

<First\_name> <Last\_name>  
<Street\_Line1><Street\_Line2>  
<City><State><Zip>

Dear <First\_name>,

The true mission of any place of higher learning should be the success of its students. At Wayne State University, we want every student to thrive academically and walk across the stage at commencement. It's our responsibility to support and encourage them as they pursue their goals. This mission is noble, but it requires creativity, innovation and, as you no doubt know, a lot of hard work.

At Wayne State, that hard work is beginning to pay off. Our six-year graduation rate has nearly doubled since 2011, the largest increase in the nation, and was recognized by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities last year with its annual Degree Completion Award. Last fall we experienced our highest freshman enrollment ever, an achievement that will bring with it more challenges and opportunities to ensure all of our Warriors finish their studies.

I have been asked by colleagues how we achieved this success, and I thought it might be helpful to share some of our experiences and observations. I will humbly admit that there is much more to know, and we remain open to learning from others, including, hopefully, you. Perhaps by discussing our mutual successes and failures in the mission we all share, we can help improve student success everywhere.

As you may have guessed, there's no single magic formula. We took chances on some good ideas. Some worked, some we adjusted, and some we discarded. The sum total of our efforts resulted in improved graduation rates for all our students — from the most gifted scholars to those who need greater academic support and guidance. Here are a few examples.

Our Warrior Vision and Impact Program (VIP) supports the success of selected incoming students by delivering comprehensive academic, career, research, financial literacy and mentoring support. The program helps ensure our students' successful transition into college, fosters their positive engagement in the university setting and prepares students to challenge themselves as leaders beyond graduation.

In 2011, Wayne State launched a student retention program that included such factors as hiring additional academic advisors, improving the curriculum in general education courses, increasing support for faculty teaching development and establishing first-year experiences to help acclimate new students to the rigors of college life. This has helped students thrive academically and form the support networks they need as they prepare for graduation and career success.

Being a public, urban, research university, it was important for us to address the financial challenges that make it difficult for some students to finish their studies. We strengthened our financial aid and scholarship offerings and increased our commitment to low-income and first-generation students through Wayne Access. This program allows students to receive scholarship or grant funding that covers up to the full cost of tuition and standard fees. So far, we've funded more than 1,200 incoming freshmen, with zero out-of-pocket costs. We've helped more students avoid taking out a loan for tuition and fees than any other school in Michigan.

Last fall, we introduced the Warrior Way Back program, an innovative debt-forgiveness initiative for students who could not return to college because of past-due balances. This program gained national attention, but more importantly, in December 2018, the first eight eligible participants of this program walked across the commencement stage. Nine more graduates joined the alumni ranks this spring, and so far, 117 students have enrolled in the program. The success of Warrior Way Back has prompted some universities to develop their own versions of the program, some of which include collaborating across multiple higher education institutions.

Other programs have helped our students thrive and succeed in various ways. Diverse learning communities, student organizations and community service opportunities allow students to grow in knowledge, build social networks and discover their passion. The Student Success Steering Committee and the Graduation Action Project bring campus leaders together to monitor and support degree progress. These programs are evidence-driven and help to eliminate student barriers.

We are proud of these successes because they are vital to our mission of student success.

I know you share this goal too; you wouldn't be in this line of work if you did not. I am eager to hear how your university supports student success at all levels, and across all student groups. Through the sharing of ideas and meaningful collaboration, we can help ensure that all students achieve their academic goals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Roy Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

M. Roy Wilson  
President  
Wayne State University