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# Investing in college degrees transforms communities

How Wayne State University elevates lives and strengthens Michigan's workforce



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Despite the eye-catching headlines, there remains no better investment than a college degree for a brighter future. It's a life-changer for our students, their families and our region.

A degree opens greater opportunities for a meaningful life and financial success. Economically, the impact is undeniable: College graduates are likely to earn higher salaries than those without a degree. A 2021 Georgetown University study found that, in aggregate, individuals with an undergraduate

degree earn 75% more over their lifetime than individuals without a college degree. In Michigan, those with a bachelor's earn \$33,000 more on average five years after graduation than those with only a high school diploma. This difference is the cost of a new car!

The impact of a college degree, though, is about more than finances or career advancement. College graduates report better health and more satisfying relationships. Their children are more school ready, and our neighborhoods benefit from a civically involved workforce. Experts estimate that 70% of Michigan jobs will require a college degree by 2027; for our region to thrive and communities to prosper, all of us must do more to promote college going.

### **Ensuring access**

The benefits of college for our region cannot be fully realized without ensuring that all talented students have access to a high-quality education. The academic preparation in high school for many first-generation students and individuals from underserved communities is uneven; these students require additional support to thrive in college. Wayne State University serves more families with fewer economic resources than any other public institution in Michigan. Through financial aid programs like the Heart of Detroit Tuition Pledge and the Wayne State Guarantee, we've opened our doors even wider. As a result, last fall, 60% of our incoming first-year students attended Wayne State tuition free.

We do so much to prepare, serve and support our first-generation and other underserved students. Our nationally recognized Warrior 360 program provides vital support tools, including peer mentors, supplemental instruction and more. As a result, our six-year graduation rate is now on par with national benchmarks.



Students do not need to choose between work or school. For many, pursuing higher education while working is the best option. Wayne State is known for course formats that serve working adults,

including several degree options intended to expand opportunities for those in the skilled trades. And the Warrior Way Back program provides a financial path to complete college after stopping out.

## College preparation

Our students' journeys don't end at Commencement. A Wayne State education prepares students for meaningful careers and productive lives. Our College to Career initiative bridges in-classroom academics with applied "learning by doing" experiences — including internships, hands-on research and service learning — with community partners that build real-world competencies, vital professional networks and important leadership skills.

Wayne State is a critical talent pipeline for our state; eight out of 10 of our graduates remain in Michigan to raise their families and take jobs with local businesses. Our top undergraduate majors — including public health, psychology, global supply chain management, computer science and accounting — align with Michigan's core industries, ensuring graduates are ready to meet market needs. Wayne State Warriors are transforming Michigan's economy, and our partners in Detroit's hospitals, offices, theatres, plants and clinics know firsthand the knowledge and competencies our alumni bring.

At Wayne State, we work for our community, in our community and with our community. Our partners make our students stronger; our faculty and staff do outstanding work that produces alumni who are second to none. Together, we ensure that our students succeed, our families thrive and we all prosper.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy is in her second year as Wayne State's president. She has launched the WSU Prosperity Agenda to advance student mobility, urban health, and innovation.

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