

## Final Report

May 2021

For USM, like most of higher education, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically shifted how courses and programs were being offered and how faculty and students were engaging in teaching and learning. Moreover, the pandemic will likely have a far-reaching impact on student mobility and institutional operations going forward. To be prepared for the 2020-21 Academic Year, as well as the post-COVID-19 higher education landscape, USM institutions needed to adapt both their technology infrastructure and teaching methods to build more effective learning environments, whether online, face-to-face, or some combination of the two.

To support the necessary changes, the William E. Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation launched USM *OnTrack* in May 2020 with generous support from University of Maryland Global Campus. USM *OnTrack* aimed to expand high-quality online learning across USM institutions both in response to COVID-19 and with an eye toward sustaining and building upon these improvements into the future. USM *OnTrack* offered critical and timely resource-sharing, faculty/staff professional development, and instructional design and technology capacity-building.

This final report highlights USM *OnTrack* contracted services, programs and resources, and avenues for future work.

### CONTRACTED SERVICES

#### Virtual Reality Technologies for Lab-based Courses

USM *OnTrack* provided faculty training and inter-institutional coordination to use Labster's virtual reality technologies in lab-based courses (see Table 1). These tools supported faculty by providing high-fidelity simulations for learning lab techniques and inquiry skills, particularly for lower-level lab courses. This component of USM *OnTrack* generated enough interest across the institutions in AY 20-21 that we upgraded to a system-wide site license that included professional development for faculty. Labster staff hosted general and discipline-specific demos for biology, chemistry, and physics in Fall and Winter 2020.

*Table 1: Labster Usage AY20-21*

Fall 2020	Spring 2021
8 institutions	7 institutions
2,994 students	2,630 students
130 courses	92 courses

From a survey completed by USM faculty users of Labster in Fall 2020, respondents reported using Labster most frequently as a lab replacement, for homework, lab enhancement, and as pre-lecture exercises to flip the classroom. Seventy-three percent of responding faculty reported they made the Labster simulations a required part of the course. Overall, respondents had positive impressions of Labster as a teaching and learning tool.

#### Instructional Design (ID) Support

USM *OnTrack* contracted with iDesign to provide a pool of instructional design service hours that institutions used as needed for individual faculty support and/or course development for those courses they chose to convert to online. This greatly expanded institutional capacity to rapidly move courses

online and gave USM campuses a way to triage their current and future needs. Through this contract, USM institutions also received web-based resources for faculty on the fundamentals of online instructional design and pedagogy as well as online learning orientation materials for students.

Through this contract, USM *OnTrack* provided a pool of 750 hours of ID support to each of 9 institutions (6,750 total hours). Support hours were used for things such as working with iDesign's Support Center to leverage the instructional design support services and implement course templates (4 institutions), create student quickstart modules (8 institutions) and faculty hubs (7 institutions), in addition to working on institution-specific projects. iDesign launched an Ask & Answer program late in 2020 for faculty to quickly and easily have their instructional design questions addressed across five topic areas. Faculty from multiple institutions signed-up to take advantage of these personalized sessions in November and December and feedback on the sessions was overwhelmingly positive. As of May 2021, a total of 4,946 iDesign support hours have been used across all participating USM institutions.

Several institutions decided to convert their hourly support hours to specific instructional design projects for high priority courses and degree programs.

- At Coppin State University, iDesign provided program instructional design and development services to transition 8 courses in the Early Childhood Development (Human Development track) Program to online, hybrid, or hyflex delivery models for the Spring 2021 semester, and 12 courses in the regular Early Childhood Development Program for the Fall 2021 semester.
- At Bowie State University, iDesign has been working with faculty to provide course design/redesign, development and mapping support to transition courses in the Reading Literacy (11 courses), online Ed.D. (5 courses), and Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning programs (3 courses) to online, hybrid, or hyflex delivery models for the Spring and Fall 2021 semesters. Several of these courses are complete and have already launched, while the rest are on track for the Fall 2021 semester.
- At the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES), iDesign partnered with the USMx<sup>1</sup> team to provide instructional design support to successfully launch and deliver 4 Fall 2020 courses on the edX platform and will assist with new Professional Certificate on edX launching in spring 2021.

### Online Course Design Workshops and Resources

Between July 2020 and January 2021, USM *OnTrack* invested in 84 Quality Matters workshops to support faculty in redesigning their courses for online delivery (see Table 2). Quality Matters is a nonprofit organization leading quality assurance in online and innovative digital teaching and learning environments. Professional development workshops focused on topics such as active learning strategies and student engagement, aligning student learning and course outcomes, course design best practices, ensuring accessibility, and effective use of discussion boards and rubrics.

*Table 2: Quality Matters Workshops AY20-21*

Summer/Fall 2020	Winter 2021
11 institutions	12 institutions
330 registrants	67 registrants
1,311 registrations	214 registrations

<sup>1</sup> USMx is the name of USM's system-wide edX agreement. More information can be found at [www.usmd.edu/cai/online-learning](http://www.usmd.edu/cai/online-learning).

## PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

### Academic Integrity in Online

As part of USM *OnTrack*, the Kirwan Center organized two workshops focused on academic integrity in online learning.

- In October 2020, the Kirwan Center partnered with the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) to host a workshop entitled, *Responding to Academic Integrity Concerns: What Faculty Can Do*. This workshop focused on how faculty can handle academic integrity concerns in an educational/formative way, considering contextual factors, including teaching online and was attended by nearly 100 individuals across the USM.
- In July 2020, the Kirwan Center organized a workshop in partnership with the Office of Academic Integrity and Accountability at the University of Maryland Global Campus entitled, *Got You, Not Gotcha: Promoting Integrity through Best Practices in Online Learning*. This workshop focused on promoting integrity through best practices in online learning and instructional design and was attended by over 100 individuals across the USM.

### Adaptive Courseware for High-enrollment Courses

To help faculty explore adaptive courseware<sup>2</sup> in their move to online teaching, the Kirwan Center hosted an Adaptive Learning Summit in July 2020. The Summit kicked off with an overview of research on the effectiveness of adaptive courseware and then connected 400 faculty participants from 12 institutions with to a variety of adaptive courseware vendors by disciplinary area. Interested disciplines were wide-ranging and included Behavioral & Social Sciences, Business & Economic, Computer Science, Engineering, Finance, Health Professions including Nursing, Pharmacy and Wellness, Mathematics, and Theatre Arts, among others. Out of the Summit, we also learned that several faculty had already implemented one or more of these adaptive tools within their courses.

To help interested faculty move closer to testing adaptive courseware, we partnered with educational technology company Lumen Learning to deliver two workshops in October 2020. Both workshops were designed to provide faculty and course coordinators with practical solutions to immediate problems while also exposing them to the courseware tools, services, and support that were being made available through USM *OnTrack*.

### Student Readiness to Learn

One concern that arose in discussions with institutional leaders had to do with student readiness to learn going into the fall 2020 semester given the level of disruption experienced in spring 2020. With the help of a readiness assessment work group, the Kirwan Center produced a set of resources to help faculty assess students' readiness to learn. Focusing on students' knowledge, motivation, and affect, these resources offered faculty simple strategies they could employ at the start of the semester to give them insights about student readiness, which in turn would help them to adjust instruction to address any challenges students might be having. See [overview document](#) and [companion web links](#).

### Web Resources

Kirwan Center staff curated web resources for use by USM institutions. Topical areas included [Pivoting to Online, Hybrid, and Hyflex Teaching](#), [Ensuring Equity and Inclusion](#), [Assessing Student Learning](#), and [Humanizing Online Courses](#), and [Engaging Students in Active Learning](#).

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<sup>2</sup> Adaptive courseware consists of interactive, multimedia content and tools that allow each student to experience a tailored level of challenge as they move through the material and gauge their own learning progress.

## **FUTURE WORK**

### **Fall 2021 Faculty Showcase**

In Fall 2021, the Kirwan Center will host a two-day faculty showcase, *Silver Linings: Lessons Learned from Teaching during the Pandemic*. We are inviting faculty, individually and with colleagues, to share challenges, triumphs, lessons learned, and new approaches for supporting quality teaching and learning. Proposed sessions will explore novel instructional approaches, active learning pedagogies, student engagement practices, assessment techniques, communication strategies, and faculty-staff and faculty-student partnerships.

### **Development of a Tool to Assess “Pain Points” in the Student Learning Journey**

The Kirwan Center engaged Grunwald Associates, a research firm, to design an “insight” tool for analyzing impediments to student success and determining strategies to help propel students across the learning journey—from recruitment and admissions to the college to career continuum. For each component of the learning journey, the tool highlights strategies under four major categories: academic, belonging, financial and personal, and navigation. We hope to use this insight tool to guide conversations with USM stakeholders on identifying areas for improvement of student success.

### **“Ready-to-Adopt” Online Courses (UMGC)**

USM *OnTrack* also developed a strategy for USM institutions to accelerate their online transition strategy through the temporary adoption of UMGc courses for delivery to their students in fall 2020. Host institutions would identify candidate courses and create a “friction free” process in which students register at the host institution, as usual. Actual placement of students into the UMGc courses, details on tuition reconciliation, assignment of credit, and the like, would be addressed through interinstitutional MOUs and implemented by back-office operations. This strategy had no uptake in fall 2020 or spring 2021, due to timing as well as concerns about competition. We would like to revisit this idea when the pandemic-related pressures on teaching have lessened and potentially launch a small pilot to see whether institutional concerns are merited or if, in fact, the increased flexibility in course-taking would attract or retain some groups of students more than would happen otherwise.

## **SUMMARY**

Faculty-focused services and programs had robust uptake in the 2020-2021 academic year, and there was evidence of movement into redesign of whole courses and sequences of courses. At the same time, strategies requiring deeper change at the departmental or institutional level were not as popular. Feedback from institutional points of contact suggest that these more comprehensive actions would need longer lead time to implement deeper change than what was available between the launch of USM *OnTrack* and the start of the fall 2020 semester. As the restrictions begin to ease, the Kirwan Center will work with USM institutions to help them evaluate changes that contributed to faculty and student success, sustain strategies that made a difference, and delve into deeper change strategies that can help them take their efforts to the next level.