



Wayne State University's Warrior Way Back

Career Advancement Program Profile

CHALLENGES

- Gaining internal buy-in and developing the program
- Gaining recognition of the vision and long-term benefits of the program from university leadership

SUCSESSES

- Buy-in was gained from university leadership, specifically the provost and chief financial officer.
- Trust was built with former WSU students who dropped out.

Wayne State University (WSU) is a public, four-year institution in Detroit, Michigan. WSU developed the Warrior Way Back program to increase enrollment and completion rates for adult learners. The Warrior Way Back Program reengages students who dropped out of WSU and helps them to earn their degree while forgiving up to \$1,500 of their debt owed to the university.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT GOAL, STRATEGIES, AND STATUS

Goal: The Warrior Way Back program aims to give students who were not able to complete their undergraduate education at WSU a chance to reenroll and earn their bachelor's degree.

Strategies: WSU forgives a third of program participants' past-due balance each semester for up to three semesters (no more than \$1,500 in total). During the program, staff closely monitor students to ensure that they are making progress, and students are required to meet with student advisers who intervene if students are not on the right track.

As long as students remain on track, they are also strongly encouraged to take advantage of the wide range of services offered, including tutoring support and affinity groups. The program coordinates reverse transfer to a nearby community college for students who want to transfer credits to earn an associate's degree.

Status: Warrior Way Back launched in July 2018, and the first cohort of 59 students was enrolled in fall 2018; seven students are set to graduate at the end of the fall 2018 semester. The debt forgiveness is fully supported by WSU, and students can use federal, state, or institutional aid to fund their tuition once enrolled. Moving forward, WSU plans to pursue philanthropic dollars to help support the program, especially to help students unable to get their remaining balance down to \$1,500.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The Warrior Way Back program serves undergraduate-level students who were previously enrolled at WSU but did not earn a bachelor's degree and have not attended class at WSU in over two years. The student must have a 2.0 or higher grade point average and past-due account balance of \$1,500 or less. WSU reached out to former students who fell in these parameters by mail and invited them to an orientation to learn more about the Warrior Way Back program.

PARTNERS

The Warrior Way Back program has built strong partnerships in the community. WSU currently partners with the Detroit Regional Chamber, Macomb Community College, Graduate! Network, and employers who support reengaging current employees.

The program plans to bring in other two-year and four-year institutions and continue to build partnerships with additional employers. The program is also working with organizations in the community to better communicate with former WSU students who did not complete their degree to help these individuals feel welcome back at the institution and build community trust.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Challenges: The vision and long-term benefits of the program had to be recognized by university leadership for the program to be successful. Leadership also had to acknowledge that the process of developing the program would be challenging and that mistakes would be made along the way.

Successes: Though challenging, gaining internal buy-in from WSU leadership, specifically the provost and chief financial officer, was a major step for launching the program. The provost was an early supporter of the program, which helped move things forward at the leadership level.

The other major success was beginning to build trust with former WSU students who may have felt the university had not helped them previously when they had to drop out of classes. WSU attributes the success to how they directly worked through their partners to recruit students to the program.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Dawn Medley

Associate vice president of enrollment management
dawn.medley@wayne.edu

ADDITIONAL READING

This profile provides detailed information on the career advancement programs highlighted in the brief, "**Fulfilling the Promise of Career Pathways: Strategies that Support Career Advancement,**" by Lauren Eyster and Semhar Gebrekristos, urban.is/2CAZnsC