Empowering Experimentation to Accelerate Academic Innovation and Drive Demand for Graduate Education

***Strategic Plan Theme*: Student Success**

***Funding Level*: Between $1-5 million**

***Facility Needs*: No new facilities will be needed**

***Submitting Unit*: Broad**

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

NA

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

klbowman@msu.edu, rhead@msu.edu, brendan@msu.edu

What is the proposal's goal?

Decrease programmatic development and innovation time, while enabling better adaptation of our offerings with learner demand and ability.

Borrowing cues from the technology sector, organizations have come to recognize agile development as best-practice. Agile development mandates that developers involve prospective customers at every step of the build process. Our current policy stature limits the feasibility of experimenting with new programs. State guidelines exist, but much of the delay is caused by our internal policies.

Potential solutions could include: • Empowering an internal innovation team (including UCC and UCGS representatives) to enable rapid, year-round review and approval of professional certificate proposals and professional MA/MS. Potential impact is limited as would require formal governance adjudication anytime the program is modified. • Alternatively, develop a process to internally green-light experimental certificate programs on an interim basis (e.g., two years or less).

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

Prospective programs would be able to seek additional validation before advancing to formal governance, or as evidence of demand for a new degree program seeking Provost start-up funds. Being nimble has benefits for our knowledge creation engine, as well as all of those in demand of educated people to help solve the most pressing problems.

MSU faculty, especially those deeply engaged in creating new knowledge and in the translational sciences are already at capacity with their teaching, research, service, and community engagement. Instead, we must corroborate faculty-led academic innovation with a small staff of professional (dedicated) advisors, recruiters, learning experience designers, and marketing staff to assist with the rapid creation of innovative new programs.

MSU's brand and market positioning perfectly prepare us to tackle the world's most pressing needs and most difficult problems with education—the ideas captured in this artifact are tactics to designed to help us respond to said needs expeditiously, and, n.b. in advance of our peers.

Who will be impacted?

MSU has the potential to establish a renewed and strengthened foothold in the adult, employee, and continuing education marketplaces writ large. Iterating new academic offerings to align with where learners are in their educational journey, is an opportunity that is easily within MSU's reach. Our land grant mission only amplifies the value of being able to quickly iterate to reach program-market-fit, as our mission ensures that faculty are themselves concerned with the issues facing practitioners, and thereby provides an additional knowledge pathway, informing research, and ultimately, research output.

We must be nimble as an institution to meet the evolving needs of learners; MSU's professional education programs, and more generally, our non-terminal graduate programs continuously improve the lives of thousands of students every year [https://bit.ly/3O43Sx1]. These same students' tuition provides new revenue streams, the growth in their professional skills pays for itself faster than most, and in some cases, faster than any other university[https://bit.ly/3vdudjB]—while many aspirant universities have crippled their professional students with insurmountable debt[https://on.wsj.com/3NWSBi6]. We, as an institution, have always excelled in disseminating practical knowledge, and we have evolved our pedagogy to do so efficiently, and at scale. And right now, our nation needs education at scale.

Six years ago, the National Center for Education Statistics data documented that "roughly one out of four adults has a non-degree credential — a postsecondary certificate, a certification, or a license;" emerging from the coronavirus pandemic, 63% of Americans surveyed sought either skills training or a non-degree certificate, rather than an associates, bachelors, or master's degree[https://bit.ly/362mV9V]. Reaching this pool of ~145M (63% of 230 million) adults residing in the United States is what our proposals seeks to unlock.

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

MSU should measure key-performance indicators associated with time-to-decision, time-to-resource-allocation, and time-to-market of new program ideas. Holding governance and administration to accountability relative to timely decision-making and timely implementation. Sustainability means re-investing in program-incubation-capacity akin to the investments made when MSU first began exploring online learning. A dedicated business development capacity, direct assistance for faculty and researchers who want to provide subject matter expertise without publishing courseware on their own, and a pool of finances to fund the most promising startup-programs would alleviate the financial burden and value-at-risk engendered when individual colleges and departments explore new programs independent of centralized support.

MSU delivers a robust education portfolio covering more subject areas and educating more learners than nearly every other university in the world.[https://bit.ly/374HIdK] Every year, we look more like our aspirant institutions—yet, we also find ourselves in increasingly difficult operating circumstances. We propose to begin reclaiming our position as an academic innovator, eager to meet the needs of our community and global stakeholders, concomitantly.