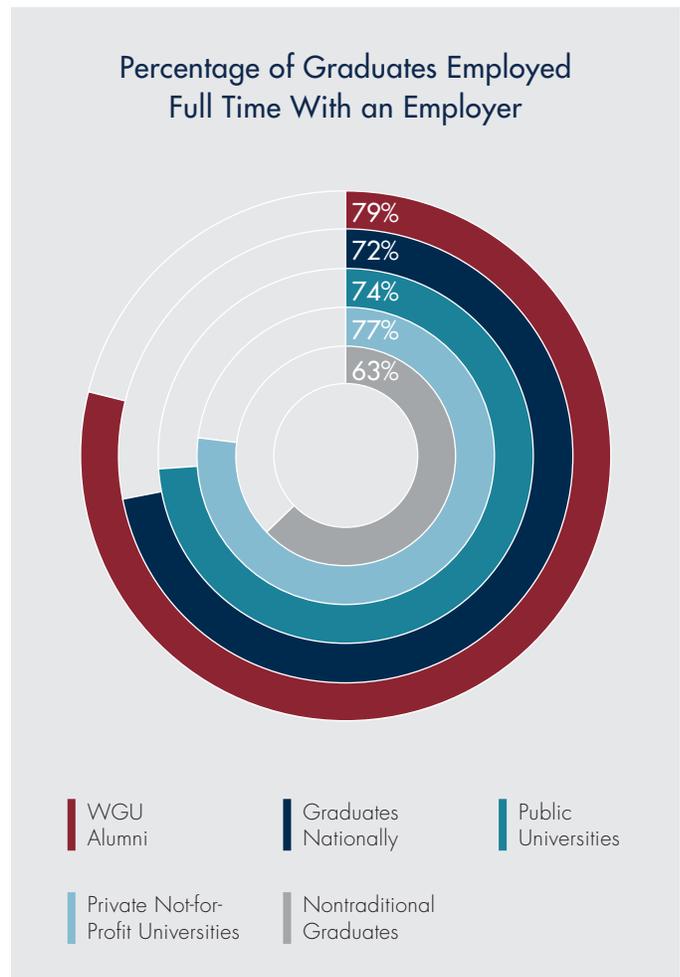
## WGU Prepares Graduates to Succeed in Their Careers

### WGU GRADUATES BOAST HIGH RATES OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

About eight in 10 recent WGU graduates (79%) report that they are employed full time for an employer, surpassing the full-time employment rate of all their comparison group peers other than those who graduated from private not-for-profit institutions. The starkest difference exists between WGU and nontraditional graduates — the percentage of WGU graduates who are employed full time by an employer exceeds that of nontraditional graduates nationally by 16 percentage points.

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

WGU graduates’ positive employment outcomes extend beyond a high rate of full-time employment. They are also engaged in their jobs. Forty-four percent of recent WGU graduates are engaged at work, surpassing the workplace engagement of graduates in each of the comparison groups.

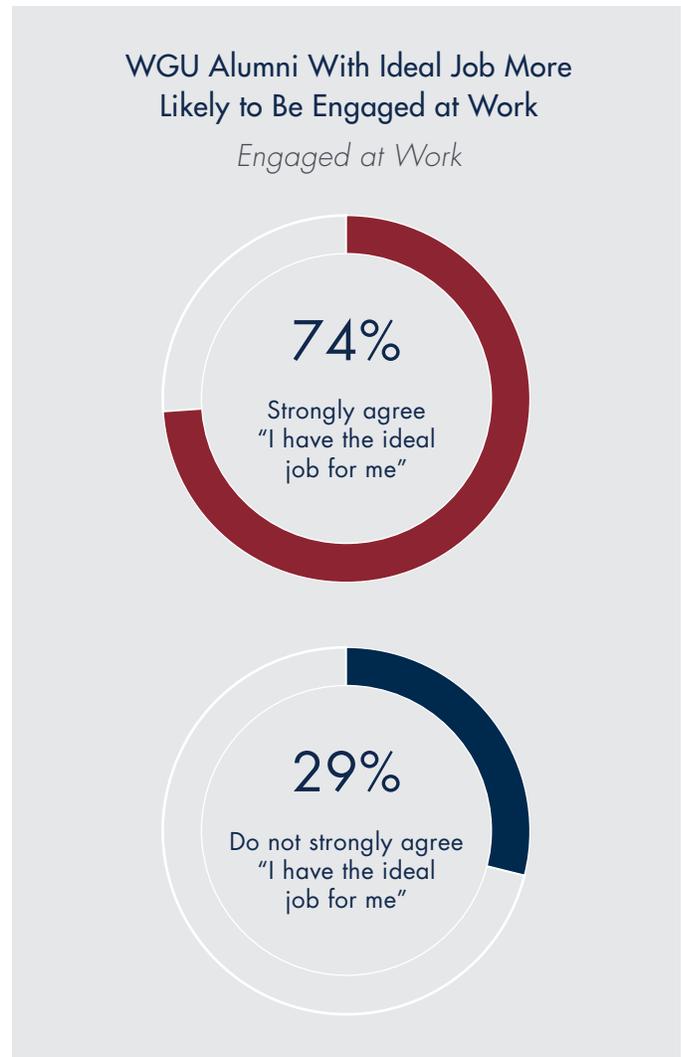


### Workplace Engagement



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. A third of WGU graduates (33%) strongly agree that they have the ideal job for them — higher than the percentage of graduates nationally (23%) and graduates from public (23%) private not-for-profit (24%) universities and nontraditional graduates (24%) who say the same. And of the 33% of WGU graduates who strongly agree that they have their ideal job, 74% are engaged at work. Just 29% of graduates who do not strongly agree that they have their ideal job are engaged.



**Percentage of Employed Graduates Who Strongly Agree “I have the ideal job for me”**

**33%**

**WGU ALUMNI**

23%

Graduates Nationally

23%

Public Universities

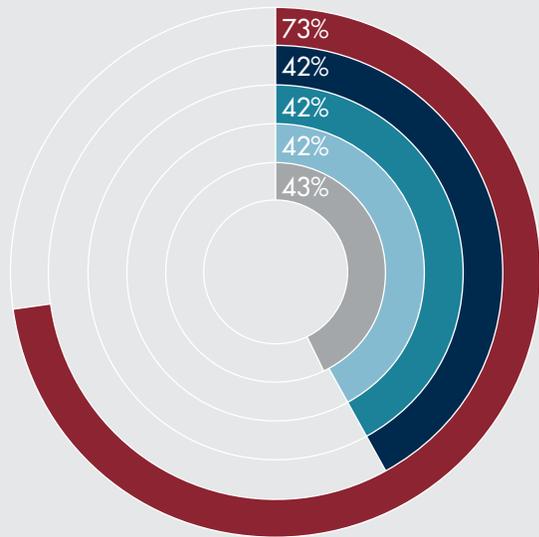
24%

Private Not-for-Profit Universities

24%

Nontraditional Graduates

### Current Work Completely Related to Undergraduate Major



Nearly three-quarters of WGU graduates (73%) 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 (42%), graduates of public (42%) and private not-for-profit (42%) universities and nontraditional graduates (43%).

The high percentage of WGU alumni who are working in jobs completely related to their undergraduate studies is significant because nearly half (49%) of these WGU graduates are engaged at work. By comparison, fewer graduates who are in jobs that are “somewhat” or “not at all” related to the field they studied are currently engaged in their job (31% and 10%, respectively). The 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 provides specialized training to people already in their career that can help them advance in their current field.

### WGU Alumni Whose Current Work Is Related to Degree More Likely to Be Engaged at Work

*% engaged in their work, by how related their current job is to their studies at WGU*



## Career Preparation and Well-Being Linked to Key WGU Experiences

The positive workforce and engagement 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 — students having had an influential mentor and a job or internship that was related to their curriculum.

As a university, WGU prioritizes mentoring relationships between its faculty and students, pairing each student with a faculty mentor who helps guide them throughout their academic program. In fact, 67% of WGU graduates strongly agree that during their time at WGU, they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams.

### Mentorship and Internship Experiences

|  | WGU ALUMNI | Graduates Nationally | Public Universities | Private Not-for-Profit Universities | Nontraditional Graduates |
|--|------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Had mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams (% Strongly agree)              | 67%        | 35%                  | 35%                 | 41%                                 | 36%                      |
| Had a job/internship that allowed me to apply what I was learning in the classroom (% Yes) | 81%        | 58%                  | 59%                 | 65%                                 | 50%                      |

The percentage of WGU graduates who had these meaningful mentoring relationships nearly doubles that of graduates nationally (35%), graduates from public universities (35%) and nontraditional graduates (36%). Even compared with private not-for-profit universities (41%) — the next-highest comparison group — WGU graduates are 26 percentage points more likely to strongly agree that they had a mentor who motivated 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 three-fifths of graduates nationally (58%) and graduates of public universities (59%) — along with 65% of private not-for-profit university graduates and 50% of nontraditional graduates — had the same experience. The high percentage of WGU students who had relevant jobs or internships could explain, at least in part, the high percentage of graduates who are employed full time for an employer (79%).

## WGU Graduates Thriving in Their Well-Being

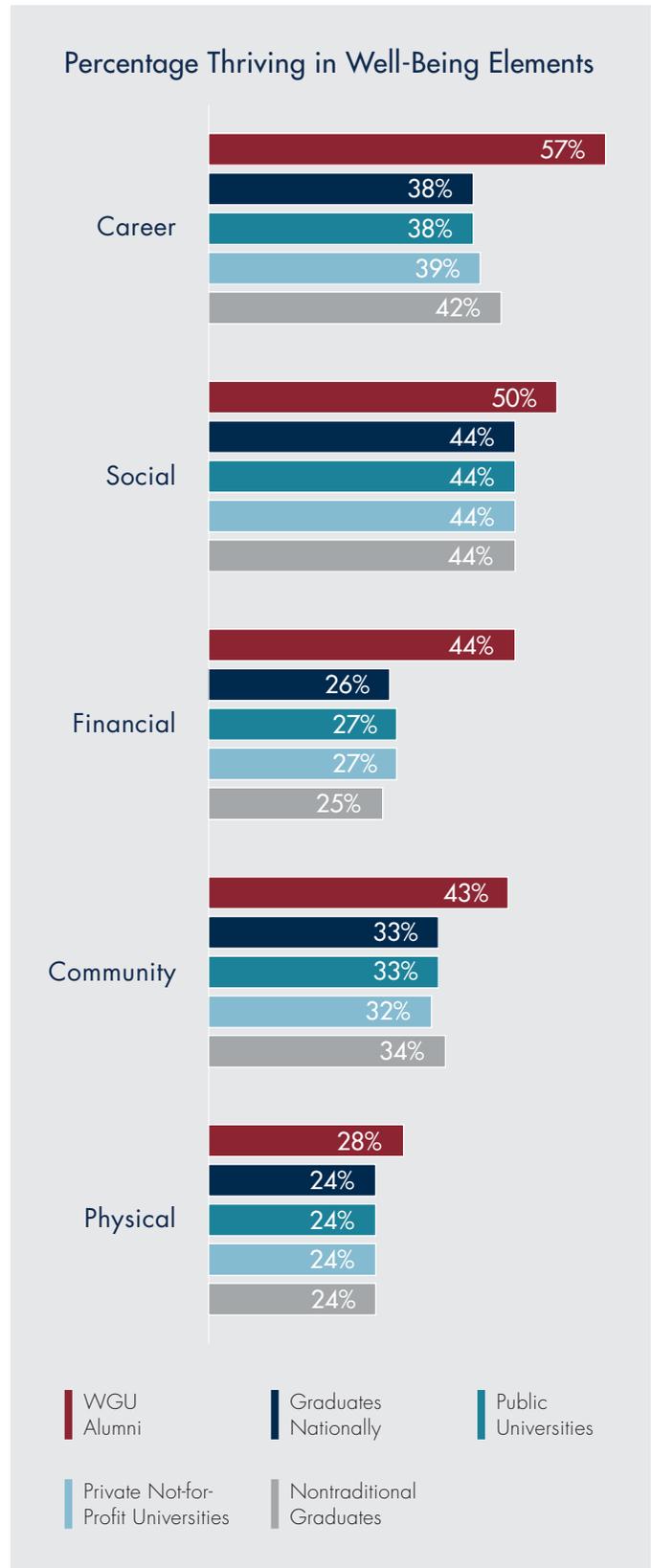
WGU graduates lead well-rounded lives after graduation, excelling in all facets of their well-being. In fact, they are more likely than graduates nationally, public and private not-for-profit university graduates, and nontraditional graduates to be thriving in their career, social, financial, community and physical well-being.

WGU graduates are particularly likely to be thriving in career well-being (57%), surpassing their peers in the percentage thriving in this element by 18 percentage points, on average. This suggests that WGU graduates enjoy what they do every day and find ways each day to learn or engage in something that interests them.

WGU graduates' strong career well-being comes as no surprise given the high percentage 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 percent of WGU graduates who are engaged at work are also thriving in career well-being, and 64% of WGU graduates in jobs completely related to their undergraduate studies are thriving in career well-being.

Financial well-being is about more than a bank account balance — it's about having the financial resources for things individuals want to do while also managing financial stress. In this element, WGU graduates surpass their peers with 44% 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 graduates in the comparison groups 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 (34%) are also thriving in community well-being.

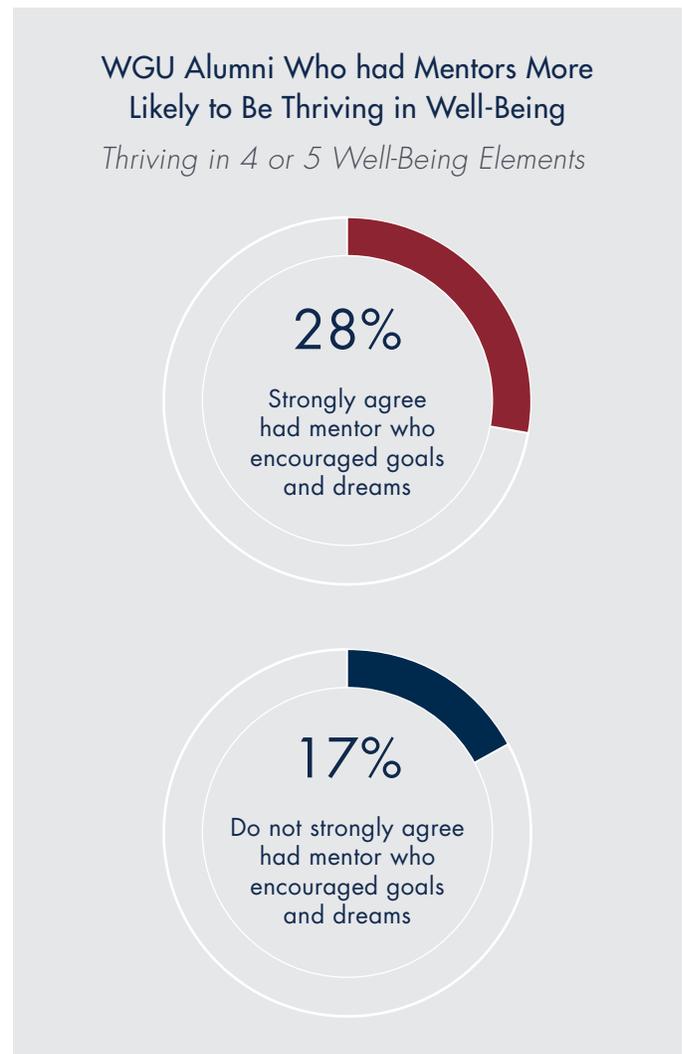


### Number of Thriving Well-Being Elements

|               | WGU ALUMNI | Graduates Nationally | Public Universities | Private Not-for-Profit Universities | Nontraditional Graduates |
|---------------|------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Four Elements | 15%        | 8%                   | 8%                  | 8%                                  | 7%                       |
| Five Elements | 9%         | 5%                   | 4%                  | 5%                                  | 6%                       |

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 about double the percentage of graduates in the comparison groups. Moreover, the number of WGU alumni thriving in all five well-being elements also outpaces graduates in each of the comparison groups.

WGU alumni who had key experiences as undergraduates are now more likely to be thriving in their well-being and employed in jobs related to their studies. For example, WGU graduates who strongly agree that they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams are 11 percentage points more likely than those who do not strongly agree they had a mentor to be thriving in four or five well-being elements.



## WGU Alumni Rate Their Experience Highly

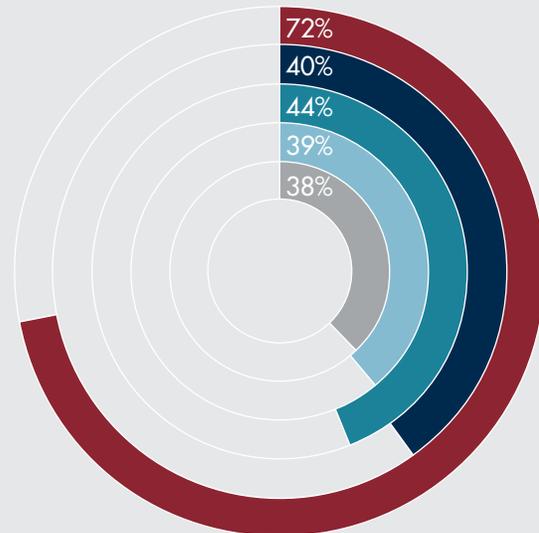
Likely in part because of their positive workforce outcomes and well-rounded lives after graduation — both bolstered by key experiences during their time as students — WGU alumni rate the university very positively. These graduates see the value in the education they received and, in turn, promote the university to others and remain emotionally attached to their alma mater.

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

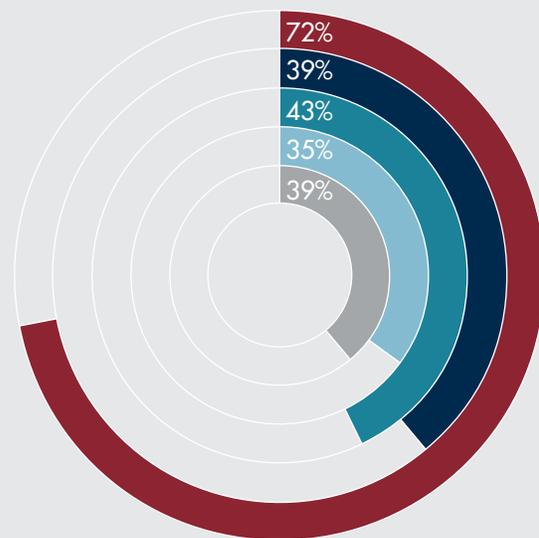
About seven in 10 WGU graduates (72%) strongly agree that their education was worth the cost. The percentage of WGU alumni who hold this view outpaces the percentages of graduates from the comparison group schools. WGU graduates are, on average, 32 percentage points more likely than graduates from the comparison group schools to strongly agree that their education was worth the cost.

Differences in how these groups perceive the value of their education are likely partially attributable to dramatic differences in the cost of attendance. On average, WGU alumni report that they took out \$10,691 in student loans to complete their undergraduate degree. Conversely, graduates of private not-for-profit universities and nontraditional graduates report that they took out more than \$20,000 in student loans. Graduates nationally took out \$19,436, and public university graduates took out an average \$16,796 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.

My education from [Institution name] was worth the cost (% Strongly agree)



Extremely likely to recommend [Institution name] to family, friends or colleagues



Additionally, nearly three-quarters of WGU graduates (72%) say they are extremely likely to recommend the university to their family, friends and colleagues — far outpacing graduates of comparison group institutions. For example, less than half of public university graduates (43%) — the next-highest group to WGU graduates — are extremely likely to recommend their alma mater.

## 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. More than seven in 10 WGU graduates (72%) strongly agree that WGU was the perfect school for people like them, surpassing — by a 36-point average — the percentages of their comparison group peers who hold the same view.

|  | WGU ALUMNI | Graduates Nationally | Public Universities | Private Not-for-Profit Universities | Nontraditional Graduates |
|--|------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| [Institution name] was the perfect school for people like me | 72%        | 36%                  | 36%                 | 35%                                 | 36%                      |
| I can't imagine a world without [Institution name]           | 37%        | 30%                  | 32%                 | 34%                                 | 23%                      |
| Strongly agree with both items measuring alumni attachment   | 36%        | 24%                  | 25%                 | 27%                                 | 19%                      |

More than a third of WGU alumni (37%) strongly agree that they cannot imagine a world without WGU. By comparison, 30% of graduates nationally say the same of their alma mater, as do 32% of public university and 34% of private not-for-profit university graduates. Twenty-three percent of nontraditional graduates 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 36% of WGU graduates who are emotionally attached to WGU is nine percentage points higher than the next comparison group — graduates of private not-for-profit universities (27%). Fewer graduates nationally (24%), graduates of public universities (25%) and nontraditional graduates (19%) strongly agree with both statements about their alma mater.

## Methodology

Results from this study are based on 2,400 survey responses from Western Governors University (WGU) alumni who graduated between 2013 and 2018. The survey was conducted Dec. 17, 2018-Jan. 16, 2019. 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 Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey — are based on web surveys, with a random sample of 1,664 respondents who have a bachelor's degree or higher, graduated between 2013 and 2018, are aged 18 and older, have internet access, and are living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey 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 Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey online.

The Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey 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 age 18 and older U.S. bachelor's degree or higher population.

All reported margins of sampling error for the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey 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  $\pm 3.4$  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  $\pm 4.5$  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  $\pm 5.9$  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  $\pm 5.7$  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 116,000 students and more than 138,000 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](http://www.gallup.com)**