

Walmart



Building a Retail Talent Pipeline with PLAs and Online Education Partner Walmart

Partnering with online higher education provider American Public University, Walmart creates an educated and skilled pipeline of workers and offers entry-level workers the opportunity to earn college credits for prior and on-the-job training and to continue postsecondary education.

Walmart serves customers and members more than 200 million times per week at more than 9,005 retail units under 60 different banners in 15 countries. With fiscal year 2010 sales of \$405 billion, Walmart employs 2.1 million associates worldwide. For its 1.4 million domestic associates, Walmart committed to supporting the completion of postsecondary degrees in order to grow the corporate talent pipeline and to offer career advancement opportunities to associates. In order to follow the Walmart business model and culture of using scale to lower costs, the company spent a year and a half developing an alternative to traditional tuition assistance programs. In 2010, Walmart established the Lifelong Learning Program, which meets the following four company goals:

1. To help associates advance their careers at Walmart and beyond;
2. To grow Walmart's talent pipeline;
3. To foster the understanding that "retail jobs create career opportunities" by demonstrating the value of transferable skills that associates learn; and
4. To position Walmart as a leading, best practice company contributing to America's goal of regaining the position of highest percentage of postsecondary attainment among 25-34 year olds by 2020.

The Lifelong Learning Program, a partnership between Walmart and American Public University (APU), provides associates the opportunity to earn college credits for prior, on-the-job training while building a portfolio of work and education experience. The effort is creating a more skilled and educated workforce, while positioning Walmart as a leading company in talent development.

Overcoming Barriers to Lifelong Learning

Walmart surveyed its associates to determine if college access is important to them and to understand what program elements would increase the likelihood of participation. Associates responded by overwhelmingly indicating a strong interest in continuing education, but cited affordability and accessibility as the top two barriers. Associates voiced an interest in studying a variety of different subjects, broader than those related to just their

PERSONAL STORY

James Buskell started working as a "cart pusher" with Walmart 15 years ago and has worked his way up to Assistant Manager. When he was 18 or 19 years old, he began pursuing a postsecondary degree but, in his words, "[At the time] I did not have the focus or drive to finish." James jumped at the opportunity to participate in Walmart's Lifelong Learning Program because the timing was finally right to finish his degree, and he wants to set a great example for his children. American Public University online courses allow him the flexibility to balance family, life, work and school demands, and he likes that he is able to earn college credits for what he has learned during his career. James said, "My career at Walmart has shown me that there are opportunities for those who are willing to work hard. The Lifelong Learning Program and the ability to learn no matter where you are in life is one of those opportunities." James is working toward a Bachelor's degree in Management with a Retail concentration.

Business Impact

- Create skilled and educated talent pool
- Develop career pathways
- Credit for on-the-job training decreases tuition costs

Employee Impact

- Earn college credits
- Credit for on-the-job training boosts academic completion
- Flexible online learning opportunities
- 15% tuition grant

Lifelong Learning Program

- Partnership with online American Public University
- Earn college credit for on-the-job training - 450,000 in positions identified as college credit eligible
- Ability to create an education, work-based learning portfolio
- Block transfer agreements with 42 community colleges

jobs at Walmart. They also indicated the need for flexible class scheduling to accommodate work schedules and busy lives. In fact, 72 percent of survey respondents said they preferred studying online to attending a brick and mortar school. With these insights into associates' needs, Walmart evaluated 81 colleges and universities before selecting APU as its preferred education partner. APU, a leading online university with a strong history of service to America's military personnel, fit Walmart's business model by collaborating to lower tuition costs for employees, making the program more affordable. By choosing an online university, employees are able to begin educational programs at their discretion and to flex classes based on the needs of their jobs and lives. This flexibility also serves Walmart in a way that standard classes do not. Scheduled to begin with the fall semester, they conflict with the retail company's busiest season.

■ Earning College Credit for On-the-Job Training

Walmart's Lifelong Learning Program launched in June 2010 and immediately generated interest from associates. In the first six months, more than 550 retail associates registered for college and are attending classes. It has three components: 1. APU offers all Walmart employees a 15 percent tuition grant; 2. Walmart employees can earn college credit at APU for their qualified on-the-job training; and 3. Walmart will be investing up to \$50 million to further reduce tuition costs for participating employees. Walmart and APU are working closely to document and review on-the-job learning in a number of critical positions within the company.

To date, more than 450,000 associates are in positions identified as college credit eligible. For the positions reviewed to date, associates can earn from 3 to 30 college credits, and those who have held more than one of these positions over the past 10 years can earn multiple credit grants. In total, associates can earn up

to 45 percent of the credit required for either an associate's or a bachelor's degree, based on what they have learned on the job and their choice of degree to pursue. The APU degrees that most closely align to credit for Walmart job learning are the Associate's in Management and the Bachelor's in Management, both with a concentration in Retail Management.

"I see . . . education, training and involving our associates as being the major advantage for Walmart."

- Sam Walton,
Founder, Walmart

However, associates can choose among any degree APU offers and in cases where an associate chooses a different degree, usually some credit from their on-the job learning can be applied toward degree electives. APU has also committed to negotiate in good faith with any community college interested in establishing an articulation agreement. Currently APU has established block transfer agreements with 42 community colleges, giving those students who wish to study in a classroom or transfer prior credits to APU's program another affordable option.

■ Refining and Growing

Walmart committed to investing up to \$50 million at the launch of the Lifelong Learning Program and is currently studying additional ways to fulfill this commitment. Since program launch, Walmart has paid the costs for all Lifelong Learning Review Courses associates take at APU, which help associates demonstrate their subject-matter mastery and place out of college courses through final exams that are similar to CLEP tests. As it considers additional investments in associates' education, Walmart is guided by its overarching goal of increasing enrollment in and adherence to the Lifelong Learning Program.

About Corporate Voices

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we are a unique voice, and provide leading and best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation's economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

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Find Out More

Corporate Voices is committed to identifying and spotlighting businesses supporting postsecondary completion while making significant contributions to internal company goals. "Best practice" talent development models that increase access to career opportunities through education and training are being examined for characteristics that are transferable and replicable to other employers. This research is being conducted with the guidance of the Corporate Voices Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team consisting of business executives leading promising models and those interested in peer-to-peer learning. If you are interested in joining, contact Peggy Walton at pwalton@corporatevoices.org. Team members include:

- Verizon Wireless
- UPS
- Convergys
- Expeditors
- Georgia Power
- KPMG

For more information about the Lifelong Learning Program, see Walmart's 2011 Global Responsibility Report at <http://walmartstores.com/Sustainability/7951.aspx>

INDUSTRY: Retail

FOUNDED: 1962

EMPLOYEES: 1.4 million domestic associates in U.S.

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