



WKU online programs ranked among nation's best

U.S. News & World Report has ranked Western Kentucky University among the top 55 Best Online Bachelor's programs – and No. 2 in Kentucky.

The 2023 rankings are calculated according to each program's engagement, services and technology, faculty credentials and training, and peer assessment. According to the report, "U.S. News chose factors that weigh how these programs are being delivered and their effectiveness at awarding affordable degrees in a reasonable amount of time."

"The fact that WKU is consistently ranked so highly among online degree programs across the United States is a testament to two factors: the high quality of instruction and stellar student support services," said Dr. Marko Dumančić, Western Kentucky University Assistant Provost of Faculty Development and Student Success.

"Our continued growth is in large part due to the intentional efforts of talented professionals across multiple offices: staff from WKU Online, Online Student Services, Online Tutoring Center, Library Services, The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, Distance Learning Testing Center, and many others," Dumančić said. "The staff's unceasing dedication to ensure WKU students get the support they need, no matter where they live, is invaluable."

Students have access to online support and resources, including academic support, online tutoring, online writing lab, success coaching, tech support, online testing, and other services to help them succeed.

WKU's Online MBA program earned recognition, ranking No. 1 in Kentucky and within the top 75 in the nation. WKU Online Master's in Education programs ranked No. 2 in Kentucky and within the top 90 in the nation. WKU was also recognized for additional rankings in the following categories: Online Bachelor's Programs for Veterans, Best Online Business Bachelor's Program, Best Online MBA Program for Veterans, and Best Online Education Programs for Veterans.

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WKU Office of Scholar Development celebrates \$1M+ earned in Gilman Scholarships for study abroad

With the conclusion of the most recent application cycle, WKU students have earned over \$1 million from the nationally competitive **Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program**. Recipients earn funding for international education, promoting the U.S. Department of State's goal of broadening the student population that studies and interns abroad.

Since the program's inception in 2001, 291 WKU students have earned \$1,155,000 in Gilman Scholarships toward study abroad. This success reflects the exceptional support students find in the **Office of Scholar Development (OSD)**. Prior to the office's establishment in 2008, only 7 students were awarded a Gilman Scholarship.

OSD mentors students applying for national scholarships to fund "academic extras" beyond what tuition covers. OSD helps Hilltoppers make more possible by increasing access to study abroad, research, professional experience and more.

To be eligible for the Gilman Scholarship, students must qualify for the Pell Grant, a federal need-based grant awarded to undergraduate students with exceptional financial need. As a result, the population of students representing WKU while studying abroad through **WKU Global** programs has diversified. Of WKU's Gilman Scholars, 43% were first-generation college students, 40% were students of color, and 8% were nontraditional college students.

"WKU students in these minority groups are given opportunities every day. However, without financial support and personalized encouragement, they can't take advantage of the opportunities sometimes go unmet," said Dr. Martha Sales, Dean of Students and Assistant Vice President for Student Life at WKU.

"This recognition highlights the resilience of these students," she said. "Because of this experience, students sharpen their view of themselves. They see themselves beyond their current circumstances and the categories they have been placed in. They expand their possibilities."



WKU experiences historic fall-to-spring retention increases

Western Kentucky University has again experienced record fall-to-spring retention rates among its undergraduate, degree-seeking students. In an email to campus on February 13, WKU President Timothy C. Caboni announced that the fall-to-spring retention rate for all undergraduate, degree-seeking students has reached 85.1%, the highest it has been since the university began tracking this data in 2010.

“The rate at which students continue their education with us, semester to semester and year to year, demonstrates continued progress toward our goal of an 80% first-year retention rate outlined in our strategic plan, *Climbing to Greater Heights*,” President Caboni stated in his [message to campus](#).

First-time, first-year students who were enrolled at WKU in the fall 2022 semester returned to the university this spring at a rate of 91.1%, President Caboni announced. This represents a 4.8 percentage point increase in just over half a decade, when retention for first-time, first-year students was 86.3% among the class that entered WKU in the fall of 2017. First-time underrepresented minority (URM) students returned at a rate of 90.8%, a gain of more than 10 percentage points since the 2017-2018 academic year.

President Caboni noted that successfully retaining students illustrates the dedication of WKU’s faculty and staff. “It is evidence of your commitment to provide an unparalleled academic experience for our students – from extraordinary instruction and hands-on application to residential life, campus engagement and more,” he shared in his email to campus.

The university’s Living Learning Communities (LLCs) also played a significant role in these increased retention rates. First-year students who participated in a Living Learning Community returned at a rate of 95.7%, compared to 89.6% of non-LLC participants. “These remarkable results demonstrate the efficacy of our commitment to a comprehensive approach to academic and social integration during the first year,” President Caboni noted. “Our continued and growing investments in Living Learning Communities provide students with immediate access to faculty with a shared academic interest, coupled with a supportive living environment and opportunities for academic and social engagement outside the classroom. We see the direct effects of these investments in their retention and success.”

Provost Bud Fischer highlighted the role that the university’s faculty and staff play in WKU’s retention success. “I am thrilled at WKU’s retention rates,” he said. “Our students are our top priority, and this is a clear indication that they feel supported, engaged and valued on our campus. We are committed to providing them with the opportunities they need to reach their goals, and I am thankful for the efforts of our faculty and staff to help our students succeed.”

WKU Forensics Team wins 2023 Kentucky State Championship

The **WKU Forensics Team** won the 2023 Kentucky Forensic Association State Tournament hosted by Owensboro Community and Technical College on February 24-25.

Senior Miles Morton of Sherman Oaks, California, was recognized with the Harlan Hamm Award, given to students for their leadership and excellence both in competition and in their academic endeavors and community service. This honor is bestowed on only four students in the state each season.

In the 13 speech categories, WKU students captured 10 state titles. Additionally, freshman Kole Ingram of Hindman, Kentucky, placed 3rd in Triathlon for his results across multiple events.

WKU also won International Public Debate (IPDA) team sweepstakes. Five WKU students won speaker awards in debate, including senior Miles Morton who was named the top speaker in IPDA Debate.

In recognition of these collective efforts, WKU topped the Large School Sweepstakes category in Individual Events and Debate and ultimately was crowned the Kentucky Forensics Association Grand Champion for the 31st consecutive year.

WKU Director of Forensics Ganer Newman was proud of the team’s results. “This was the first in-person State competition since the start of the pandemic. It was great to see the coaches and students from around the state working together to make the tournament a success. We are proud of the way the team represented WKU at State. Now we direct our attention to the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, the Debate Grand Prix, and the Asynchronous Speech Championship, before concluding our competitive season with the National Forensics Association Championship tournament in April.”

The team will now begin preparations for national competitions.

