WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Wayne State University's Challenge

Wayne State University, located in the heart of Detroit, MI, is a R1 research institution with approximately 17,000 undergraduate students. Wayne State caters to many regional students, with nearly 90% of their student population hailing from within 30 minutes of campus. For two major reasons, Wayne State has always depended upon their physical campus to attract students. As an urban institution, administrators see curiosity from prospects as to whether they will get the traditional college feel with green space and adequate residence halls while in a city setting. Wayne State has many first-generation students who have questions about what college life may be like, and they want to visit in-person with their families to see if it feels like the campus for them. Due to such a large regional population, Wayne State could rely on their prospects visiting the campus for tours, information sessions, and other enrollment events to meet their yield goals in years past.

With the onslaught of COVID-19, the admissions team, comprised of 10 Admissions Counselors serving a freshman class of over 3,000 students from a pool of more than 11,000 admitted students, needed to alter their efforts to recruit students safely without adding to the burden of their already stretched staff. "We didn't have a full-time staff member to commit to this launch," said Dawn Medley, Associate VP of Enrollment Management. "We used approximately 15-20% of our staff member Kate's time for us to launch Wisr." The decision to pivot to an online experience for yield and melt initiatives was made within four hours. The Orientation team followed suit shortly after.

wisr

Results

With the launch of the Wayne State Wisr network, dubbed Wiser Warriors, Wayne State University created a thriving network for prospective students to connect and build peer-to-peer connections rather than just receive communication from administrators. Kate Dyki, Program Management Specialist, took ownership of the initiative, devoting roughly a day per week during the initial launch. With an early foundation of 40 current students serving as peer mentors/ambassadors, the program saw exponential growth to nearly 150 mentors ready and willing to connect with prospects. The Wisr platform allowed WSU to match admitted students with peer mentors to give them a virtual "home" and a safe space to ask questions and learn about what WSU had to offer and what life as a Warrior would look like. Dyki saw increased engagement through the utilization of peer mentor profiles offering some personality to prospects. "As an institution, we spend a lot of time emailing, snail mailing, or texting prospects, but that peer-to-peer connection is a major deciding factor in helping our students gauge the fit of an institution," said Dyki. "Through Wisr, we were able to deliver that experience and create those connections virtually."

With a robust peer-mentor network and Wiser Warriors up and running, the enrollment team saw over 200 communities crop up, with more than 2,000 community joins and participation rates as high as 81%. Wayne State recognized the opportunity for a configurable program and continuously made adjustments unique to their students. They offered ongoing contests for students as they signed up with incentives ranging from weekly pizza coupon giveaways to Apple products.

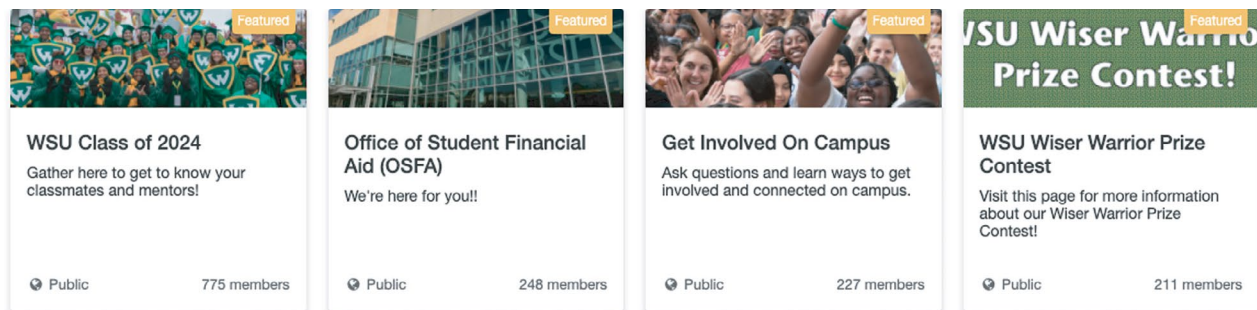|			
91%	**2000+**	**81%**	**100+**
Of students on the Wisr platform who interacted with a student ambassador yielded	Strong early adoption with over 2,000 community joins	Of students joining actively consumed discussion board content	Virtual information sessions

The New Student Orientation team soon followed and adopted Wisr's Orientation model for their 2020 programming, providing a seamless transition within the platform. "Building peer-to-peer connections was one of the biggest benefits of using the software for orientation," said Katie Rawlings, Associate Director for New Student Orientation. "It helped validate any concerns they had about making the transition to college—especially during a global pandemic."

With a typical kickoff in April, the Student Success staff segmented the Orientation communities to encompass both the date that the students completed Orientation as well as their individual course of study. Students were admitted once they completed the required modules beforehand which resulted in over 50 separate communities. Eric Blovits, a third-year Dance major, serves as both an Orientation Leader and an enrollment ambassador, utilizing the Wisr platform for both. "The Q&A was a huge success. It was great to hear an incoming student's perspective, listen to what they were worried about, and for them to even share what they needed that we may have missed," said Blovits on his time as an Orientation leader. He shared that one of his favorite parts was that "there was a lot of problem solving in figuring out how to translate an on-campus event to a virtual experience."

Moving forward, the Orientation team will restructure their communities basing them off the 13 colleges the university has to maximize connectivity. While New Student Orientation and Undergraduate Admissions fall under two separate divisions, they complement each other with continuous programming through the entire yield cycle. Dyki expressed that "there is value in having virtual support for both programs, especially when the two Wisr platforms can co-exist together."

WSU Class of 2024
Gather here to get to know your classmates and mentors!

Public   775 members

Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA)
We're here for you!!

Public   248 members

Get Involved On Campus
Ask questions and learn ways to get involved and connected on campus.

Public   227 members

WSU Wiser Warrior Prize Contest
Visit this page for more information about our Wiser Warrior Prize Contest!

Public   211 members

Looking Forward

With a successful first implementation of the Wiser Warriors Network, the Undergraduate Admission and New Student Orientation teams have made some alterations for their future use of the Wisr network. While initially thinking bigger was better, Dyki has new insight into how she wants the program to run. "Large college campuses often struggle with the siloing of information. Wisr's ability to funnel information from across the entire university into one spot is my favorite functional feature of the platform." The goal is to use this funnel to pare down the number of communities available, so the process is more streamlined and students can easily find what they are looking for. Like a large demographic of Wayne State students, Dyki was a first-generation college student. She understands the difficulty and uncertainty of navigating the college admission and decision process when you may not have all of the information you need readily available. In the midst of a pandemic that closed many doors that lead to that information, it was important for Wayne State to open a window. "You don't know where you are going to fit in until you experience some sort of connection, whether in-person or online. Our number one goal is to support our students and help them feel connected to the institution and each other in a time when it's never been more challenging."

> "Wisr and Wayne State University share a vision to provide onboarding, academic, and career support to our students at every major point in their lifecycle. We're excited to have launched Wisr with our recently admitted students, to provide trained current students as peer mentors through orientation and the first-year experience. As we work to integrate this solution into Wayne State's mobile app, this will serve as a bridge to our faculty, alumni, and even our corporate partners."

Dawn S. Medley
Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management