

# How Western Governors University Boosted Student ROI With DataCamp

Western Governors University (WGU) partnered with DataCamp for Business with the goal of making their Master of Science in Data Analytics degree (MSDA) accessible for students with or without STEM backgrounds. Learn how WGU blended DataCamp's interactive learning into its curriculum, yielding a 12% increase in student return on investment.



## INDUSTRY

Education

## FEATURES USED

Interactive exercises, Custom learning paths, SSO integration



## Summary —

WGU's mission is to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity. To make its Master of Science in Data Analytics (MSDA) degree inclusive for students with or without STEM backgrounds, WGU sought to redesign its program. Facing the challenge of teaching complex data topics to diverse communities, WGU partnered with DataCamp for Business to add interactive learning into their curriculum and help bridge the data fluency and foundational programming skills gaps for students without STEM backgrounds.

The MSDA program is, in total, 11 courses. Out of those 11 courses, WGU implemented DataCamp in 7. With over 2166 students completing DataCamp courses, WGU achieved an 89% adoption rate. By leveling the playing field and bridging programming skills gaps with DataCamp, WGU was able to increase student ROI by 12% and raise the 2-year graduation rate by 36%, further succeeding in opening pathways in data analytics education.

## Challenge —

In their quest to bring higher education to everyone, WGU set out to make the Master of Science in Data Analytics program inclusive for students coming from non-STEM backgrounds. However, this meant finding ways to teach complex topics to diverse communities without foundational programming and data fluency skills—all while staying within the program budget. WGU sought a scalable solution that offered hands-on, self-paced learning that would align with its competency-based framework.

## Results —

**Over 2166 students have completed learning on DataCamp, leading to an adoption rate of 89%. Blending DataCamp for Business into WGU's learning curriculum has contributed to a 12% increase in WGU's Student ROI and an increase in the 2-year graduation rate of 36%.**

## Solution —

Using DataCamp's **custom tracks feature**, WGU built 7 courses for WGU's MSDA program needs — **providing tailored learning paths aligned with WGU's competency-based framework**. The most popular technologies students learn include **Python, SQL, R, Tableau, and conceptual theory courses on data literacy and fluency**. Using SSO integration and working closely with DataCamp's Customer Success Manager ensured a **smooth rollout at WGU**.

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## Inside WGU's Ambitions to Make Higher Education Accessible in the United States

Access to quality higher education has long been a pressing issue in the United States, particularly in the realm of STEM. Traditional Bachelor and Master programs often carry high costs and are time-consuming, creating barriers, especially for underserved communities.

Western Governors University (WGU) was founded 25 years ago as an innovative response to these challenges, offering accredited online, competency-based degree programs with a flat term tuition mode.




**When WGU started, our mission was to create a high-value online education platform that could reach those who would never have an opportunity before to go to college; those who are the first in their families to get a degree; and those who live in the areas where education is not accessible. We wanted to improve their lives, family, and community relations through education.**

SCOTT ALLEN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, COLLEGE OF IT AT WGU

Instead of granting a diploma for completing a certain number of course hours, WGU ensures students are job-ready after graduation by aligning course competencies to in-demand job skills. Assessments are aligned to these competencies and tailored learning paths support student learning. WGU additionally assigns a program mentor and dedicated course instructors to help students gain competency. This approach helps students achieve mastery in the shortest possible timeframe and guarantees a high return on student investment.

First introduced in 2016, the Master of Science in Data Analytics (MSDA) program was created as a follow-up to the undergraduate degree in Data Management & Data Analytics. In 2020, WGU redesigned the program to make it more accessible for people without STEM backgrounds.

WGU faced the challenge of delivering an interactive online learning experience tailored to its students' needs and learning styles. They sought a hands-on data-science-focused learning solution that could be self-paced, engaging, and customized to varying backgrounds and simultaneously meet the program's budgetary requirements.





Many of our students, typically around their late 30s, are often in the middle of their careers and considering a change. They come from a variety of backgrounds – firefighters, nurses, or teachers, and are drawn to the promising field of data analytics. However, the absence of programming skills and fundamental data fluency creates barriers to their success in the Master's Program. Hence, tailored, self-paced learning becomes paramount to accommodate these diverse backgrounds.

SHEALAN PREAM, LEAD ACADEMIC PROGRAM MANAGER AT WGU

## Redesigning Master of Science in Data Analytics Degree for Accessibility at Scale With DataCamp

Western Governors University (WGU) partnered with DataCamp for Business to create a unique and accessible data analytics learning journey for its graduate students.

In close collaboration with DataCamp for Business, WGU addressed 3 major challenges when redesigning its MSDA program:

1. **Provide hands-on learning.** Previously, WGU partnered with text-only or video-only learning providers. With ambitions to make a standalone master's degree for students with or without STEM backgrounds, WGU required more learning modalities to help master complicated concepts. WGU was confident that DataCamp's interactive learning experience with bite-sized videos, interactive exercises, instant exercise feedback, and a vast catalog of courses for different skill levels would enrich their program and provide accessible, engaging, and self-paced learning.



Having students experience what we call 'hands-on keyboard' is vital to us. It's about offering a platform where students can alternate between learning and applying that knowledge, creating a rhythm of 'learn a little, do a little.' I believe this is a significant factor that led to the success of our partnership with DataCamp.

SHEALAN PREAM, LEAD ACADEMIC PROGRAM MANAGER AT WGU

2. **Meet the program's budgetary requirements while upgrading course quality.** DataCamp for Business offered a scalable and affordable all-inclusive pricing model that helped WGU keep the degree price accessible, add new learning modalities, and ensure high student ROI.



**When we saw DataCamp's price point – it was very attractive to us. Although we had one partner already at the undergraduate level capable of doing data science learning with these different learning modalities, it was much more expensive.**

ERIC LAGALLY, ACADEMIC DIRECTOR AT WGU

3. **Provide tailored learning paths aligned with WGU's competency-based framework.** Using DataCamp for Business **custom tracks feature**, WGU built 7 courses for their MSDA program, ranging from **Data Acquisition to Predictive Modeling, Data Mining to Representation and Reporting**, and more. The most popular technologies students learn include **Python, SQL, R, Tableau**, and **conceptual theory courses on data literacy and fluency**.



**DataCamp brought a strong alignment with our MSDA program redevelopment in 2020 and was a natural fit because we were already using it. All the required content was covered in DataCamp's catalog, and in 2020, we increased the amount of coverage of DataCamp in the program. Now 7 out of 11 courses are provided to students via DataCamp.**

ERIC LAGALLY, ACADEMIC DIRECTOR AT WGU

Western Governors University (WGU) has a unique structure in which students can enroll on the first day of every month, and the terms last for six months, so students are continuously progressing through their programs. **Working with DataCamp's Customer Success Managers and having scheduled calls with them was essential to ensure a smooth program rollout at WGU.**

  
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Having a customer success manager who schedules weekly or bi-weekly calls is essential because we can surface and resolve things quickly. That is a crucial part of how we work with any partner.

ERIC LAGALLY, ACADEMIC DIRECTOR AT WGU

WGU's MSDA Program serves 1000+ students each year, and to provide easy access to DataCamp courses at scale, **WGU enabled DataCamp's SSO integration**. It allowed WGU to automatically allocate licenses to students just in time when they started learning.

## Key Results

Using tailored learning paths, **2166 WGU students have completed learning on DataCamp**, leading to an **adoption rate of 89%**. Currently, **7 out of 11 WGU courses in the MSDA program are provided to students via DataCamp**.

Blending DataCamp's interactive learning into WGU's curriculum allowed the WGU team to dedicate more attention to supporting the student lifecycle, ensuring higher program completion rates. Introducing **DataCamp for Business has contributed to a significant increase in WGU's 2-year graduation rate by 36%**.

The collaboration with DataCamp for Business also **helped boost the 'Factored Graduate Return' (FGR) by 12 %** – a major metric that WGU tracks to showcase students' ROI. FGR stands for the student's increase in salary post-graduation, accounting for the remaining working years, time spent in the program, and the cost of the degree.



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