Report of the Commission for Blended and Online Learning
August 12, 2013
"Enhancing Learning and Achievement with Technology"

The Provost's Commission on Blended and Online Learning was charged on September 28, 2012 with reviewing, analyzing and providing recommendations to the Provost with regard to priorities, issues and costs associated with blended and online education at the University of Maryland. The preliminary report that follows describes the thinking of the Commission to date.

Today, universities are facing a major disruption brought on by advances in technology that have resulted in significant pedagogical shifts including courses that blend online and face-to-face instruction, courses that exist entirely online, and the widely discussed subset of online courses: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). While disruptive to traditional patterns of teaching and learning, these innovations offer the potential to enhance both faculty opportunities and student learning and achievement, in part by providing new levels of flexibility in the educational ecosystem.

The new pedagogies enabled by improvements in technology are only beginning to be realized. The task of moving a university with over 5,600 unique courses and tens of thousands of students in new directions in an ever-changing landscape is a massive undertaking. However the Commission encourages the university to embrace the challenge for the vast potential it offers to our educational mission.

The Commission's goals and recommendations that follow offer a vision and first steps for enhancing student learning and achievement in a technologically abundant living-learning environment.

<u>**GOALS:**</u>

1. **Empower, promote, and support student learning** through the strategic integration of technological resources in order to:

   1.1. Increase the quality of learning environments by integrating appropriate technology to enhance personalized and active learning;

   1.2. Increase the flexibility of course and degree structures through technology enhanced learning options;

   1.3. Ensure that all students have access to the digital resources and support they need to engage the technology-enhanced educational opportunities;

   1.4. Provide timely and useful student learning outcome assessment to both students and faculty.

2. **Empower, promote, and support faculty instructional and mentoring capabilities** through the strategic integration of technological resources in order to:

   2.1. Ensure that all instructional faculty, including graduate teaching assistants, have access to the digital resources and support they require to provide instructional excellence;

   2.2. Enhance pedagogical strategies and educational innovation by providing timely and knowledgeable support for these strategies;

2.3. Ensure faculty and student participation in decisions regarding curricular and educational innovations and the future educational direction of the university.

3. **Enhance our educational and land-grant mission** by utilizing the technological and pedagogical advances needed to reach beyond the campus borders to a broader and perhaps underserved citizenry.

Recommended actions:

To begin to achieve these goals, we recommend the following:

1. **Appoint a high-level administrator within Academic Affairs to develop, support and provide leadership across the campus** for technology-enhanced education.   This campus-level resource would serve as a 'hub' to support and coordinate the many efforts already underway in units throughout the university.

2. Provide incentives for faculty to develop and adopt e-learning technologies and pedagogies for enhancing student learning experiences including:

   2.1. Financial resources for educational innovation in the form of competitive grants;

   2.2. Funding and training for teaching assistants;

   2.3. Pedagogical and technical staff to support course development;

   2.4. A physical and technological infrastructure to support these course development activities;

   2.5. Recognition of educational innovation in the APT process.

3. **Provide the infrastructure** to create environments and experiences that facilitate learning and enable students to gain the skills and knowledge they need to be critical thinkers, excellent communicators (written and oral), and lifelong learners.

   3.1. Work with the Division of IT to implement initiatives outlined in the IT strategic plan that are focused on learning and teaching. These include developing a comprehensive understanding of technology needs and enhancing support for faculty and students to fully utilize this technology. (See IT Strategic Plan #2.6, 5.1, 5.4)

      http://www.it.umd.edu/ITstrategy/plan/2_support_enablement.html

      http://www.it.umd.edu/ITstrategy/plan/5_student_experience.html

   3.2. Create and support facilities for testing and prototyping technologies and pedagogies that enhance student learning (IT Strategic Plan #3.7), i.e., 'sandboxes' for experimentation;

      http://www.it.umd.edu/ITstrategy/plan/3_scholarly_enablement.html

   3.3. Create and support "educational spaces" on campus that enhance active student learning and collaborative interactions among students and with faculty (current examples would be the new St. John Learning and Teaching Center and the redesign of the libraries);

3.4. Provide support for and ease of access to library and informational resources and services that support student learning and achievement. See the Library's strategic plan for specific details

http://www.lib.umd.edu/binaries/content/assets/public/about/2010librariesstrategicplan.pdf

3.5. Create and support the systematic, valid, and reliable assessment of student learning with particular attention to the issues associated with academic integrity in technology-based student assessments.

3.6. Create and support the ongoing assessment of course re-design and educational innovations in order to provide evidence-based best practices and decisions.

4. **Increase the** support for professional development of faculty and graduate teaching assistants to support excellence in utilizing technology to meet the needs of students who learn in different ways. Expertise and support is needed to provide technological enhancement that addresses, but is not limited to, the following:

4.1. Variations in instructional modalities (e.g., face-to-face, visual, audio, etc.);

4.2. Students with various learning challenges and styles (e.g., learning disabilities, deafness, blindness, visual or auditory learners, etc.);

4.3. Variations in technology competence, experience, and accessibility;

4.4. Create and support new structures that facilitate inter-disciplinary learning community focused on the innovated use of technologies to enhance student learning, such as those currently overseen by the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE).

4.5. We recommend that instructional designers be located in and report to academic units with a dotted line responsibility to the Instructional Design Group in the Division of Information Technology.

5. **Develop excellent and well-branded online and MOOC courses** that are nationally recognized and consistent with the mission of the University of Maryland, College Park.

6. **Develop a funding model** that supports the development and sustainability of technology enhanced learning systems. Any savings from the implementation of new technologies are not likely to be realized in the short run. At the start, a substantial investment of funds will be required to develop blended and online courses. It is recommended that a model be developed that would consider, but not be limited to:

6.1. Infrastructure support and enhancements (both personnel and IT);

6.2. Course development and incentives to faculty;

6.3. Revenue sharing from MOOCs.

7. **Develop policies with all stakeholders (faculty, administrators, and students) that support best practices** in technology enhanced instructional environments to support student learning and achievement. These policies would include but are not limited to:

7.1. Teaching responsibilities and workloads;

7.2. Assessment of student learning outcomes;

7.3. Intellectual property of online materials;

7.4. Clarification of the usage of copyrighted materials;

7.5. Assessment of the suitability (or not) of an online environment for specific types of courses (e.g. lab courses, experiential learning, I-Series courses, etc.).

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