

Equalizing Access to Higher Education

Helping educators deliver opportunity through connectivity



The Customer



Western Governors University (WGU),
the nation's largest online university

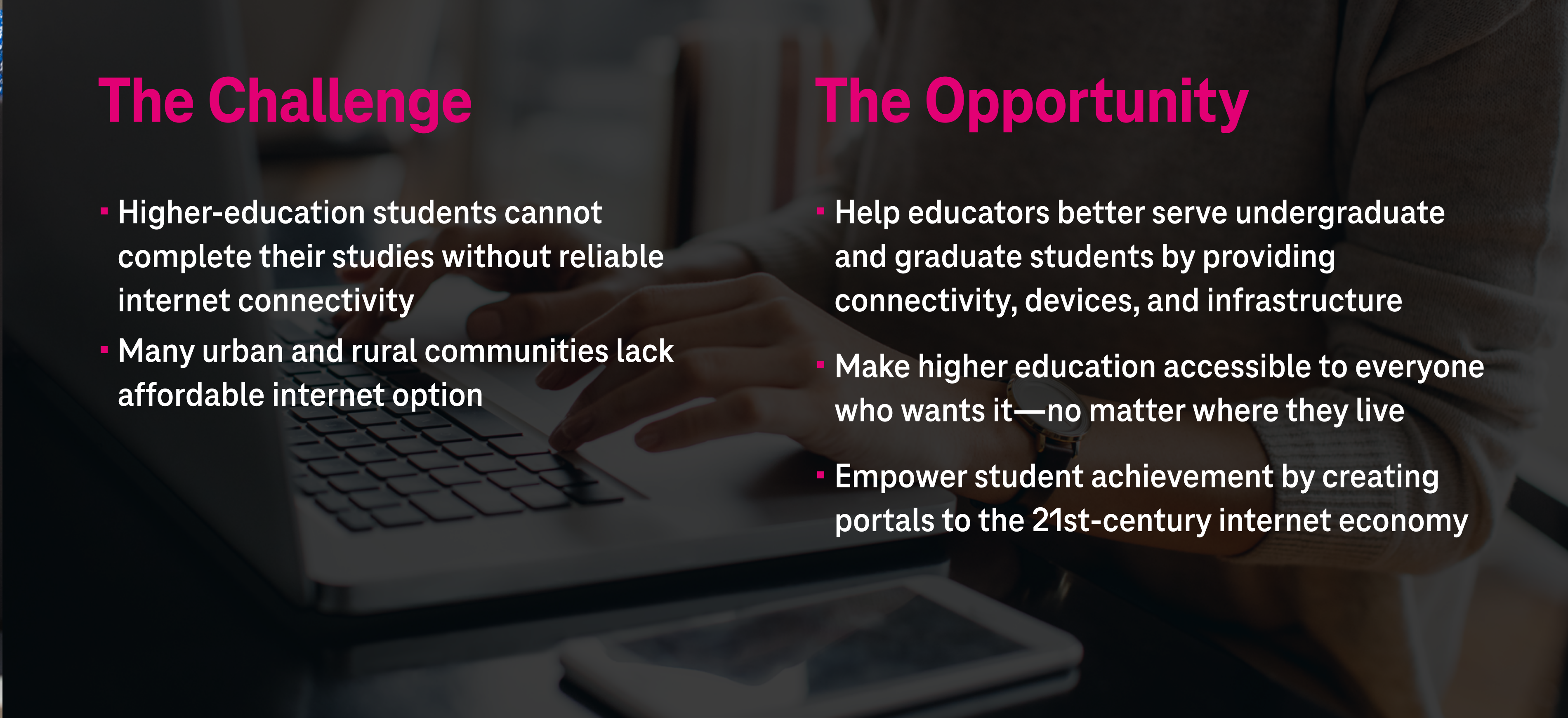


The Challenge

- Higher-education students cannot complete their studies without reliable internet connectivity
- Many urban and rural communities lack affordable internet option

The Opportunity

- Help educators better serve undergraduate and graduate students by providing connectivity, devices, and infrastructure
- Make higher education accessible to everyone who wants it—no matter where they live
- Empower student achievement by creating portals to the 21st-century internet economy



Overview

T-Mobile support for WGU's Nationwide Online Access Initiative provides the coverage, capacity, and devices needed to empower students to participate in higher education online.

- Higher-education students cannot complete their studies without reliable internet connectivity
- Many urban and rural communities lack affordable internet options
- Make higher education accessible to all and help educators better serve students through connectivity, devices, and infrastructure



01 Assess

Creating equity in Higher Ed

Up to 50 million Americans lack the reliable broadband service essential to access economic opportunities, distance learning, jobs, and even civic engagement in the 21st century.

COVID-19 has shined a light on this problem. Approximately 20% of college students in a *Communication Research study* report difficulty maintaining access to technology, including internet connectivity and functioning devices. Students of lower socioeconomic status and students of color disproportionately experienced hardships.

An Ed Trust-West *study* found that in California alone, more than 102,000 California college students from lower income households (14%) and 145,000 college students of color (13%) may lack internet access. Also, more than 109,000 students from lower income households (15%) and nearly 134,000 students of color (12%) may lack access to a device to engage in distance learning.

The *disparities* are more pronounced with rural and urban populations than in suburban areas, where reliable broadband access is more publicly available.

Western Governors University (WGU) wrestles with this challenge every day. Founded nearly 25 years ago by the governors of 19 states, the school has grown into the nation's largest online university, with 130,000 graduate and undergraduate students attending classes virtually and 200,000 alumni.



An alternative to traditional education

WGU's founders created the university to offer an alternative to a traditional education that has failed many learners, including adult returning students. At WGU, 70% of students identify with one or more of four underserved populations: first-generation college students, low-income households, people of color, or residents of rural areas.

WGU students are also untraditional because their average age is 37, and most attended—but did not complete—college. Many work full time and have families. All are attracted to WGU because the school offers the promise of an affordable, high-quality education that can change their lives.

WGU's philosophy and approach may explain why its enrollment has increased by 7% while that of traditional higher education institutions is down by 15%.



“ The internet changes the nature of education. You don't have to build the campuses and classrooms. High-speed connectivity is one of the easiest ways to provide access to higher education in a way we couldn't before. Every institution should invest heavily in expanding connectivity and access. ”

— Scott Pulsipher, President,
Western Governors University

02 Create

What's at stake at WGU

WGU's mission goes beyond offering affordable college classes. It is committed to providing students with access to opportunities and a path to a better life.

The university built its entire curriculum and reputation on the results it drives for students. For example, WGU proudly reports that graduates see an average salary increase of more than \$11,000 within two years of graduation. And survey data showing that 97% of employers say WGU grads meet or exceed their expectations.

To prepare students for successful careers, the school's curriculum focuses on four high-demand fields: K-12 teaching and education, nursing and healthcare, information technology, and business. WGU's more than 60 degree programs are designed to fit a high-growth, highly rewarding career path.



COVID-19 forced Eulanda, from St. Louis, Missouri, to quit her job because she feared getting infected at work or during her daily commute and then infecting her asthmatic son.

The situation threatened to derail her work toward an IT degree that she hoped would change her family's life. Eulanda was struggling to juggle household bills—including broadband fees.

“No one should have to choose between keeping the lights on or keeping Wi-Fi,” she said.

That was a choice she didn't have to make. WGU's Online Access Scholarship covered the cost of broadband internet in her home.

The importance of increasing graduation rates

But the key to fulfilling the school's mission is finding ways to help students who are busy juggling jobs, family, and other responsibilities to complete their studies.

Every university is concerned about graduation rates. Under ideal conditions, just **59.8%** of full-time students attending traditional universities complete their undergraduate studies within six years. WGU's completion rates are difficult to compare, since the Department of Education only counts first-time, full-time students and excludes the non-traditional, returning students that comprise 95% of WGU's student body. However, the school projects its six-year graduation rate for undergraduate students will be 52% in 2021, and it has set a goal of 65% by 2025.

To reach this objective, WGU helps students overcome challenges that can interrupt their studies.

In 2020, one challenge was the pandemic, which hit students hard. A significant number of those who had relied on work computers or office internet to attend classes and complete their coursework lost their jobs and broadband access, at the same time. That made it difficult to stay in school.

The Online Access Scholarship

In response, WGU created a \$1 million Online Access Scholarship fund to keep students in school by underwriting the cost of broadband access and devices needed to carry on with classes.

The program, originally designed to help about 1,000 students, has expanded and is available to both existing and prospective students. And Online Access Scholarship awardees may also qualify for a Resiliency Grant, a needs-based tuition scholarship which helps students pay for school.

“ We won't rest until every American who wants access to quality, cognitively based education online, available 24/7, gets it. ”

— Tonya Drake, Chancellor, WGU Washington

03 Succeed



Solving education equity challenges with connectivity

WGU sought out T-Mobile for Education after learning of its commitment to supporting K–12 education through its [Project 10Million initiative](#), which offers eligible K–12 households 100GB of data per year and a free mobile hotspot for five years. Project 10Million also allows participating school districts to apply the value of the free program toward additional data plans based on specific students' needs. And while Project 10Million is not a higher-education initiative, WGU felt it demonstrates T-Mobile has a deep commitment to equity in education.

Together, WGU and T-Mobile for Education created a program tailored to WGU students' needs to provide broadband and device resources, bring about systemic change, and bridge the gap between talent and opportunity.

Ashley started college in Austin but was forced to drop out when she moved home to rural Texas to be with her family after the birth of her baby.

The problem: There was little to no internet access where her family lived in Woodville, Texas.

After communicating her situation to WGU, the school awarded Ashley its first Online Access Scholarship. Within minutes of a technician's arrival at the family's rural home, Ashley had high-speed internet access and could resume her education.

Successfully stretching budgets

The WGU program is extensive and significantly helps stretch the university's investment in the scholarship program. The involvement of T-Mobile has already helped WGU double the number of students supported by the Online Access initiative. As part of its commitment, T-Mobile is working with WGU to deliver free hotspot devices and unlimited service to 2,000 WGU students to give them high-speed internet access at home.

T-Mobile is uniquely qualified to help WGU connect its students. With the rapidly expanding capacity on its network, T-Mobile can deploy high-speed internet services in the most rural of communities, where no high-speed internet service existed before.

The T-Mobile network is built from the ground up for the next wave of innovation.

Superior customer satisfaction

T-Mobile has ranked highest in Business Wireless Customer Satisfaction by J.D. Power for four years in a row. The company's dedicated customer support team is committed to helping schools stay connected to their students when they need it most.

T-Mobile received the highest score among very small, small/medium, and large enterprise business wireless providers in the J.D. Power 2017–2020 U.S. Business Wireless Satisfaction Studies of customers' satisfaction with their current wireless provider. Visit [jdpower.com/awards](https://www.jdpower.com/awards).

“ The nature of education has forever changed. Yet students still face the challenges of battling for bandwidth at home, sharing limited data plans and even the prospect of intermittent or no internet connectivity. We won't stop until every student who needs wireless broadband has it. ”

**— Mike Katz, Executive Vice President,
T-Mobile for Business**

04

Envision



The WGU and T-Mobile partnership offers promise for the future

The WGU and T-Mobile joint effort has become a true partnership.

T-Mobile for Education is delivering connectivity that will help students complete their education, acquire better jobs, and change their lives. But the company also benefits from a relationship with a school system that is committed to tailoring its curriculum to meet the emerging needs of companies and industries.



Educating the future T-Mobile workforce

As WGU works with T-Mobile, both organizations are committed to identifying the kinds of IT and business skills needed in the coming years and collaborating in the development of a new curriculum that aligns with those skills.

Eventually, T-Mobile intends to create paid internship opportunities for WGU students and, ultimately, jobs for some of the school's graduates.

“ T-Mobile is an innovative employer that sees the nature of the future of work. The greater our partnership, the better our ability to identify skills and develop curriculum that aligns with that skill development. As these initiatives scale, T-Mobile and WGU will be at the forefront of redeveloping roles, skills and knowledge for the future. ”

— Scott Pulsipher, President,
Western Governors University

Stronger together

About WGU

The opportunities for collaboration only start there. WGU has become the nation's largest online university by creating partnerships with private and public sector organizations. As the school's connectivity partner, T-Mobile expects to play a role in future collaborations that require connectivity, infrastructure expertise, and investment.

Why? Because both organizations share a vision and recognize that they are stronger together.

About T-Mobile for Higher Education

T-Mobile is committed to higher education institutions, from urban campuses to rural colleges, to online universities like WGU, to help them navigate disruptive times and deliver on the future of learning. Our Higher Education program provides access and equity that forges opportunities for the workforce of the future, unlocks innovation with America's largest and 5G network, and solves connectivity challenges via a mutually beneficial partnership that minimizes cost and complexity.

To see what T-Mobile can do for your institution,
visit <https://www.t-mobile.com/HigherEd>
or call our Team of Education experts at [1-877-386-4246](tel:1-877-386-4246).





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