

Barriers to Degree Completion Task Force Final Report

• Task Force Members

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• Charge

- To analyze barriers to degree completion for staff women who have started, not completed, and have not been enrolled for two or more years at any level (undergraduate, Masters, PhD, professional).

• Process/Activities

- Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) queried records to identify all Ohio State staff who had started work toward, but not completed an undergraduate degree. That report was run against the National Student Clearinghouse to delete those who completed a degree elsewhere.
- Distributed a survey to 911 staff (men and women) via direct email seeking reasons for stopping progress toward an undergraduate degree and asked for additional demographics of respondents.
- IRP staff analyzed survey data.
- Met with Scott Klute, Office of Business and Finance, to find the impact on the university if these staff were to re-enroll.
- Collected information from Wexner Medical Center's Education, Development and Resources team within Human Resources about a program that provided tuition assistance to staff working toward degrees in nursing and select medical technology fields at Columbus State Community College in exchange for a two-year work commitment.

• Results/Findings

Of the 911 staff who have taken courses but not earned an undergraduate degree, IRP identified 520 female staff (58%) in that category. These women work across the university in a diverse range of positions. The Office of Business and Finance reported that because the credit hours run through the budget model regardless of payer, the financial impact on the university would be minimal if all of these women were to complete their coursework.

Response rate for the survey was 11%. Work obligations were cited by two-thirds (67%) of respondents as a reason for stopping degree progress. A slight majority (54%) felt that non-traditional status was a barrier to completion.

The top suggestions for change by survey respondents were

1. Extension of tuition benefit to include community colleges;
2. More flexible work schedules; and
3. Increased scheduling of classes to online/weekends/evenings.

The tuition voucher program in the medical center has been discontinued. There is no centralized repository of information relating to this program and we were unable to collect concrete data relating to the number of staff participants, the length of the program, or the costs associated. In our communications with the Medical Center Human Resources team, however, it was represented as a failed program.

- **Next Steps**

- Share data with the University Staff Advisory Committee (USAC). USAC is also interested in this topic.
- Notify the Office of Distance Education and eLearning that there is a strong interest in more online coursework among our population. While our sample size was small, it has overwhelmingly indicated that this would be helpful.

- **Recommendations**

We recommend that senior leaders at dean/VP level and above reference in public forums the Flexible Work Toolkit that PPCW and USAC developed together: <https://usac.osu.edu/flexible-work-policy-resources/>

We emphasize to the president/provost and to senior leaders the final recommendations in our 2019 report:

For senior leaders at dean/VP level and above:

- Model flexible work arrangements in their offices.
- Talk about the Flexible Work Policy in public forums.
- Remove barriers to promoting it at the Wexner Medical Center.
- Remove barriers to promoting it across regional campuses and across departments/colleges on Columbus campus.

For president/provost:

- Assign an ad hoc team to review the policy and the Flexible Work Arrangement Proposal form and consider updating it to provide greater clarity to employees and managers considering Flexible Work Arrangements. This review team could include members of PPCW and USAC, senior HR professionals from campus (regional and main) and Medical Center, HR policy coordinator and HR associate vice president of talent, diversity and leadership.
- Assign a permanent team from the Office of Human Resources to track use of flexible work arrangements university-wide and share that data annually. The data reporting could be accomplished by requiring units to annually inform the policy owner of the following:
 - number of formal requests for flexible work arrangements received by unit in each calendar year
 - number approved
 - number denied and reason
 - number of ongoing flexible work arrangements
 - demographics of the employees seeking flexible work arrangements

The report should also include demographics of employees requesting flexible work arrangements. This information could be collected using employee ID numbers, but the current Flexible Work Arrangement Proposal forms do not collect employee ID numbers.

For the Office of Human Resources:

Include tuition coverage as a potentially funded activity to be reimbursed by the Staff Career Grant. This would include an update to language on the website as well as marketing information.

We opted to narrow the charge and did not continue with the assessment of the graduate and professional group after analyzing the data for the undergraduate group.