

# Report from Strategic Planning Focused Inquiry on Online Strategy

This report provides detail on the efforts of the strategic planning online focused inquiry group during the summer of 2020. That work produced the following aspirational vision: MSU will revitalize the land-grant vision, becoming a highly-engaged digital university, increasing the number and diversity of learners we serve, helping individuals and organizations thrive in a continuously disrupted economy and society by providing online learning that transcends our founding as a place-based institution. Such a revitalization will strengthen the reputation and financial position of the university.

MSU can achieve this vision if executes the following initial strategies:

1. Empower a dedicated academic unit for online offerings
2. Targeted, market-driven growth in Post-BA degrees and certificates
3. Develop 3+ online BA degrees for degree completers and working adults
4. Create experiences for "multimodal undergraduates" (students prepared for the 4th industrial revolution)

This report is intended to point MSU in a particular direction and give the strategic planning team and executive leadership ideas to engage. We describe the group's process, provide a description of MSU at present, and describe a desired future state for MSU with recommendations for how we get there. An appendix contains detail from our inquiry.

## Problem Statements

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MSU is defined and operated as a premier, public, place-based institution for research and education of traditional students.\* As such...

- A. MSU is on-course to face a decline in enrollment and to miss opportunities to participate digitally that could directly impact our region's economic competitiveness and our international reputation.
- B. MSU needs to define an audacious goal related to our digital transformation, to escape our own cultural and mental barriers toward opportunities to serve more diverse learners in a highly disrupted world where the digital affords us new avenues through online learning.
- C. MSU needs to diversify our portfolio of educational opportunities to meet the needs of learners and ensure we continue to produce the revenue necessary to run the institution, including the research enterprise.

\* "**traditional student**" defined as ages ~18-24, physically present, attending full-time, probably in a cohort-based program, and degree seeking. What if we also strategically served learners who are none of these things?

# Current State of Online Learning at MSU in 2020

What we see	What we think
We are the world's premier land-grant University	If true, why ignore non-degree learning and non-traditional students?
40 Graduate Online/Hybrid Degrees 34 Graduate Certificates	Should double degrees and triple certificates. Find ways to nest certificates in stackable degree
1 Undergraduate Degree Online (RN to BSN) No undergraduate degree completion options	Inaccessible to large numbers of students we could serve well as the premier public institution
MSU has growth potential as transfer destination	Need to position online courses to assist
Lots of consideration of for-credit certificates	Little attention to non-degree / skill-gap needs
Broad UG summer study options & electives	Few core courses and prerequisites online
MSU has an excellent international reputation	We should use online to extend reach
Excellent residential services in Neighborhoods	Should have a "Neighborhood" for online students
Hub offers market research & development	Consultative: No authority to greenlight or decline
Dated incentives in OCCI and RBI	Incentives should align to future-facing strategy
Program ideas stalling out due to faculty workload	We need thoughtful educator staffing models

# Key Drivers for Online Learning Strategy for 2020-2030

1. Michigan State will diversify and grow despite a decline in traditional-age students.
2. 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution will continue to disrupt, creating skill gaps.
3. Graduate degree programming is a crowded market and will require a targeted approach.
4. Our online portfolio will diversify, particularly around market segments we don't currently serve or serve well
5. Diversifying our portfolio of online offerings will ultimately help develop our faculty and digital curriculum, benefitting traditional undergrads.
6. A hybrid university (digital and place-based) has institutional resilience.
7. Diversifying our product portfolio will require flexibility in our academic appointments for non-traditional teaching roles, including educators with industry experience. Incentives, rewards, and how we value faculty will follow.
8. MSU should become a digital enterprise, leveraging all our assets including alumni relations, agricultural extension, and outreach and engagement.

# Vision Statement for Online Learning Strategy

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Our design sprint produced a statement that addresses the problem statements and introduces the strategies that are contained in this report. If we execute these strategies, we will build towards this vision.

**MSU will revitalize the land-grant vision, becoming a highly-engaged digital university, increasing the number and diversity of learners we serve, helping individuals and organizations thrive in a continuously disrupted economy and society by providing online learning that transcends our founding as a place-based institution. Such a revitalization will strengthen the reputation and financial position of the university.**

# Online Learning Strategy – What we should do

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1. **Empower a dedicated academic unit for online offerings.** Unless a single unit has responsibility, authority, and resources, we cannot execute any of the strategies on offer and transform the institution.
2. **Targeted, market-driven growth in Post-BA degrees and certificates**
  - Strategic, coordinated continuous learning programs such as skill building bootcamps
  - Develop capacity for skill profiling and alternative online certificates and scaled affordable degrees
  - Deeper engagement with industry to inform curriculum
2. **Develop 3+ Online BA degrees for degree completers & working adults.**
3. **Create experiences for "Multimodal Undergraduates"**
  - Leverage digital experiences for on-campus students. All grads have experience with leadership, digital, and technical/analytical skills for 4th industrial revolution.
  - Grow international reach by (1) enabling students to spend less time in East Lansing, and/or (2) partner to enable students to earn MSU degree while finishing in country of origin.

# Online Learning Strategy – What we need to succeed

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- A. Executive Leadership** the President and Provost must promote our digital growth. Set clear targets for enrollment and programmatic growth. The authority to execute should be delegated to an academic unit.
- B. Build dedicated business and governance process** to support agile program building, including a way to finance start up for new initiatives. Runway to new programming needs to be reduced to 6-12 months.
- C. New budget model for the university** that treats online and on campus programs and students the same. Ideally a universal rolling average RCM model that incentivizes growth and local cost control.
- D. Market-sensitive pricing**, with online tuition as "in state." More generally we need the ability to price programming in ways that are systematic and market-sensitive to value and competition.
- E. New thinking on faculty composition** to enable teaching-focused faculty and ways to value such work in promotion, tenure, and merit processes.
- F. Invest in an Academic Unit for Online Learning** for program development, marketing, design and build, student services, and educator professional development.
- G. Build transfer pipeline** by partnering with regional community colleges, pre-transfer advising, expanding articulation agreements, building and standardizing prior learning assessment in RO/Admissions, and lowering friction for students (fees, transferability, admit to major).

# Desired Future State of Online Learning 2030

1. **What should be the size and reach of the mission of the university and what is the role of online education?**
  - A. MSU sustains the size of the undergraduate population, in the face of our demographic challenges, by increasing diversity of the student population, growing transfer students, adding online programs for degree completion, and creating new online/hybrid opportunities connected to the labor market (e.g., quality "bootcamps").
  - B. MSU is selective but aggressive about the creation of new graduate and post-BA certificate programs, expanding into areas of market demand in which MSU can be distinctive and competitive.
  - C. MSU expands into previously untapped market segments with non-degree options that are responsive to economic need, societal change, and directly addresses skill gaps in the workforce.
  - D. MSU has more diverse learners, from demographic characteristics to markets we serve. MSU has a more diverse range of faculty and staff configured and incentivized to create and facilitate learning experiences.
  
2. **What should be the number of undergraduate and/or graduate students in East Lansing and/or online?**
  - A. MSU's proportion of on-campus to online students is an outcome of our program design and financial strategy.
  - B. Design is key. We are responsive to needs of learners and design appropriate experiences.
  
3. **What is the role of online in enabling us to deliver on the promise of access yet still sustain quality of education?**
  - A. MSU reaches our digital potential by making the right investments in an academic unit to support faculty in understanding the market, designing programs, building experiences, recruiting, and supporting learners.
  - B. MSU diversifies our digital products and services to better meet the needs of learners and disseminate our research-informed knowledge to those in need, helping them solve the world's problems.
  - C. Our educator professional development is digitally inclusive, and this benefits all learners.



## Details on each online learning strategy recommended

- Post-Baccalaureate
- Degree Completion
- Multi-modal Undergraduates
- Empower an Academic Unit for Online Programs

# Empower an Academic Unit for Online Programs

Growth in Programs, Quality Assurance, Portfolio Management. Focus on the Online Student Experience

## Transparent Budget Model

Revenue sharing model to reflect strategic goals and growth, cost control, set performance targets and fund strategic priorities

- Percentage of tuition model
  - Need Programs to be strategically marketed with consistent enrollment
  - Percentages renegotiated on regular basis
  - New revenue over baseline shared with units

## Establish Authority

- Centralized funds to support online programs at MSU
- Facilitate Institutional Change Management and stakeholder connections
- Marketing and Communications
- Educator Professional Development
- Capacity to build new programs with instructional design services
- New Online Program Approval Process
- Access to Internal and External data
  - Program Evaluation
  - New Opportunity analysis
  - Quality Reviews

## Invest in Online Student Services

### Admissions, Enrollment, Success

- Build internal capacity for Online Student Services
- Improve application decision process and timeline for online students
- Student Services (recruitment, retention, completion, placement)
- Leverage technology to expand quality student service offerings
  - Eliminate service gaps
  - Coordinate triage & Case Mgt
  - 24/7 support system for working adults (build or outsource)
  - Knowledge base of FAQs for online student self-help
  - Align processes between units
  - CRM + Chat bot

## Online Learning Initiatives: Post-BA

Targeted, market-driven growth in post-BA degrees and certificates

Market research: IPEDS data, NCES, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Google Search trends, Competitive analysis of program and career outcomes;

Value Analysis: Tuition vs. Ranking, MSU vs. National average and Regional Competition

### Financials and Growth

Continue to evolve existing portfolio

- Adding concentrations, certificates, and degrees
- Selective, based on market potential
- Validate student and employer demand
- Segment market on career stage and learner goals

Incentivize program evolution, to market needs. Controlling for overall enrollment, make digital/on-ground equal design choices. Use RCM model to incentivize revenue growth and encourage local cost control.

Provide seed investment to motivate development in high-growth areas and strategic priorities.

Develop adjacent, alternative programs and certificates that share core courses to distribute cost experience and build pathways for more learners.

Price sensitive to competition. Eliminate out-of-state.

### Operations

Create effective program launch policies to capture market opportunities in 6-12 months. Program approval committees and governance dedicated to online is necessary and must be able to move quickly (e.g., meet as needed and vote electronically).

Add online capacity to student support services-- "neighborhood student success" model for online.

Identify new interdisciplinary opportunities, unique to MSU's strengths. Give the Hub authority to proactively pursue and incentivize creation of new programs with colleges.

Consider streamlining process and cost via creation of an Independent academic unit that can work collaboratively with all academic units to develop and staff new programs via joint appointments and buyout contracts to develop or teach.

### Competition and Risk

#### Mega Non-Profits

- Arizona State University
- Southern New Hampshire University

#### For-profit conversions

- Purdue Global; Arizona Global

#### Alternative Providers / Aggregators

- Coursera (degrees, certs, short courses)
- Guild (access to employees of large companies)

#### U.S. News and World Report

- 3 MSU Online programs featured (Of our 64 for-credit degree & certificate programs)

Masters Conferrals now flat, no longer growing.

Increasing recruiting expenses (200%+ increase cost per click, e.g. for programs like RN to BSN)

Favorable climate for new entrants, especially in certificates and flexible shorter post-BA options.

Competition even in "New" fields, such as "Data Science" or "Data Analytics".

The future may hold more value in episodic education for credentials or more frequent professional development in skill-based non-credential offerings, depending on job disruptions.

## Online Learning Initiatives: Degree Completion

Develop 3+ online BA degrees for degree completers and working adults

**Market research:** IPEDS data, National Student Clearinghouse, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Competitive analysis of peer institutions in the region, consideration of partnership models with feeder schools.

**Value Analysis:** Tuition vs. Reputation, Completion Measures, Revenue vs. Marginal Cost

### Financials and Growth

Begin by offering at least 3 online BA options

- Business Administration (popular fields)
- Social Sciences, Humanities (general degrees)

Use RCM model to incentivize revenue growth and encourage local cost control. Benchmarking pricing to competition for adult degree completers.

Provide seed investment to motivate creation of online courses needed to flesh out degree plans.

Price sensitivity of target population requires tuition set relative to competition. Eliminate out-of-state. Consider alternative payment structures such as income-based repayment.

Consider offering undergraduate certificates in job-focused, technical areas (e.g., bootcamps).

### Operations

Create efficient program launch policies to capture market opportunities in 6-12 months.

Create advising partnerships with community colleges within 100 miles. Build pipelines of transfer students with credit articulation. Own the community college transfer market.

Add online capacity to student support services-- "neighborhood student success" model for online. Specialists for adult population to proactively monitor financial and enrollment risks and encourage degree completion.

Introduce Prior Learning Assessment. Add capacity administratively and on faculty to allow experienced adults to shorten time and cost to degree by demonstrating knowledge and competence.

### Competition and Risk

#### Competency Based

- College for America (SNHU)
- Western Governors University

#### For-profit conglomerates

- Waldorf / Columbia Southern

#### Private Religious

- Liberty University

#### Regional

- Central Michigan

While market appears large, only 1/5 "degree completers" are within striking distance of a degree and are therefore likely to complete.

Demographic of those likely to complete online, typically under 30 years old and 2y+ completion.

Completion Students likely to have multiple factors contributing to low credit momentum.

- 25 y.o. or older
- Place-bound
- Employed
- Have a relationship/family to maintain
- Work full-time

MSU has decentralized services for online, because most programs are graduate and run locally. Degree completion will require a stronger University approach to organize and execute.

## Online Learning Initiatives: Multi-modal Undergraduates

Leverage digital experiences for on-campus students, expand internationally

Market research: IPEDS data, NCES, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Google Search trends, Competitive analysis of program and career outcomes;

Value Analysis: Tuition vs. Ranking, MSU vs. National average & Regional Competition

### Financials and Growth

Use Hybrid and Online formats where they best meet programmatic and curricular goals, designing beyond the course for a rich learning experience.

Consider long-term facilities savings from optimizing hybrid scheduling.

Become a 12 months campus—summer as busy as other terms.

Use RCM model to incentivize innovation in existing majors to attract undergraduates, driving transfers.

Provide seed investment to motivate new program development in strategic priorities and to add capacity where student demand outstrips program capacity.

Consider expanding use or membership in online consortia in BTAA or State of Michigan.

### Operations

Utilize online courses to accelerate academic preparedness of incoming and transfer students.

Design some programs as online completion, complimentary to experiential learning. Increase flexibility for placement or relocation before graduation. Could a student finish in Tokyo or bridging to job placement?

Add online capacity to student support services, extending concept of neighborhoods to include virtual services.

Identify new interdisciplinary opportunities, unique to MSU's strengths. Incentivize Deans to spur innovation in existing majors.

Find ways to leverage the investments in other online initiatives and programs to improve the experience of on-ground and place-based students in East Lansing.

### Competition

MissionU

One-year full time in-demand skill development

- Holberton School
- Kenzie Academy
- Praxis

13 Universities in D.C. area collaborate with businesses to create digital literacy experiences (no credential) to fulfill in-demand skills. Google has done the same for AI and other technical skills in short supply. Pledging to hire as alternative to a degree.

Alternatives to College, a website matching students to 200+ bootcamps.

FutureLearn (120 University consortium by UK Open University). Or China's XuetangX, 1900 classes includes premier US brands.

Coursera, Udacity, EdX

Risk that MSU wallows in numerous unaligned experiments without keeping pace with shifting student, parent, and employer expectations.

## Process used in Focused Inquiry for Strategic Planning – Online Learning

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- 1) The working group began with 3 simultaneous work sprints
  - Post-BA
  - Undergrad
  - Build vs Buy
- 2) Work sprints raised more questions than we answered and suggested a more inclusive design sprint
- 3) The design sprint with a larger group focused on re-imagining MSU's market position and the needs of the academic units in pursuing new online opportunities.
- 4) The Hub online program management team synthesized the results for review by the larger working group to produce this report

## Contributors

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## Citations

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[Gartner's model Microcredentials Promote Continuous Learning and Build an Agile Workforce](#)

[Gartner's model A Simple Higher Education 'Business Opportunity' Framework for Continuous Learning](#)

[EAB – Multi-modal Undergraduates](#)

[EAB – Adult Degree Completion](#)

[EAB – Online Graduate and Professional Students](#)

[EAB – Executive Guide to Online and Hybrid Education Strategy](#)

[The Economist – New Schools of Thought: Innovative Models for Delivering Higher Ed.](#)

[U.S. News and World Report Online Program Rankings 2020](#)