

Grand Canyon University accepted few credits and no degrees from Warren National University (and nothing from Kennedy-Western University)

by Dave FEATHERLY

In an attempt to set the record straight about any potential that former students of Kennedy-Western University or Warren National University had to transfer either credits or degrees to the legitimate, reputable, respected and accredited Grand Canyon University (GCU) of Phoenix, Arizona, I sought an interview with officials at GCU who could answer my questions on the subject.

I had two main purposes in talking with the folks at GCU. First, I did not want damaging rumors hanging over their head if they did not accept credits or degrees from an unaccredited diploma mill and, second, if somehow they did and could and would legitimately accept those credits or degrees, I wanted to inform other former students of K-WU and/or WNU who were left in the lurch by the sudden cessation of those two Cheyenne-based businesses. I thought we (Wyoming) owed at least that much to those who were duped by the diploma mills that were allowed to operate so long in our midst.

I had asked, by e-mail, to talk with Brian Mueller, the CEO of GCU. My request was answered rather quickly by Bill Jenkins, whose title is Executive Director, Office of Institutional Advancement. He pointed out that Mueller was quite new to GCU and would be out of the office the next few days and suggested a better interview would be with GCU President Dr. Kathy Player and GCU Registrar Kate Dillon Hogan.

I accepted the offer of those two officials and promptly at the prearranged time, 10:00 am PDT on Friday, August 21, a call came in with all three of the GCU people on the line at their end.

I introduced myself and explained my four year quest to rid Wyoming of degree sellers and told them about my experience with the subject and shared with them my views about the history of Kennedy-Western University and Warren National University. I told them, in case they were unaware, of the former students' litigation against those two outfits, filed in Laramie County District Court here in Cheyenne. I told them how Wyoming, more specifically Cheyenne, had become a safe haven for these rascals and that, after four years of shining a bright spotlight on them, all were now gone. They are not all gone from the national landscape, just from Wyoming.

The purpose of my call was to determine if, in any way, Grand Canyon University had formed an alliance with this disgraced operation. I asked the question: Did GCU accept credits or degrees earned at K-WU or WNU toward degrees at GCU? I then read them the words in the WNU "**Petition for Contested Case Proceeding**," in which the Wyoming Department of

Education had been told by WNU: **"The other University will provide the opportunity for some units earned with WNU to transfer as credit into their program. This school, Grand Canyon University has dedicated a team of advisers to assist WNU students through their enrollment process. In the first 90-minutes that this opportunity was made available to WNU students, Grand Canyon University received fourteen inquiries from WNU students."**

Dr. Player wanted to explain what had transpired with the request WNU made to GCU to consider accepting credits earned at their unaccredited diploma mill toward a degree at accredited GCU. She said that WNU had made an open presentation, including providing the letter from Higher Learning Commission, North Central Association, the same accrediting agency GCU holds accreditation, which, to my knowledge, no one outside WNU had seen. I don't believe the WDOE had, because I asked them for a copy and they said they hadn't received it because WNU had withdrawn their application before they were formally rejected. I had not seen the final letter from HLC.

Impressed by the candor and openness of WNU and concerned about the students who would be left hanging with the WNU closing, GCU offered students who were enrolled at WNU during the time of the "Chicago Project" (which was the application to HLC toward accreditation) to apply to GCU for consideration of acceptance of credits for transfer toward a degree from Grand Canyon University.

They wanted to make it clear that no credits earned from Kennedy-Western University and no degrees earned from Kennedy-Western University were considered transferrable. And only those credits (no degrees) "earned" at WNU during the time of the Chicago Project would be considered - not before.

I asked whether credits earned at an unaccredited diploma mill could be transferred to a university such as theirs that was accredited - whether HLC approved of such action - and was told they were allowed to do that. In fact, they named some other education, such as military-provided, that may be considered for transferrable credits.

I had recently been contacted by another former student of WNU who was not finished with a degree and had not been able to get a response from WNU for months. I thought this might be one legitimate place those credits could be considered. But, the Registrar told me the "window" of opportunity was closing - that any credits they determined transferrable to GCU had to come in for the fall semester, which was beginning less than two weeks from our conversation.

The presentation by WNU to GCU was made by a woman calling herself the "Chief Academic Officer," but it wasn't the one I interviewed at length. The one who traveled to GCU on behalf of Warren National University took credit for revising the curriculum and hiring Deans and Instructors but I believe that was done by the one I interviewed. (I have tried to contact her the evening this article is being written.)

Because the women from GCU believed the WNU representatives had been open, up front and truthful to them, I asked if they were told by the WNU folks that they (WNU) had posted on their website that students could transfer credits earned at WNU to Preston University, another unaccredited diploma mill.

They said they had not. Obviously, WNU was not quite as "open" as the GCU people wanted to believe they had been.

The GCU folks also seemed a bit surprised to learn that K-WU (the same operation as Warren National University, just with a different name) had amassed over \$43 million in revenue during the two year period of 2002 and 2003.

When all was said and done, the Registrar estimated that they had accepted credits for transfer from only a "handful" of former WNU students - perhaps a dozen in all. As I wrote earlier, GCU did not consider accepting any degrees toward a higher degree - from WNU or K-WU. They seemed a bit surprised to hear that WNU itself would not accept a bachelor's degree from an unaccredited diploma mill like itself toward a master's degree from WNU. The ultimate in hypocrisy.

It is a shame that Grand Canyon University was brought into this controversy. I believed them when they told me that their primary interest was the vast number of students out there who had not completed their degree pursuit - as worthless as the degree might be, many had paid their money to get one - and now realized that unless they could find an accredited university to accept transfer of their credits, or at least some of them - continuing toward a degree from an unaccredited diploma mill like Preston University would serve them no useful purpose.

I asked Dr. Player if GCU had accepted credits from any other unaccredited diploma mill and she said they had not. I inquired about Preston University and Newport International University, two other Wyoming degree sellers who are still peddling their paper but now from California addresses. I was told she was unfamiliar with both and knew for certain that GCU had not accepted any credits from those or any other diploma mill.

It seems GCU officials were impressed by the WNU presentation - and the HLC

letter that opined WNU did not have the financial stability to continue. Perhaps if GCU had researched the WNU operation deeper, they would have run as fast as they could from any connection to them.

In my opinion, it is unlikely that Grand Canyon University will again approve the transfer of credits from unaccredited diploma mills toward a degree from their reputable institution. It simply is not in their best interests to do so.

Rumors, innuendo and accusations posted on internet forums and blogs by anonymous posters to the contrary, there was no wholesale acceptance of transferred credits earned at WNU (and none earned at K-WU) by GCU. And, if it is permissible under their accreditation to accept limited transfer of credits earned at WNU, good for those former students of WNU. And good luck to them in their ongoing pursuit of a degree which they can use with any employer, unlike the WNU degree of which they may have been charged with a crime if they tried to use it in certain states.

The lawsuit filed in Laramie County (Wyoming) District Court by former students of Warren National University and Kennedy-Western University chugs along. Today, when I again sought the case file for review, I was told it remains in the judge's chamber. I reported awhile back that the defendants filed a Motion to Disqualify the judge to whom the case been assigned. Frankly, I thought the plaintiffs would beat them to that Motion. Either of the two remaining District Court Judges are more competent to hear this case.

As the case moves forward, the Cheyenne Herald will provide coverage of important happenings in the matter. Until then, this is likely to be the last coverage about the issue of degree sellers that once filled our streets like rats in Belfast.

Any former KW-U or WNU student who has debt for an education that was cut short by WNU closing may want to contact me by e-mail. If there are a number of former students who borrowed from the same lender(s), there may be a case for fraud or collusion against those lenders. They should have known they were putting people in debt for something with no value. If two or three lenders made the majority of these unscrupulous loans, it may be actionable. I am not a lawyer and am not offering legal advice. I will pass along any information provided here to the law firm handling the current lawsuit against K-WU and WNU. It will be their call as to whether a case can be made. They do not know I'm asking for input and have not assured me of any interest if a bunch of former students are being hounded by the same lender now, even though degrees could not be finished because of the WNU closing.