

DIGITAL LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE TIMELINE

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

For several years at Howard University, online education efforts were implemented independently, with the University's multiple departments and degree programs launching online programs individually. More recently, the University has sought to centralize digital and online learning initiatives and align best practices for teaching and learning across the institution.

The timeline presents major milestones in Howard University's recent efforts to enhance its digital learning infrastructure (DLI), addressing the major events and contextual factors enabling its DLI to evolve to its current form. It provides insight into the institution's journey to centralize DLI efforts across the institution through the Office of Online and Digital Learning and to socialize the new office into the University.

2012-2018

THE BEGINNINGS

Howard University initiates its online presence through the School of Business with the assistance of Dr. Moses Garuba (Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Engineering and Architecture) and the Office of the Provost. Experimentation with in-house development and marketing of online programming generates lessons learned about the assets and deficits of internal capacity.

2018

ONLINE PROGRAM MANAGER ENGAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ONLINE PROGRAM

The School of Business brings on Noodle Partners to launch an online MBA program and invest in the growth of its online Executive MBA (EMBA) program. Noodle becomes a strategic partner to enhance online graduate program offerings.

2019

HOWARD FORWARD: STRATEGIC PLAN ADOPTION

The University adopts *Howard Forward*, its strategic plan for 2019-2024, which calls for accelerating the development of additional online programs and courses. The plan sets a target that 20% of course offerings be offered online, supported by the development and integration of strategic and effective distance learning options.



2020**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

During March, the pandemic prompts all staff, faculty, and students to almost immediately transition to virtual communication, teaching, and learning. Through emergency remote instruction, the crisis instigates mindset and culture shifts across the institution toward acceptance and adoption of a virtual modality. The pandemic accelerates the institution's plans to create additional online programs.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT (CETLA)

With the institution in virtual mode, CETLA plays a critical role in training faculty on best practices in teaching and learning, specifically as it pertains to leveraging the learning management system (LMS). Ongoing professional development becomes a cornerstone of the University's transition to virtual instruction.

DR. MORRIS THOMAS JOINS THE UNIVERSITY

Following the first wave of the pandemic, Morris Thomas, Ph.D., PMP, joins Howard University as Director of CETLA. He brings expertise in academic and student affairs and in online education to the faculty development team and the University more broadly as the Howard University community prepares for the fall semester and beyond.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC INNOVATION AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Stemming from the 2019 strategic plan, *Howard Forward*, is the creation of the Office of Academic Innovation and Strategic Initiatives, signaling commitment of the University to accelerate partnerships with online providers.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSITIONS, INTEGRATIONS, AND EXPANSIONS

As the demand for online instruction grows, the University reviews the capacity of its tools to address needs across the campus community. Several changes are implemented to meet the moment.

The University adopts Echo360, a lecture capture and learning engagement tool, following the discontinuation of Tegrity, its previous service. Echo360 is soon integrated with Blackboard, the University's LMS.

The University expands its Zoom license for the entire institution, integrated with Echo360 so that Zoom recordings are automatically saved to Echo360 course libraries. The expansion provides more storage capacity and functionality for web conferencing.



2021**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF DIGITAL AND ONLINE LEARNING**

The Office of Digital and Online Learning is made possible in part through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Digital Learning Infrastructure Capacity and Knowledge Sharing grant. The office provides oversight for the selection and implementation of digital learning tools and coordinates matters pertaining to online course and degree program development. Its focus on enhancing DLI capacity supports the *Howard Forward* strategic plan.

Dr. Thomas becomes Assistant Provost for Digital and Online Learning and works with the Office of Academic Innovation and Strategic Initiatives to promote, advance, and develop online content, programs, and activities.

2022**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

The University's \$240,000 DLI grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supports 1) the development of physical digital learning spaces, including the Green Screen Suite, Digital Learning Recording Studio, and Digital Learning Hub, available for faculty training and access to digital learning tools; 2) digital learning hardware and software; 3) faculty training to adopt and use online courseware; and 4) the hiring of personnel to support grant-related activities.

Through CETLA, the University has trained most faculty in use of the LMS, and faculty are enhancing their ability to be adept with virtual instruction, including strengthening the design of online courses.

The University begins transitioning its LMS from Blackboard to Canvas.

The University moves toward bringing its digital learning infrastructure under the Office of Digital and Online Learning.

ABOUT THE SERIES

This timeline is the first in a series of knowledge sharing resources created as part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Digital Learning Infrastructure Capacity and Knowledge Sharing investment. As the learning consultant, Equal Measure partnered with the foundation's Postsecondary Success team and with Howard University, Morehouse College, Paul Quinn College, and UNCF to inform foundation strategy as well as awareness about digital learning infrastructure that drives success for HBCU students specifically and equitable student success in higher education more broadly.



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