

# How ASU helped this returning student rewrite his story

**Ryan Abernethy didn't finish college the first time, but through Earned Admission and the ASU-Uber partnership, he got a second chance**

By Samantha Becker, ASU News  
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Ryan Abernethy thought his college dreams had stalled, but behind the wheel of an Uber, he unexpectedly found a road back.

Years ago, he began pursuing a degree in criminal justice at Temple University. Like many students, he left before finishing. Life moved quickly — family, responsibilities, career — and higher education slowly faded from view.

He spent a decade working for a beverage company and drove for Uber on the side to help support his growing family. He was doing well, but the desire to return to college never left.

"I had that kind of calling, like it wasn't enough for me," he said. "I wanted to do more."

It was between rides that he discovered the opportunity he needed: [Arizona State University's partnership with Uber](#), which offers tuition coverage for eligible drivers. It was a second chance at a degree — and ASU offered the pathway to make it possible.

Abernethy enrolled in the [Earned Admission](#) program: a flexible, low-risk option for returning students to earn their way back into college. For someone balancing work and parenting, it was the right on-ramp. He signed up, buckled up and got started.

(Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhSJTM1tYJM>)

## Back in the driver's seat

Earned Admission not only gave him a clear way forward — it offered something that traditional schools hadn't before: flexibility.

The program allowed him to earn college credit for admission into ASU asynchronously, without the pressure of immediate tuition costs or rigid class schedules. For Abernethy, who had a 1-year-old and a 3-year-old at the time, that open structure was everything.

“I would be a stay-at-home dad during the day, college student at night,” he said. “The way the Earned Admission program was designed — where you can do it at your pace and your time — it definitely makes it a lot, a lot easier.”

Once he met the academic requirements for formal admission, Abernethy enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in information technology program — part of the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#) — through [ASU Online](#). He’d always been interested in computers, but this was his first real opportunity in a decade to turn that passion into a career.

“It gave me the ability to balance everything exactly how I needed it. Because having to try and hop on a Zoom call in a class with kids screaming in the background?” he said, laughing. “It would have been tough.”

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Earned Admission grads  
redefine the college journey

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## From student to IBM technical specialist

While earning his degree, Abernethy took full advantage of all ASU had to offer, including virtual career fairs. He could explore job opportunities without disrupting his busy schedule — and it quickly paid off.

“One thing led to another, and I was able to land an internship with IBM,” he said. “Here I am in my 30s, and I’m like, ‘Oh man, am I that old guy intern here?’ But they told me, ‘Everybody was picked for a reason. Don’t think you’re not supposed to be here.’”

Internships are a critical launching pad for many students, and for Abernethy, it was a career-defining power move. His experience at IBM turned into a full-time role as a partner technical specialist in information architecture. It was the start of that “something more” he had been searching for.

Now, with a degree in hand and a career in technology, Abernethy knows he made the right choice.

“I went back to school because I wanted a better life,” he said. “Not just for me, but for all of us.”

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## Ready to return to school?

ASU’s Earned Admission program was built for adults who stepped away from college but haven’t stopped dreaming of going back. Learn more at

## Expanding access to higher education

Abernethy's story is one of thousands made possible by ASU's Earned Admission — a program built for adults who stepped away from college but haven't stopped dreaming of going back.

"Earned Admission is transforming who gets to say 'I'm a college student,'" said [Marco Serrato](#), vice president of Arizona State University's [Learning Enterprise](#).

"At ASU, we believe your potential shouldn't be defined just by transcripts or test scores. This program opens the door for learners who have the drive, but not always the traditional credentials, to prove what they're capable of. It's not just access — it's empowerment. And we're seeing it change lives every day."

Earned Admission is built for students like Abernethy: working adults with ambition, responsibilities and time constraints. And once students return, they don't just get in — they thrive.

"Earned Admission opens doors that are often closed to learners," said [Casey Evans](#), chief operating officer at ASU's [EdPlus](#). "It gives people the support and space to show what they're capable of and a real path to keep going to get their degree."

And the impact goes further, multiplying into broader communities and society. Programs like Earned Admission help to fill workforce gaps, particularly in high-demand fields like IT.

"Ryan's journey is a powerful reminder of why we design programs that meet learners where they are — at any stage of life," says [Kyle Squires](#), ASU senior vice provost of engineering, computing and technology and dean of the Fulton Schools of Engineering. "His determination to return to college, earn his degree and now thrive in his career is exactly the kind of success story that inspires our mission. At ASU, we create adaptable, high-quality learning experiences that empower anyone willing to put in the effort to succeed."

Abernethy's story is proof that it's never too late to earn a degree, change careers or take that step toward a new future.

"Honestly, the whole thing was all because of ASU," he said. "It's an amazing program. Anybody can do it. As long as you have the drive and the grit, you can definitely break through those barriers."

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Ryan Abernethy.