



American Public
University System



Education Benefits:

How to Motivate Employees, Strengthen In-House Teams, and Maximize Utilization

A Step-By-Step Guide for HR Leaders

Executive Summary

Education benefits are a valuable resource for both employees and employers. While they allow employees to save on the cost of a university education, these benefits also allow employers to attract and retain top talent, build agile teams, and future-proof their organizations through succession planning.

Yet, low utilization of tuition education continues to pose a challenge. Many companies struggle to realize the full potential of their education benefits programs, whether due to employees’ lack of awareness about the benefits or perceived issues that prevent staff members from pursuing continuing education.

To better understand employers’ challenges, goals, and expectations surrounding education benefits, American Public University System (APUS), through its parent company, American Public Education Inc., engaged Hanover Research to survey 294 professionals in at least a manager position or the HR industry between May and June 2024. Respondents answered questions related to workforce trends, employer needs, and education benefits programs.

Guided by these findings, along with feedback from our partner organizations, we’ve identified five pivotal steps for maximizing utilization rates:

Step 1	Find the gaps in your workforce
Step 2	Explore industry-relevant L&D programs with your APUS account manager
Step 3	Inform, remind, repeat
Step 4	Personalize the conversation
Step 5	Eliminate barriers, celebrate wins, and foster a growth-oriented culture

Your APUS account manager is here to help you every step of the way.

The data contained throughout this guide was obtained through a survey commissioned by American Public University System (APUS) through its parent company American Public Education, Inc. (APEI) and conducted by Hanover Research. The survey was administered to 294 respondents who were employed in at least a manager-level role or in the human resources field between May and June 2024. Respondents answered questions about workforce trends, employer needs, and education benefits programs. The findings are based solely on self-reported responses from the surveyed sample and may not be representative of all employers or applicable to all industries or locations.



Fast Facts

Education benefits provide a cost-effective solution for upskilling and reskilling in-house teams.

Lack of awareness is one of the top reasons why employees don’t utilize their education benefits.

Step 1: Find the gaps in your workforce

Skill gaps are unavoidable—new hires, veteran employees, and even top performers all have room to grow. Hiring additional talent can help to offset employees’ shortcomings, but upskilling in-house staff is significantly more cost effective.

Rather than viewing skill gaps as weaknesses, employers should reframe them as opportunities to guide L&D initiatives and leverage education benefits.

Employees who utilize their education benefits gain access to career-relevant education that helps sharpen hard and soft skills. Benefits not only empower professionals to obtain academic credentials, but also help organizations minimize employee turnover and, ultimately, protect against succession risk. Through continuing education, workers may proactively reskill and upskill in accordance with their employers’ succession plans.



Fast Facts

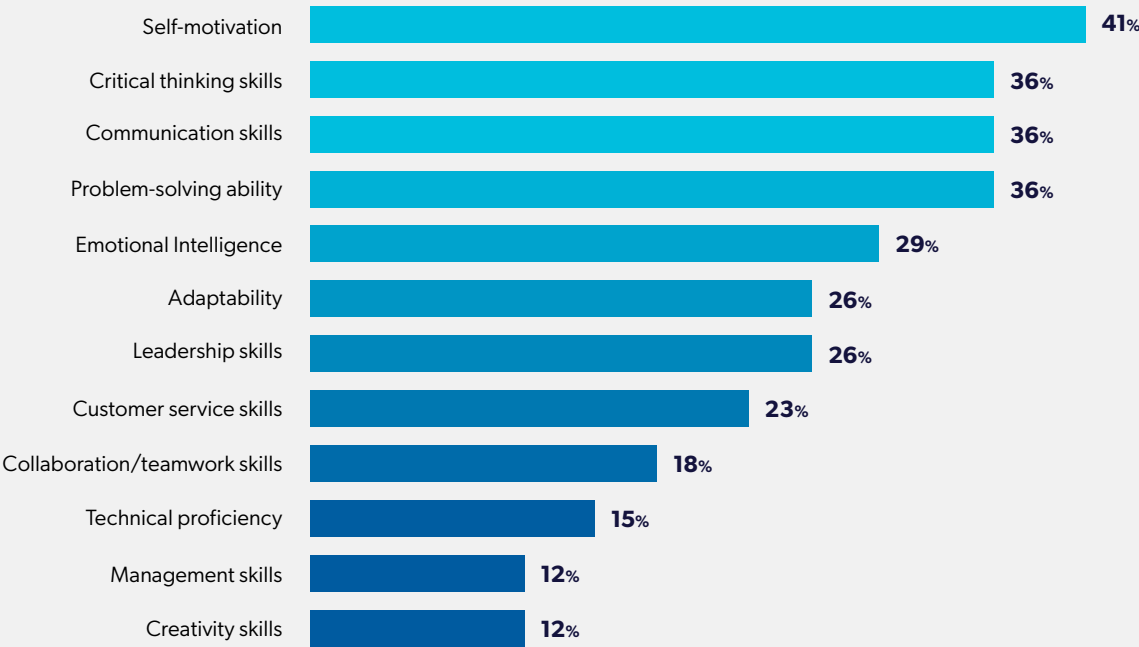
Skill gaps are unavoidable.

New hires, veteran employees, and even top performers all have room to grow.

54%

of employers are satisfied with the overall quality of the available talent pool.

Skills Today’s New Hires Lack Most, According to Employers



Step 2: Explore industry-relevant L&D programs with your APUS account manager

Once you’ve assessed your employees’ skill sets, your APUS account manager can recommend academic offerings that align with your L&D goals. Our University’s courses start monthly, so workers can enroll anytime.

Many employers now offer education benefits that help cover the cost to pursue not only formal degrees, but also certificates and microcredentials. Workers may even use their benefits to enroll in individual courses. These short-term options expedite reskilling and upskilling initiatives.



Fast Facts

Even staff members who already hold degrees can expand their knowledge and skills through continuing education programs.

HR leaders can encourage more employees to utilize education benefits by providing context about the specific skills workers can gain through various programs and courses.

Roles that Could Benefit Most from University Training Programs, According to Employers



“When you’re talking about working adults, being able to register for individual courses using employer benefits – without the restrictions of a traditional semester – offers a great deal of flexibility.”

– **Eric Morris**

Associate Vice President of Client Services and Strategic Partnerships at APUS

Step 3: Inform, remind, repeat

Education resources aren't always top of mind for employees, especially not for long-serving staff members. Most employers discuss education benefits with new hires, but few provide follow-up information after the initial onboarding process. Increasing utilization of benefits requires ongoing communication, complete with information tailored to employees' needs.

"The reality is that employees need to continually be reminded about their education benefits, and those conversations need to happen with one segment at a time. That way, we can avoid inundating staff members with information that's not applicable to them," Morris explains.

For best results, employees should receive reminders about their education benefits – and the relevant programs they can be applied to – at least once a quarter or even as often as once a month. HR leaders are advised to work collaboratively with team leaders and managers to encourage employees to utilize their benefits.

Engage staff members through digital and print collateral across various touchpoints.

APUS provides our partner organizations with marketing kits comprised of turnkey materials and resources, including:

- Enewsletters
- Social media assets
- Email blast templates
- Virtual events, including live and on-demand webinars
- In-office information sessions
- Print flyers

As subject matter experts, our faculty members also develop industry-relevant and career-specific content, like articles and webinars, that our partners can share with their employees.



Fast Facts

29%

of employers say employees don't use their education benefits because they're either unaware of the benefits or unaware of their eligibility.

Informing employees about education benefits is easier than you think. Your APUS account manager will provide you with program-specific collateral to share with department leaders and managers.

Step 4: Personalize the conversation

Company-wide communications offer an efficient way to present employees with general information – and reminders – about their education benefits. Department- and team-specific messaging should provide further details, complete with L&D recommendations tailored to each audience. Staff members need to understand the connection between education and their own personal career goals, challenges, and interests.

Engage team leaders and supervisors to discuss L&D opportunities with staff members as part of the employee performance review process. Use the following scripts to address each unique scenario, and direct employees to your organization’s APUS partner page.



Fast Facts

Most employers agree that education benefits play a key role in enhancing employee retention.

Online courses start monthly and run for 8 to 16 weeks at American Public University System.

Scenario 1: Employee expresses interest in advancing within the organization

“Your goals are ambitious, and I believe you have the potential to reach them with additional training and education. Have you considered using your education benefits for professional development? These are some programs from our partner university that align with your interests:” *[Name 2-3 relevant programs.]*

Scenario 2: Employee expresses interest in transitioning to a different team or department

“Your career satisfaction is important to me, and I want to help you pursue your professional goals. Have you thought about continuing education? You can apply your education benefits towards a degree, certificate, or microcredential with our partner university. Take some time to review their programs, and let me know which one you’re interested in so we can help you cover the cost.”

Scenario 3: Employee has skill gaps that hinder performance

*“I would like to see you grow more comfortable with *[problem areas]*. Through our education benefits program, you can access online classes to help you reach this goal. I recommend looking into *[2-3 relevant short-term programs]* – you can even take one class at a time. Think it over and let me know what you decide.”*

Step 5: Eliminate barriers, celebrate wins, and foster a growth-oriented culture

Common Barriers That Can Prevent Employees from Utilizing Education Benefits	
Barrier: Employees have limited free time and fear that enrolling in education programs will disrupt their work/life balance.	Solution: Encourage employees to consider part-time enrollment. Connect them with programs that have monthly start dates and online asynchronous courses.
Barrier: Employees aren't sure why they should pursue continuing education.	Solution: Answer the question, "What's in it for me?" when communicating with employees about education benefits. Discuss how professional development aligns with internal advancement opportunities and succession planning.
Barrier: Employees worry they'll incur student debt if their benefits don't cover tuition in full.	Solution: Set clear expectations about how much financial assistance employees will receive. You can also talk to your APUS account manager about TuitionWise, our program that helps eliminate out-of-pocket tuition expenses.
Barrier: Employees who already have degrees assume they won't be eligible for education benefits.	Solution: Be transparent about eligibility criteria, and consider extending your education benefits program to all in-house employees to encourage career-long L&D.
Barrier: Employees don't know how to apply their education benefits to a degree/certificate/microcredential program.	Solution: Share information proactively about how to utilize benefits, and work with education providers who can help streamline the process with online application systems.
Barrier: Employees aren't willing to cover tuition payments upfront.	Solution: Opt for direct billing instead of tuition reimbursement.

Recognizing employees for advancing academically is equally as important as eliminating barriers.

Organizations should encourage peer recognition by celebrating team members' academic achievements through announcements in company newsletters, internal social media sites, and department meetings. Shining a light on employees who engage in professional development not only boosts morale, but also helps further increase awareness about education benefits.

Ready to maximize benefit utilization at your company? Reach out to your APUS account manager today.

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An investment in your people is an investment in your organization's future

Employees are busy on the job and at home. As a result, businesses and organizations can facilitate opportunities for high-quality education by partnering with higher education systems like American Public University System (APUS) that provide respected, relevant, accessible, affordable, and student-focused online programs.

Organizations can trust APUS to provide high-quality education that's relevant to today's workforce. With more than 200 degree and certificate programs, organizations can offer employees access to education that aligns with their professional development goals.

Investing in your employees' education means investing in your organization's success.

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