



# Western Governors University

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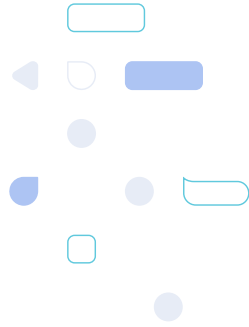
After evaluating a variety of online qualitative research tools, Western Governors University (WGU) selected Recollective to bring its research into the 21st century. With over a decade of solely performing focus groups over the phone, WGU sought to implement more flexible research options to provide deeper insights while accommodating for its students' and alumni's varying schedules.



“In the end, the way it was described to me, was that Recollective was built by software folks for researchers, not built by researchers because they were trying to solve a need, and that absolutely shows in the quality of the product. When I looked at all the other products out there they were missing features that Recollective had.”

- Tom Glover, Senior  
Research Analyst, Western  
Governors University

*Western Governors University's innovative competency-based academic approach allows individuals to fit their education into their lives, not the other way around. After determining that over the phone interviews were not an adequate way to collect the level of insights that they needed, Western Governors University began searching for a new online research tool that better fit into the busy lives of their students and alumni. The University has since utilized Recollective's flexible research environment to collect richer insights into the lives of their students and alumni, as the platform allows their students and alumni to participate in their Studies at their own convenience.*



# Background

Established in 1997, Western Governors University (WGU) is an online university for the 21st century. It was founded by the governors of 19 U.S. states and has since grown into a national university, serving more than 129,000 students in all 50 states.

WGU opens doors for working learners who need flexibility to achieve their education and career goals by offering a self-learning education model. In order to help their students succeed, WGU is constantly trying to discover new ways to improve the overall student experience.



# Challenge

As part of that initiative, WGU has always understood the importance of getting direct feedback from their students. From the beginning, this consisted of numerous qualitative student surveys conducted at various points during the students' programs. Over a decade ago qualitative research was added to compile the stories behind the numbers. Most of this qualitative work was done through the use of one-hour, phone-based focus groups. The challenge was that this approach was inconsistent with the online learning experience that the University provides and they were unable to collect the depth of insights they were hoping to gain due to the time constraints of the sessions. Being a large online university, WGU needed to find a tool that would allow them to conduct research to better understand the online student experience and give both their students and alumni from across the United States a voice.

WGU identified that the new tool they needed had to be online, allow for the continuous collection of data over a specified period of time and be able to fit into the lives of their busy students and alumni. More specifically, WGU needed to find a way to:

- Gain insight into the student experience from the student's first day through to the day they graduate and become an alumnus
- Understand how students are interacting with the university in the online environment
- Collect feedback on the current and new projects offered in various courses and degree programs from both students and recent alumni

In order to be able to collect a higher quality of feedback on their degree program offerings and the special projects being offered, WGU looked to find a way to speak with their students over a longer period of time than just the one-hour phone focus groups and interviews they were previously conducting. They were also looking for the ability to incorporate a wider variety of qualitative methods based on the specific topics of interest by the various areas of the university.

WGU's Qualitative Research Team then set out to find an online tool that would allow them to collect deeper insights using a method that was more consistent with the online learning environment they provided to their students.

# Solution

After evaluating a wide range of online qualitative community platforms with different in-platform tools available to researchers, WGU's Qualitative Research Team selected Recollective as their top choice for conducting online asynchronous qualitative research based on the wide variety of Task Types, the flexibility in programming, and the data analysis tools available within the platform that were not available on the other comparable platforms they were considering.

In particular, the Fill the Blanks, Sort and Rank, and Grid Task Types stood out as features that would allow WGU to collect deeper insights when gathering feedback from their students and alumni when conducting research in an asynchronous environment. The Qualitative Research Team knew that they needed a platform that would provide engaging ways for them to ask questions to their students and alumni over the projects they were running. Instead of relying on one-hour phone interviews, the team was now able to run multiple projects based on the research interests of the University that each lasted for a period of approximately 3 to 10 days in length with new Activities being fielded daily.

When designing the Activities for their Studies, WGU utilized the various socialization features available within the Recollective platform. They decided to leave some of their Activities private to function as asynchronous one-on-one interviews, while intentionally socializing the responses of other Activities to allow participants to collaborate with one another to function similarly to an asynchronous focus group.



## Benefits

Since many of these Studies were run asynchronously over a period of 3 to 10 days, this allowed for WGU to collaborate with students over a period of time rather than a single one hour over the phone interaction. This new asynchronous research method allowed for expansion on the topics of interest that WGU previously would have discussed over the phone, while also allowing for the opportunity for students and alumni to engage in meaningful interactions with one another online.

Recollective was particularly beneficial for WGU when it came to conducting research on the impact of new projects being introduced in degree programs and how the introduction of such projects affected the career outcomes of their graduates. It also provided insights into how the university can better support their students amidst ongoing changes in the programs being offered.

While conducting research on the platform, WGU spoke to the quality of the support offered by Recollective and how it empowers their team to conduct their research in the most effective way possible.

The Helpdesk Team at Recollective empowers researchers and works to troubleshoot any issues that arise during the lifespan of a project and offer guidance on how to make the platform work as intended depending on the specific research question or scenario. This is especially helpful for researchers who are taking a DIY approach to using the platform.

“I will tell you, hands down, my favourite part about working with Recollective is your Helpdesk Team. They are amazing people. I love working with them. Always quick. Always have the answer. I really don't mind asking a stupid question that I should know and could have found really easily.”

**- Tom Glover, Senior Research Analyst, WGU**



# Results

Through the use of the Recollective platform, WGU has been able to collect insights that are valuable to a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. Since June 2020, WGU has been able to dive deeper into topics such as degree and certificate-related research projects, innovative learning experiences, as well as the connections between faculty and students.

The insights gained from these studies have been used to improve the projects being offered in courses throughout both the undergraduate and master's programs offered at WGU. More specifically, WGU has been able to:

- Allow curriculum developers across the University to understand the student experience with specific courses and specific programs to continuously improve the quality of the learning experience and keep the curriculum up-to-date and relevant to current industry needs
- Gather important insights about new initiatives, including the offering of new and innovative learning experiences to help students master course content
- Continue to improve upon the unique WGU faculty model to provide timely and individualized learning support at scale to over 100,000 students

To date, WGU has run over 35 Studies using the Recollective platform. Recently, WGU has begun adding Recollective's Live Video Activities into their research method to gain further insight on the asynchronous Activities they run. This gives the opportunity to gather even deeper insight on topics raised during research projects.

*For more information on how Recollective can help you jumpstart your research, **contact us!***

