

**Ohio House  
Higher Education Committee  
Testimony on Senate Bill No. 181  
Tuesday, May 26, 2020  
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Good morning Chairwoman Keller, Vice Chairman Riedel and Ranking Member Ingram. I am here in support of SB 181, providing Ohioans an opportunity to work and simultaneously earn a college degree, debt free.

My name is Randi Malcolm Thomas, Esq., I serve as the Director of the Office of Institutional Relations. I have worked in higher education for more than 20 years. It is an honor to testify before you today discussing one of Miami University's recent contributions to Ohio's economy and its workforce, the Ohio Work+ at Miami University Regionals Program (Work+).

**Framing the Work+ Program:** The Work+ Program is different from traditional higher education and business partnerships. While extremely valuable for all parties involved, traditional higher education business partnerships have been driven around the education schedule and related education barriers. With the Work+ Program, we have attempted to base the program around the employer's schedule and needs with higher education providing wrap-around educational services. The Work+ Program may be the only education program where participants are viewed as employees first and students second; although it is a close second.

**History of the Work+ Program:** The Work+ Program is the brain child of Ohio Senator Bill Coley. Senator Coley and our President, Greg Crawford had been in discussions regarding a common theme that both men had heard repeatedly from Southwest Ohio employers regarding employers' continual challenges in filling entry level positions.

Senator Coley heard about a program called Metropolitan College in Louisville, Kentucky. It was born out of UPS being unable to fill entry level positions. Metropolitan College is a Kentucky partnership among UPS, The University of Louisville and Jefferson Community and technical College. Participating students get their full-time undergraduate tuition paid to the University of Louisville or Jefferson Community and Technical College as well as book reimbursement money, bonuses and other benefits.

Senator Coley invited President Crawford, myself, and other Miami staff to accompany him to Louisville, Kentucky to visit with the UPS team that runs Metropolitan College. We came away from that visit inspired to re-develop the Metropolitan College concept in a manner that would

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serve the needs of our Southwest Ohio businesses. Since that visit, Miami University has been working closely with Senator Coley and area employers to design and implement a program to address the issue of filling entry level job openings. The result of that collaboration is the Ohio Work+ at Miami University Regionals Program. All the Work+ Partners have made an intentional decision to consider how the initiative might be replicated across Ohio, as we further develop the Program,.

**About the Work+ Program:** Work+ provides Ohio residents the opportunity to gain work experience, build a career, and earn an associate or bachelor degree debt free. Program participants work part-time, 24 hours a week, with one of the Work+ employers, take classes in a major of their choice from Miami University Regionals, and we hope to incorporate life skills training in the future. Employers pay the student's tuition for every class in which the student earns a C minus or above.

**Work+ Program Benefits:** The benefits of the Work+ Program align with those of the workforce innovation and opportunity act, as the Program:

- Increases opportunities for participants with barriers to employment;
- Combines employment, education, and life skills training thereby aligning workforce investment, education, economic development systems;
- Provides participants the skills and credentials to secure and advance employment through working directly with employers to ensure that the participants possess the skills necessary to be successful;
- Promotes improvement in the structure and delivery of services by combining employment, education, and life skills training into one program;
- Increases the prosperity of participants, employers, and their communities; Increases the employment retention & earnings of participants and the attainment of recognized post-secondary credentials; and
- Develops career and professional skills through micro-credentials and stackable certificates.

**How Does an Ohio Resident Apply for the Work+ Program?** Interested Ohioans get started in two easy steps:

1. Apply and be successfully hired into an entry-level position by any of the Work+ employers:

[The Fischer Group](#) (Fairfield)

[Thyssenkrupp Bilstein of America, Inc.](#) (Hamilton)

[Butler County Regional Transit Authority](#) (West Chester)

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2. Apply to Miami Regionals

- Complete the [Work+ Future Student Interest Form](#) or [Work+ Current Student Interest Form](#)
- Apply for [Admission to Miami Regionals](#)
- Apply for [Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#)
- Attend a [Work+ Orientation & Registration Session](#)
- Sign a [Work+](#) employee/student agreement

**Ohio Resident Response to the Work+ Program:** We received over 200 informational inquiries for 45 spots. Our final cohort for this first year of the program was 26 participants. Realize that it is our partner employers that dictate the size of the cohort not the university. The employers determine how many participants they will hire and who they will hire. Miami University then provides the educational services as a wraparound function. The university coordinates closely with the employer so that the university can get the participant the courses that they need at a time that does not conflict with the participants work schedule. The university also works with the employers to assess the performance of participants. This provides the university and the employer the opportunity to provide feedback to the participant as to deficiencies that need to be addressed, as well as, opportunities for growth through gaining additional training or course work in areas that the employer requests of a participant. For your convenience of review, I've included a summary of the Work+ Program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Examining Adding A Life Skills Workshop:** The Work+ team has been actively exploring the idea of adding a life skills training portion to the program. The employers, the university, and other community and government stakeholders are all in agreement that a life skills workshop throughout the program would assist program participants in the following ways:

- Participants identify their potential and maintain a high level of motivation;
- Creates a shared experience among participants via learning goal-setting, problem-solving, emotional control, family relationships, financial stability, effective communication, and drug and alcohol abuse; and
- Low-income students won't have to choose between employment and education costs to participate.

Miami University and our Work+ employer partners remain excited about the program and the many ways that it will improve the financial position of participating businesses, the program participants, and the advancement of the State's education attainment goals, among other things.

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Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

### **Work+ Program During COVID-19**

#### **Spring 2020 Summary**

- ❖ There were a total of 26 students participating in Work+ at the start of the stay-at-home order for COVID-19.
- ❖ One of our employer partners had 3 Work+ employees that continued to work throughout the stay at home order. These students will continue in the program with that employer.
- ❖ Seven of the eight students continue to work at another of our Work+ employer partners and those seven employees will continue in the program. One student decided to leave the program as that student did not feel comfortable in the workplace due to fear of infection.
- ❖ All 12 Work+ employees were laid off in April at one of our Work+ partners. Tuition for Spring semester will be paid for, but the employer is suspending participation in Work+ for the foreseeable future.
- ❖ Another of our Work+ partners was forced to lay off all 3 of their Work+ employees in April. Tuition for Spring semester will be paid for, and the employer will bring the students back as part of the Work+ program likely by the end of May.

#### **Fall 2020 Summary**

- ❖ All four of our new employers continue to want to participate in the program. They are waiting for COVID-19 to subside and for their return to daily operation before committing to the number of students that they will take on as employees.
- ❖ One of our current employers is interested in taking on 2-3 new employees.
- ❖ The other Work+ employers have expressed an interest in taking on new employees and are working through their internal processes to determine those numbers.

#### **Summer 2020 On-Boarding**

- ❖ Students can continue to express interest in the fall program through May 15th, as stated on the website.
- ❖ Former Work+ employees who were laid off because of COVID-19 will be given first priority for hiring into any available positions.

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- ❖ The onboarding process will begin around July 15 for any remaining jobs with new students. The process includes a rolling application designed to continue through the first couple of weeks of classes or until all open positions are filled.