

Initial Comparator Research – Missouri

(LMS = Blackboard, <http://bblearn.missouri.edu/>, used both as a supplement to F2F on-campus instruction and as a vehicle for distance education/fully online degree programs. Additional course support through Sakai, <http://sakai.missouri.edu/>, which is being used as an ePortfolio/learning communities hub, largely supporting students in residence. They are currently conducting an LMS review, so the possibility of migrating to a new platform does exist at this institution. See <http://lmsreview.missouri.edu>. MU Extension runs a Moodle platform for noncredit courses, <https://extcourses.missouri.edu/>.)

General impression: MU Extension is not dissimilar in form to UO's Academic Extension unit, but features a greater emphasis on face-to-face or self-paced online instruction for communities external to the University. Mizzou Online has grown into its own service unit that runs parallel to Extension; both report to the provost's office. Top-level internal investment in Mizzou Online has helped it grow into a substantive wing of the institution. While digital pedagogy might not have initially been an area of interest to many at this institution, a systemic emphasis on quality online education has increased interest in instructional technology across the University.

1) What services does this institution's Extension unit provide to campus partners?

Very few; it is integrated into the University's organizational chart but is almost wholly external facing, especially after assuming responsibility for statewide Extension services in the last decade. MU Extension (<http://extension.missouri.edu>) is a cooperative program that connects University resources with Missouri communities; their programming currently emphasizes public health, agriculture, business development, and continuing education for working professionals in nursing and other fields. Their programming includes informative web sites, in-person meetings and classes, and self-paced online programming.

Some of UO Academic Extension's current portfolio is a direct parallel to MU Extension, particularly with regards to non-credit, community-oriented educational programming. Much of the support which UO AE currently provides for online undergraduate courses, however, would be handled by Mizzou Online, which is a service unit out of the Provost's Office.

A first scan suggests that MU Extension may have been the home of an early iteration of online learning, as Mizzou Online was formed through the merger of two previous units: the Center for Distance and Independent Study and MU Direct: Continuing and Distance Education. MU Extension remains under the purview of the Provost's Office, as does Mizzou Online.

Notably, MU Extension's noncredit courses are run on their own LMS, a Moodle install, which is supported by its own internal unit, Extension Technology and Computer Services (ETCS; <http://etcs.ext.missouri.edu/default.shtm>). ETCS provides comprehensive technology support, but pedagogy is not a focus.

2) Where is digital education housed? Are there separate units for online learning and blended or hybrid courses? Are technology and pedagogy combined or separate? How much of this effort is centralized?

The majority of the University of Missouri's digital education efforts are focused on online course delivery via Mizzou Online, but there is also an educational technology office with its own mission and focus. Educational Technologies at the University of Missouri (ET@MO) provides fairly robust EdTech support not only to those teaching courses for Mizzou Online, but also to campus faculty experimenting with hybrid course delivery or digital pedagogies (<http://etatmo.missouri.edu/>).

Departments that wish to offer online courses, especially for students who are not in residence, most often work with Mizzou Online; there is an established timeline and set of procedures for developing fully online degree programs and certificates, as well as for moving single classes online (<http://online.missouri.edu/faculty-staff/course-development.aspx>). Courses can be offered in alignment with MU's academic calendar, on a self-paced basis, or in combination. Each project is assigned a coordinator, similar to our current AE Program Managers; that coordinator reaches out to ET@MO for instructional design and pedagogical support as needed.

Mizzou Online is currently conducting outreach to interested University units via a standardized RFP process (<http://online.missouri.edu/faculty-staff/rfp.aspx>); \$2M is available to move courses online this year.

ET@MO offers an alternative for enhanced face-to-face or hybrid courses through Sakai, allowing for a more flexible space in which to create ePortfolios or Learning Communities. This appears to largely be directed at an audience already on campus.

Missouri's Blackboard installation is managed by the University's Division of Information Technology (DoIT; <http://doit.missouri.edu/>), while their Sakai installation is managed by ET@MO.

While services remain slightly decentralized, roles played by each unit are distinct; it is clear what paths faculty might follow to put new courses online or to receive further assistance with digital learning.

(Incidentally, this means that the role of a unit like IT is clearer—here, enterprise applications, research computing, project management and network security. Likewise, the role of the library is clear—it is not involved in ed tech.)

3) What structures, formal or informal, are in place to encourage pedagogical innovation on campus? Is there any effort to centralize such activity?

Pedagogical support at MU is provided through a consortial model. While the service units involved have banded together under the brand of the Teaching and Learning Center or TLC@Mizzou (<http://tlc.missouri.edu/about/index.php>), there is no hierarchical organizational chart; the units involved work together from across the university.

Collaborating units include academic advising, the campus writing center, the fellowships office, the honors college, the service-learning office, two study support centers, the undergraduate research office, ET@MO, and an annual conference on college teaching (<http://www.wakonse.org>).

As should be clear from the above list, the primary audience for TLC@Mizzou is the undergraduate student population. Only the final two divisions have a faculty focus—though Missouri graduate students and GTFs have support elsewhere; the graduate school offers an official minor in college teaching to all students seeking MU graduate degrees. Given that Wakonse is only an annual event, the bulk of faculty pedagogical innovation is channeled through ET@MO.

While ET@MO (<http://etatmo.missouri.edu>) offers a number of different programs designed to specifically meet faculty needs, and also offers a number of different financial incentives to faculty who wish to invest in improving their teaching, the support provided is almost solely within a technological lens. There are some obvious limitations to this—for example, their “teaching assessment” service consists of training on how to use MU’s online system to collect quality feedback from students. There seems to be little peer-to-peer support, and there isn’t much focus on non-technological innovations, such as how to run a discussion section.

Nevertheless, given the diversity of initiatives and financial support available to faculty, it is reasonable to claim that ET@MO provides robust support within one particular arena.

4) Where are instructional design and instructional technology housed? What pathways exist to guide faculty to instructional technology services? Is access to instructional technology support uniform across different faculty groups at the institution?

Instructional technology and instructional design support are housed at ET@MO. Faculty have a clear path to follow; every single web page directs faculty seeking instructional design support to this office. Access to instructional technology support is uniform across the institution, at least among campus-based faculty; Extension faculty probably receive less support.

This uniformity and relative clarity seems to be the outcome of A) the growth of Mizzou Online into a serious competitor in the distance education market (itself fueled in part by the interest of the university administration) and B) a productive working relationship between the online unit and the ed tech office (ET@MO).

5) At what administrative level are digital education initiatives, endorsed, supported, or made a fundraising priority? For example, does the institution count, encourage, or otherwise track student enrollment or participation in digitally-inflected (hybrid, blended, tech-enhanced F2F) courses? What institutional investments have been made in hybrid and/or blended learning?

Digital education is clearly endorsed by the MU administration, as well as by the University of Missouri system as a whole, and the state's Higher Learning Commission. It is unclear if student participation in digitally-inflected courses at MU proper is tracked, but that is only because data on the use of Sakai is not publicly available—it is clear that Mizzou Online is analytics-driven, and could probably churn out extensive reporting aside and apart what it makes publicly available on its web site. There is state funding available for online learning.

Program Spotlight – CE/DE/Online at AAU Public Comparators

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
MU Extension / Mizzou Online

Summary: MU Extension and Mizzou Online are separate service units, with oversight from the Vice Provost for Extension and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and E-Learning, respectively. MU Extension provides non-credit face-to-face or self-paced online instruction for communities external to the university. Mizzou Online enrolls degree or certificate-seeking students who are either taking some or all of their credit-bearing courses online.

Scope: MU Extension bears responsibility for Extension services statewide; their programming currently emphasizes public health, agriculture, business development, and continuing education for working professionals in nursing and other fields. Mizzou Online offers 900+ for-credit online or hybrid courses each year, and offers 7 undergraduate degrees, 35 graduate degrees, and 22 certificates.

Formation: Mizzou Online was formed in 2011 through the merger of the Center for Distance and Independent Study (CDIS) and MU Direct: Continuing and Distance Education. Prior to 2011, oversight of online courses was coordinated through MU Extension.

Strengths:

- Internal publicity and financial investment in Mizzou Online has helped it become a substantive wing of the institution and has increased interest in instructional technology across the University
- The University has established a clearly-defined process for creating new online courses, certificates, and degrees that takes both the interests of academic departments and concerns about probable audience into account
- University-wide common vocabulary and established definition of distance education
- Cooperative umbrella framework (TLC@Mizzou) unites campus teaching and learning units in common cause
- Numerous awards from professional organizations in the last five years

Limitations:

- MU Extension's non-credit courses are delivered via their own LMS (Moodle) as opposed to the Blackboard installation that serves the rest of the University
- Term-by-term designation of distance student population complicates tuition model and burdens registration staff