Digital Future Update

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The digital future is now. Recent developments with respect to MOOCs and the Flex Degree underscore how rapidly the higher education landscape is changing. UWM’s Digital Future planning initiative (www.digitalfuture.uwm.edu), currently in the first phase of its implementation, increases the University’s capacity to adapt to the digitization of higher education.

Implementation is under way for top recommendations from the three Digital Future Working Groups (Teaching and Learning; University Operations and Services; and Research).

Implementation Update

Teaching & Learning: The Virtual Teaching Commons

The Learning Technology Center is developing a virtual environment in which faculty and academic staff can gather information and share resources related to learning technologies, online pedagogy, and current trends in the use of technology to increase active learning and student engagement.

This virtual space would allow for community building (through synchronous chat, asynchronous blog comments, Twitter), just-in-time training (through blog posts with text and images and video tutorials), promote teaching innovation through UWM faculty showcases, share announcements and news, including UWM Alerts, Learning Technology Center announcements, upcoming workshops, national news ([Wired Campus],[Chronicle],[Inside Higher Ed]), regional and national conference proposal deadlines, and promote awareness of national trends and research in learning technologies through RSS feeds and Twitter hashtags.

In the last year, the LTC developed a blog (uwmltc.org) and the infrastructure needed to facilitate such environments. They have begun the digitization and development of support materials for institutionally supported technologies for blended and online learning, including Desire2Learn, student response systems, ePortfolios, digital media development, social media, and more. The LTC looks to develop faculty showcases, community-building opportunities, and other key components in the next year.

University Operations & Services: One Stop Student Services Website

Student Affairs is taking the lead on the development of a One Stop website that would consolidate student-related information in one authoritative place on uwm.edu. The project team is also investigating expanding the use of Intellireponse (otherwise known as Ask the Panther) from Financial Aid to other student services areas for the next phase of site development. Earlier this fall, the project team went on a site visit to the University of Minnesota, which is a national leader in this area. The team has also conducted focus groups, analyzed help desk logs, and is surveying
the student body to better determine students’ information needs. We know that students expect to be able to get individualized information on a 24/7 basis, and in a resource-scarce environment, technology can serve to assist students in self-service triage to get them the information they need when they need it.

**Research: The Digital Commons**
The Digital Commons, which is run by the UWM Libraries and acquired through the Educational Technology Fee Fund, is a UWM-specific academic publishing application. The Digital Commons (http://dc.uwm.edu/) provides an extensive e-publishing system. Initially, the Commons will be used for the digital publication of student electronic theses and dissertations for all UWM graduate students, replacing the current print-based system. This will be followed by featuring UWM scholarship and research at both student and faculty levels. Complete e-journal publishing is supported, as well as individual research projects and sets of projects organized as needed. All of the content of the Digital Commons is searchable via Google and other search engines, and the Commons will provide a permanent home for UWM research that can be referenced for portfolios, internships, and job opportunities.

**Technology Infrastructure**
In the focus groups that prioritized the original set of Digital Future recommendations, the critical need for technology infrastructure was cited frequently as hurdle to overcome in reaching our digital future as a campus. To address these priority concerns, the campus administration has made the following investments in cyberinfrastructure: 1) expansion and upgrade of campus Wi-Fi ($2.8M) and 2) core network upgrade, Data Center network and network security enhancements ($650K).

In addition to the activities surrounding Working Group recommendations, there have been a number of other Digital Future events and initiatives, including the following:

- A third Digital Future grant competition of $30,000 was announced earlier this fall. Earlier grant rounds yielded innovative projects that benefited the campus, and I expect that trend to continue.
- The Learning Technology Center hosted an Unconference, a participant-driven event in which attendees determine the agenda. The day-long event featured Bryan Alexander, from the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education, and elicited lively discussion on digital storytelling, ensuring quality in online and blended teaching, mobile learning, open education resources, visual thinking and 21st century literacy from all attendees. See [www.unconference.uwm.edu](http://www.unconference.uwm.edu).
- Encyclopedia of Milwaukee panel discussion. This project, which received Digital Future grant support, is an exciting large-scale publishing venture (both web and print based). The discussion focused on how the Encyclopedia of Milwaukee project team bridged the worlds of academia and web
development in developing a public history website. See http://youtu.be/J5pH_60R7zA.

- Learner Analytics presentation by Tracy Sleep, Student Services & Institutional Research Manager at the Iowa Community College Online Consortium. The presentation was designed to spur thinking about learner analytics (aggregate data on student behavior in the learning management system) at UWM. D2L is now offering new products that offer learner analytics functionality, which the LTC looks to pilot in the future.

**Next Steps**

Digital Future planning is one of the elements informing campus-wide strategic planning. To that end, a Digital Future Campus Summit is in the works for next February, to include a panel discussion on the outcomes of the second round of funding, a Digital Future leadership panel, and small group discussion to provide input on projects moving into the implementation phase.

I have also charged a new, related group, Emerging Educational Initiatives, to serve as an advisory group to me on issues requiring a rapid response (including MOOCs and flex degree, plus prior learning assessment and other educational innovations as they arise).