eLearning Board of Curators Summary

UM System launched a system-wide eLearning initiative in November 2018, led by Steve Graham in partnership with representatives from the Board of Curators, UM System administration, and faculty and provosts from each of our four universities. The vision for UM's eLearning initiative is: "UM System will be the premier eLearning provider in Missouri and contiguous states in respect to the quality of programs, courses offered and the number of learners served. Our initial focus will be on adult and traditional learners to meet the workforce needs of the state of Missouri and beyond while reaching a goal of at least 25,000 new learners by 2025."

The goal is to build a national class eLearning organization, reach new students who we are not currently serving, and meet the workforce needs of the State of Missouri. This requires a support structure for eLearning students including success coaches using data and analytics to provide support in a scalable fashion; meaningful online communities allowing students to learn and grow together; utilizing artificial intelligence to enhance but not replace learning; providing experiential learning opportunities and offering robust career placement services.

We have engaged the consultants Ernst & Young-Parthenon to guide us through this transformational effort. Their work is divided into three phases: 1) current state assessment and market analysis for opportunities, 2) detailed design and mobilization and 3) program implementation. We are just wrapping up phase one and will launch phase two next week.

Phase one included exploring alternatives and best practices through internal and external assessment. The internal assessment analyzed data from the four universities, including over 40 individual interviews and a survey of our faculty (n=216) who teach online. The external assessment included gathering national comparisons and conducting a prospective student survey (n=539) to inform us about the regional market that would allow us to reach our vision. It also reviewed industry-leading practices in online learning and examined mistakes made by other large public universities in the online market to help us avoid similar pitfalls.
Four options for growth were evaluated based on the data that were collected: 1) build organically, 2) partner with an individual solution providers, 3) partner with a turnkey provider or 4) acquire a complete online entity. After a thorough analyses of our strengths and weaknesses we decided to focus on the two partnership opportunities in the areas where we need the most assistance: marketing, pre-matriculation services and post-matriculation services. The research also confirmed that our course development and instruction efforts are strong so we will enhance these aspects internally. In addition, we have launched the search for a Chief eLearning Officer to lead this important effort and a faculty technical group. This faculty technical group is comprised of faculty members from each of our four universities and will establish system-wide standards. We have also created an eLearning website was created to help keep the UM community at large informed about the progress being made along the way.

The next steps in this effort include implementation decisions such as: 1) governance model, 2) degree granting capabilities, 3) branding of degrees, 4) financial structure, 5) academic ownership, 6) administrative ownership, and 7) accessibility. These decisions will be made while using the guiding principles of: A) ensuring high quality of offerings, B) minimizing competition between our universities, C) minimizing disruption to existing students and D) emphasizing fiscal sustainability.

We will determine if we will engage in the optional phase three with EY Parthenon. If so this work will include partnering on implementation and marketing strategies, program and organizational design recommendations as well as determining the appropriate approach to performance management. This summer we plan to have the Chief eLearning Officer identified and in place to lead the effort moving forward.