MSU Online

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

***Funding Level*: More than $5 million**

***Facility Needs*: Adjustments to existing facilities will be needed**

***Submitting Unit*: MSU Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation**

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

Broad College of Business MSU Center for T&LI MSU Center for T&LI Natural Science Comm Arts and Sciences Arts and Letters Arts and Letters International Studies and Programs Ag and Natural Resources International Studies and Programs Ag and Natural Resources Comm Arts and Sciences Education Veterinary Medicine Osteopathic Medicine MSU IT Arts and Letters

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

This proposal recommends establishing a centralized academic unit (MSU Online) that will be responsible for coordinating resources and initiatives to support online student success and development and delivery of MSU's online and hybrid program offerings to sustain and promote enrollment growth.

The future of education will require flexibility to deliver innovative programs that can provide meaningful experiences for online audiences that have comparable outcomes to in-person programs. Michigan State University (MSU) currently has more than 80 online programs including one Bachelor's of Science degree completion, Master's degrees, and Doctoral degrees, as well as various graduate and post-graduate certificates. Administration of these existing programs vary significantly with little consistency across the university in terms of course development, marketing, student services, and retention efforts.

A first step in creating consistency was the development of online.msu.edu, to serve as a centralized resource through which prospective students can learn about the full catalog of online programs. This platform filled an important gap as there was no clear way to identify our online programs given the decentralized way this information was communicated to prospective students, current students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the public.

This proposal outlines a framework aimed at enhancing both quality and consistency of experiences across these programs. This online learner-oriented framework will advance MSU's land-grant mission to become a highly engaged digital university. A series of targeted strategies have been identified to enable MSU to increase the number and diversity of learners we serve, enhance the experience of all learners, and expand access to online academic programming for individuals of all backgrounds and experiences.

Figure 1. Establishment of a centralized online / hybrid MAU. Click the link to view.

In this proposal, "online learning" refers to instruction delivered online at MSU either in a synchronous or asynchronous format. "Online programs" refer to graduate degrees and certificates, as well as professional development and non-credit programs, including alternative, micro and stackable credentials. Online programs may be fully remote or hybrid by nature. "Learners" refers broadly to any prospective audience for online learning, including traditional on-campus students in both undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as groups who are not primarily targeted by existing online programs, such as prospective transfer students, some-college-no-degree students, continuing adult learners, and dual (high school and college) students. These learners may live in the local MSU community, throughout the United States, or internationally.

What is the proposal's goal?

The goal of this effort is to establish MSU as a leading institution for online learners, within five years, as measured by external metrics (e.g., rankings) and internal metrics including applications, enrollments, degree conferrals, and learner satisfaction. This will be done by creating and funding a central MAU, MSU Online, under the Provost's Office, led by a responsible administrator, to combine all aspects of administrative, faculty and student services support for MSU's online programs. As an integrated unit MSU Online would be responsible for:

Providing student support services and guidance during admissions, on-boarding, and annual advising, through degree completion and post-graduate career advancement. Provides retention case management in coordination with faculty advisors and professional advisors in programs. Makes direct handoffs to the full breadth of MSU's student success and student services offerings, many of which are not optimized for distance learning support.

Recruiting students on behalf of academic programs with a dedicated outbound calling and in-bound omni-channel call-center (including chat support) staffed for two shifts to engage non-traditional adult learning population.

Digital marketing of MSU Online within the MSU brand, as a distinct opportunity for public engagement. Drive digital search traffic, social media, and advertising buys to produce measurable conversions (lead acquisition, program applications, and enrollment).

Providing faculty support, in the form of instructional design and direct assistance in the creation of digital content and maintenance of learning experiences composing our online and hybrid programs.

Establishing a quality assurance program, through preparatory instructor training, certification of courses and programs, and incentives for faculty to participate in peer-review processes.

Providing administrative support for monitoring education market conditions and evaluating market potential of degree/certificate programs. Proactive assistance to academic units to ensure market intelligence reaches program directors, chairs, and deans offices.

Administering a services budget, separately reviewed annually, derived from overhead on distance learning tuition, and directly correlated with our distance learning enrollment. Revenue share must be adequate to staff the following functions with an appropriate ratio of student-to-professional staff.

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

MSU Online will strengthen our land grant mission by advancing equity and expanding impact. This includes increasing enrollment and enhancing the diversity of learners who otherwise may not be served by MSU. Improved student support will decrease the time to degree and increase graduation rates by providing flexibility in scheduling course offerings that are common bottlenecks for graduation. (Student Success Obj. 1,3; Innovation for Global Impact Obj. 3; Diversity Equity and Inclusion Obj. 1)

MSU Online will also expand and diversify revenue sources, align resources with strategic priorities, and ensure university-wide effectiveness and efficiency. Best-in-class processes for supporting online learners will be employed university-wide. This will generate new revenue and diversify revenue sources by tapping new and underserved markets consistent with our land-grant identity and brand. Stewardship and Sustainability Obj., 1)

Most importantly, these efforts will provide exceptional support services for online learners. The user experience will be improved by consistent services throughout the online student journey, from prospective students through graduation. The MSU Online brand reputation will be exemplified by outstanding Spartan experiences. (Student Success Obj. 3,4)

The centralization of the initiatives will minimize the duplicative efforts in marketing, recruitment, and student support across those departments and colleges administering online programs. By creating this structure, more faculty effort can be spent on pursuits to maximize student success in the online classroom. The entire university community will be served by the adoption of best practices in digital marketing, which

will help attract diverse and talented learners. In addition, these efficiencies will serve to support academic entrepreneurship by leveraging market intelligence and faculty capacity to best meet the evolving needs of prospective students and employers. MSU Online would also strengthen existing relationships with external partners and create opportunities to expand these efforts. (Staff and Faculty Success, Obj. 2)

Lastly, MSU Online will advance our market position in online learning amongst the Big 10, positioning our online programs as a nationally and globally renowned brand. If we do not act, our position will continue to fall behind our peer institutions (Figure 2). MSU will earn such global recognition by diversifying our online portfolio to meet the needs of learners around the world, increasing access to online opportunities. In-house expertise will be reorganized to expand services for faculty and staff seeking online course development and instructional design assistance and training. These efforts will lead to high-quality online offerings at the university.

Figure 2. Conferrals of online degrees and certificates in 2019 by Big 10 peer institutions. Click the link to view.

Who will be impacted?

Implementation of MSU Online will introduce substantive benefits for online learners, together with the faculty, staff, and administrators involved in the delivery of online programs. Online learners have unique needs, distinct from those of residential and on-campus learners. Currently, many online programs lack the same sense of community and cohesion as in-person programs as exemplified by the efforts of the Student Life and Engagement office. Diversifying our student population through online and hybrid programs requires dedicated student support for each classification of student we have proposed to serve. All such stakeholders will benefit from the streamlined processes and improved experiences provided by the combined services of a dedicated online learning unit.

A foundational understanding of support needed has been established through a working group comprised of online program directors. This group has facilitated sharing of best practices and identification of common issues faced across programs. Our learners will have access to quality online programs, robust support services, broader access to more opportunities with increased flexibility with respect to scheduling and course modality. Online programming will also provide the ability to reach a more diverse community of learners across the globe.

In addition to students, our online programs require a significant commitment from our faculty and academic staff. This most directly impacts program directors and faculty who teach in the online programs. Faculty and staff carry a significant conflict of commitment across a diverse set of demands. Faculty would benefit from renewed central support for online programming, providing capacity for program growth, faculty-student interaction, and research productivity.

Further study will be required to understand those impacted and to assist with the design of our solution, and ought to be underwritten by startup funding for proposal acceptance. MSU needs to understand the full market potential of each area we propose be pursued, including Global Impact and International Enrollment in Online Programs, Traditional Undergraduates, Graduate and Career-oriented post-Baccalaureate students, Degree Completion for some-college-no-degree / likely-completers, and Lifelong Learners.

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

Executive leadership must promote this initiative to set clear targets for enrollment and programmatic growth. MSU can reach full potential by making investments in a centralized unit to support learners and online program development that will help to facilitate change management and stakeholder connections. (Student Success Obj., 3) This unit will also manage new opportunity analysis, market research and demand analysis, and encourage market sensitive price points. (Stewardship and Sustainability Obj., 1). To achieve a deeper understanding of the changing market of online programs, access to internal and external data is essential.

This unit will partner with MSU colleges and departments to build transfer pipeline partnerships with regional community colleges to establish services such as pre-transfer advising, development of transfer agreements, and standardized prior learning assessments. Central offices necessary in these partnerships include Registrar

and Admissions to assist with lowering friction for students (fees, transferability, and admit to major). These efforts will continue to extend to MSU's outreach and engagement mission by deepening relationships with international partners. More flexible online and hybrid learning models will be developed based on different market needs (for both student recruitment and collaborative research opportunities). (Student Success Obj., 1,2,3,4; Innovation for Global Impact Obj., 1; Stewardship and Sustainability Obj., 5; Diversity Equity and Inclusion Obj., 1,5)

In future phases of investing in online learning at MSU, we hope incentives will be provided to teaching-focused faculty to value such work in promotion, tenure, and merit processes. We also advise incentives for programmatic development, growth, and local cost control. (Staff and Faculty Success Obj., 2, 3)