

Debt-Free Workforce Programs Framework (One-Page)

Overall goal

Increase students that graduate debt-free in programs that address national needs and workforce gaps (e.g., education).

Green = Prioritized for the next 12-18 months

1) Make “debt-free” a guaranteed design feature for specific programs

Objective: Turn debt-free from an aspiration into a clear promise with rules students can understand.

Key initiatives

- **Develop Debt Free Program Selection Criteria:** Define the criteria for programs eligible for the “debt-free” guarantee and formalize the financial modeling process
- **Tuition Debt-Free Promise:** Cover remaining tuition/fees after Pell/state/institutional aid for designated shortage programs.
- **Cohort-based launch:** Start with 1–3 programs; expand only when funding + outcomes hold with marketing plan.
- **Transparent net price + borrowing cap:** “No-loan packaging” for students that meet the eligibility requirements below; prevent unnecessary borrowing.
- **Priority Program Pools:** Reallocate institutional aid into shortage-aligned programs.
- **Program unit economics:** Sustainable tuition/discount targets by delivery cost and capacity.
- Consider what it would take for DePaul to **support existing loan forgiveness programs** at the federal and state levels: Forgivable support tied to working in a high-need role/region for X years.

Primary owners: Financial Aid + Enrollment + Academic Affairs/Colleges + Finance

Core KPIs: % graduates with \$0 debt, average debt at graduation, net price for eligible students, participation/retention in pledge

2) Reduce time-to-degree and eliminate “extra quarters”

Objective: Keep students on a predictable, on-time path—the biggest controllable driver of debt.

Key initiatives

- **Structured pathways:** Default degree maps; guaranteed course rotations; block scheduling.
- **2+2 transfer guarantees:** Locked pathways with predictable total cost.
- **Credit for prior learning/competency:** Especially for adult learners and paraprofessionals. (like early childhood and pstep)
- **Advising redesign:** Checkpoints + early alerts tied to academic and financial risk.
*in connection with advising/retention subcommittee

Primary owners: Provost/Academic Affairs + Colleges + Advising + Registrar/Operations

Core KPIs: time-to-degree, credits at completion, on-pace rate, term-to-term persistence, “extra term” frequency

3) Cover living-cost pressure (the biggest driver of borrowing)

Objective: Reduce borrowing driven by rent/food/transport—especially during unpaid training periods.

Key initiatives

- **Paid clinical/residency model:** Teacher residencies with wages during training for undergraduates.
- **Student teaching stipends:** Prioritize shortage areas (special ed, bilingual, STEM, rural). Add this to the legislative lobbying list too.
- **Completion microgrants:** Small dollars to prevent stop-outs from emergency expenses.
- **Books/fees/materials support:** Vouchers or inclusive-access models, potentially including licensing exams/fees and professional clothes.

Primary owners: Colleges + Employer/District partners + Student Success + Financial Aid

Core KPIs: borrowing for living costs, stop-out rate, completion rate, emergency grant utilization and persistence lift

4) Build employer and public-sector co-funding pipelines

Objective: Make employers/public partners co-investors in talent, not just end-users.

Key initiatives

- **District-sponsored cohorts:** Tuition/stipends in exchange for hiring commitments-continue to work with school districts.
- **“Grow Your Own” pipelines:** Paraeducator-to-teacher pathways with guaranteed placement and support.
- **Lobby for state funding support:** for Illinois residents who want to stay/teach in Illinois.

Primary owners: Industry/Employer Partnerships + Colleges + Career Services + Enrollment

Core KPIs: # sponsored students, # placement slots, partner commitments signed, partner hiring conversion rate

5) Create a dedicated funding engine (philanthropy + grants + matches)

Objective: Establish a durable funding stack that can scale debt-free cohorts *in connection with Advancement’s efforts.

Key initiatives

- **Workforce Debt-Free Fund:** Pooled fund with “cost per debt-free graduate” reporting.
- **Matching campaigns:** Donor dollars match employer/state dollars to increase scale.
- **Targeted grant strategy:** Workforce and teacher-prep grants; build a grant calendar/pipeline.
- **Named scholarships:** Donor-facing, shortage-area outcomes (e.g., “bilingual teacher debt-free”).

Primary owners: Advancement + Finance + Grants + Colleges

Core KPIs: funds raised, grant dollars secured, match leverage ratio, cost per debt-free graduate

6) Ensure placement, licensure, and early career success (credibility loop)

Objective: Prove the model works by delivering job-ready grads who stay in the field. *in connection with advising/retention subcommittee

Key initiatives

- **Guaranteed placement lanes:** Student teaching and hiring agreements.
- **Licensure success package:** Test prep, fee coverage, retake support.
- **Early-career coaching:** 1–2 years mentoring to improve retention.
- **Outcome dashboards:** Placement, licensure, debt-at-grad, 1/3-year retention *in connection with advising/retention subcommittee.

Primary owners: Colleges + Career Services + Partner districts/employers + Institutional Research

Core KPIs: placement rate, licensure pass rate, first-destination outcomes, 1/3-year retention, debt-at-grad

7) Governance, guardrails, and scale rules

Objective: Protect sustainability and scale only when outcomes and capacity are proven.

Key initiatives

- **Program Selection Criteria:** Develop the selection criteria for which programs should offer the Tuition Debt Free Promise
- **Student Eligibility rules:** FAFSA completion, on-pace progression, advising participation.
- **Scale gates:** Expand only if metrics hit thresholds (cost, completion, placement, retention).
- **Risk reserve:** Set-aside to manage volatility and policy shifts.
- **Annual program review:** Adjust funding, capacity, curriculum, and partner commitments.

Primary owners: Executive sponsors (Provost/CFO) + Governance Council (EM, Aid, Colleges, Finance, Advancement)

Core KPIs: program-level ROI, risk reserve adequacy, compliance with eligibility rules, scale-gate pass rate