

## **Background Paper on Academic Transformation**

For the University System of Maryland (USM), Academic Transformation is not a fad or a buzz term. Academic Transformation—most notably through Course Redesign to date—has become an important element of the USM’s ongoing efforts to rethink and reengineer course delivery, with the goals of improving student learning outcomes and containing the growth in educational costs.

By recognizing and taking full advantage of the disruptive impact of new and evolving technologies, the USM has become a national leader in the implementation of a variety of innovative teaching and learning models. Our success is not simply measured by the number of students enrolled in such courses, but also by the improved outcomes in student learning. In addition, we have been able to capture significant savings from our efforts through faculty time redistribution and the reduced cost of course delivery.

The initial course redesign efforts supported by the USM Office, while by no means pervasive, are nevertheless significant. To date, with funding from the Carnegie Corporation and private donations, we have supported the redesign of 38 courses within the USM, impacting more than 12,000 students during spring semester 2012 alone. We are in the process of recruiting 10-15 faculty teams to redesign additional courses this coming year. Moreover, through a grant from the Lumina Foundation, the USM Office facilitated the redesign of some 16 courses at community and independent colleges in Maryland. A new cohort of 16 courses at community colleges and Historically Black Institutions (HBIs) is currently under development, led by the USM through a new Maryland Higher Education Commission grant for Complete College America.

Initial analysis suggests that the redesigned courses, which incorporate active and collaborative learning, greater use of technology and online tutorials, and immediate feedback to students, have resulted in improved student learning and higher retention rates. In virtually every redesigned course, students generally perform as well as, if not better than, students in corresponding traditional courses. As noted, there also is evidence of cost savings for institutions stemming from the ability to restructure faculty time. This cost-savings benefit is especially strong in developmental courses as increased student success reduces the need to repeat courses. The USM is preparing additional longitudinal analysis of both student success and cost savings as we assess student progression through these programs and into subsequent courses.

As the first university system in the nation to implement course redesign in a coordinated manner across a diverse set of institutions, the USM is recognized as a leader in this movement. As a result, we have been invited to be a partner by ITHAKA S+R, Carnegie Mellon University, Coursera, and others to test new approaches to teaching and learning, especially in core curriculum and gateway courses. Now, we have the potential to cement the USM’s position as THE national leader in higher education academic transformation.

As the opening presentations in this session of the Board Retreat will illustrate, there are signs suggesting a massive change in the way technology and online learning will transform the nature of many classrooms at colleges and universities across America. Established universities, non-profit entities, for-profit publishers, and technology companies alike are developing a wide range of new approaches for delivering education and supporting learning. The many new alternative models are welcomed, but institutions of higher education need to determine the actual value of these models. We also must develop investment strategies for successful adoption and sustained implementation of the best models. And we must assess the models through the lens of the varied learning environments and diverse student populations across the USM.

For these reasons, we propose the establishment of a Center for Academic Transformation that will enable the USM to secure and expand its leadership position for the benefit of its students. While USM campuses will continue to be engaged in institutionally supported teaching and learning innovations, through research, analysis, and dissemination of “best practices,” the Center will become a valued resource for system institutions and the higher education community more generally. USM presidents and provosts have indicated their support for this concept.

Housed in the USM Office of Academic Affairs and headed by an Executive Director, the Center will have a small permanent staff and it will:

- support, coordinate and assess academic transformation activities on the campuses;
- raise external funds for system wide transformation activities;
- conduct research with external partners on the effectiveness of various new educational delivery platforms in improving learning outcomes and reducing costs of educational delivery; and
- disseminate best practices among USM institutions and to the broader higher education community.

The Center will bring greater focus, visibility and fund raising potential to USM’s academic transformation efforts. It also will help solidify USM’s leadership in what will undoubtedly be an important new dynamic in teaching and learning activities throughout higher education.

These are challenging times in higher education, but these challenges also present us with exciting opportunities. As a system of diverse institutions, the USM is uniquely positioned to be a national and successful model of academic transformation, benefitting our students, enhancing quality and efficiencies, and advancing the college completion goals of the state.