



WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY

WARRIOR WAY BACK



APLU

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES
AWARDS PROGRAM

IEP CATEGORY • TALENT

CASE
STUDY
2019

**Wayne State University:
Transforming “Stop-outs” into
“Returning Students”**

ABOUT THE STOP-OUTS PROGRAM

Nearly 700,000 residents in the Detroit area have some college experience but haven't completed their degree (these one-time students are classified as "stop-outs"). Students stop out for a variety of reasons including academic issues, life changes, and financial concerns.

Studies show that college graduates consistently out-earn students with only a high school diploma. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), weekly income for graduates holding a bachelor's averaged more than \$1,100 a week, while students with some college experience but no degree earned about \$750 a week. Higher education is demonstrably tied to economic self-sufficiency.

By focusing on stop-outs and creating programs specifically to help returning students recommit to higher education, Wayne State University (WSU) aims to increase the number of degree-holders in our region. This in turn will create graduates who positively contribute to their community and a workforce ready to meet the challenges of a changing economy, helping to draw additional investment, employers, and jobs to the area, and improve the financial strength of the region.

Goals of the Program

- Increase the number of credentialed adults in Southeast Michigan
- Create pathways for career growth
- Provide a better prepared workforce to employers
- Boost the number of residents earning a living wage

Numerous university departments and partners including the Detroit Regional Chamber are working together to create new pathways – and smooth old ones – for degree attainment. WSU is the academic institution lead for the [Talent Hub](#) grant awarded to Detroit by the Lumina



Figure 1: Warrior Way Back (WWB) is a debt forgiveness program for returning students with an outstanding balance with Wayne State University (WSU).

Foundation and coordinated by the Chamber. Additional partners include several community colleges, which serve as a gateway for many first-generation students pursuing degrees.

TRANSFORMING “STOP-OUTS” INTO “RETURNING STUDENTS”

WSU has several programs to help stop-outs complete their degree, including **reverse transfer agreements** with 11 community colleges that allow students to obtain an associate degree while also working on their bachelor's.

Through reverse transfer, students with community college credits can transfer some WSU credits back to their community college, which then grants an associate degree. These associate degrees add to the area's number of credentialed employees and are an important milestone for recipients, demonstrating to employers that the student is serious about achievement and completing their degree.

As part of this effort, WSU's Office of Educational Outreach and Macomb Community College launched the first **Return to Your Future** event specifically for WSU stop-outs with Macomb credits. During this special event in March 2019, stop-outs visited the WSU Advanced Technology Education Center in Warren to meet with a Macomb advisor and review transcripts and credits, as well as talk to WSU representatives from Advising, Financial Aid and academic departments to determine what they needed to get back on track and re-enroll. WSU plans to roll out this program to additional community college partners to help increase graduation rates and maximize the investment these students have already made in their education.

A **returning student session** during the university-wide Open House in March drew WSU students who want to re-enroll, but didn't know where to start. Returning student Erica Cooper, a working nurse at Sinai-Grace Hospital, last attended WSU in 2015 and came to the session. “I'm in the medical field and I keep putting this degree off and I really want to return,” she said. “It seems like they've got it where I can feel more comfortable now. They made me feel like I was just part of the herd before, and I got overwhelmed and my grades slipped. I didn't know who to go to and what resources I actually had. Before they just gave me money and a class to pick, and now they're trying to set it up so I can be successful, because I need that. I'm thinking this is a second chance to get this degree, finally.”

Warrior Way Back, an innovative program begun in 2018, waives overdue balances of up to \$1,500 for undergrads who stopped out at least two years ago, intend to complete their bachelor's, and have a minimum cumulative grade-point average of at least 2.0. When qualified students re-enroll and successfully complete a semester, one-third of their balance is forgiven. This occurs for up to three semesters until the balance is eliminated. Removing this financial barrier

incrementally over three semesters ensures students maintain their enrollment and continue moving toward graduation.

The first student to enroll in the program, Johnathan Williams, started at WSU in 1990 and was only 11 credits short of his bachelor's degree in information systems management. "I have a clear goal in my mind and I'm so close now – I'm going to earn that degree," he said. "I've got a whole team at Wayne State looking out for my best interests. They're as invested in my goal as I am. They're cheering me on and pushing me toward that finish line – I've never had this much support as a student."

INCREASING ACHIEVEMENT FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

While our hope is that every stop-out returns to WSU for a bachelor's degree, we recognize that this may not be a practical choice for everyone. We are committed to assisting our students through the programs outlined above to get back in class and graduate, whether from WSU, a community college or another university. Eliminating some debt, providing transcripts and facilitating the transfer of credits will allow Wayne State students to achieve the goals they set when they first enrolled: attaining a college degree, positioning themselves for the 21st century workforce, and increasing their earning potential.

ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its **Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)** established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP designation program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP awards program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP