

7. ACADEMIC ROADMAP

External forces are driving a reformation in higher education that is changing the very foundation of how students experience “college.” Drawing on UMUC’s identity not only as a high-quality online institution but more fundamentally as an innovator, the university is pioneering a new learning model, one that helps students achieve more while maintaining low tuition.

In transforming its learning models across all programs, UMUC must build the infrastructure and processes necessary to ensure career-relevant and cutting-edge curricula, so students are ready to enter and immediately contribute to the workplace. The learner experience must also be redesigned so that UMUC students have a unified, streamlined and supportive educational journey from their first course through graduation.

To reach its goals, the university must undertake a number of interrelated projects over the next three years. The academic roadmap centers around the following four critical objectives:

a. A Redesigned Learner Experience

UMUC’s transformation of the learning model requires a “Copernican Revolution” that puts the learner at the center of the UMUC universe—at the heart of everything it does. Certain components of this revolution are already underway:

- A new orientation called “Jumpstart” helps students learn about their own strengths and weaknesses, providing them with tools they can use to identify their own preferences and abilities and guiding them in the design of individualized learning plans around specific goals.
- Straight-line undergraduate learning paths are being developed without the traditional array of choices, and accelerated pathways from

undergraduate to graduate degrees are coming. Competency-based education programs are designed to move students forward at the optimal personalized pace. Learning activities are sequenced throughout programs to ensure learners’ progressive development.

- Learning spaces (formerly “online classrooms”) will be informed by learning science and best practices in instructional design. They will enhance collaboration, communication, and connection with peers and faculty and enable learning anytime, anywhere, seamlessly across platforms.
- Online learning resources embedded in the learning space are not merely substitutes for physical textbooks but can support learning in more targeted ways. Through excellent course design, online learning resources can be precisely embedded within courses in ways that support learning at just the right place and time.

b. Personalized Learner Support

UMUC students start with varying skills and abilities, and they require personalized support to succeed. Wherever they start, the university will provide ways to recognize their learning, identify gaps in knowledge and skills, and build their capacity to succeed as they move through their programs.

- Through assessment supported by technology, UMUC increasingly will be able to measure students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities before they begin their studies. This allows the university to avoid forcing them to cover material they have already mastered, instead helping them to more quickly acquire and demonstrate new knowledge and skills.

- Technology also allows UMUC to personalize ongoing learning to the individual student. In particular, adaptive learning (smart software that learns how learners are progressing and adapts specifically to those learners' needs) will help students learn more effectively. In courses that most students take when they first attend UMUC, adaptive learning approaches will be critical to help students build foundational skills and develop the confidence to move forward.
- The future learning model will also be supported by data analytics, allowing the university to learn more about its students and what helps them succeed and to continuously improve programs based on dynamic information about learners.

All of these elements will be combined in the learning model and will drive UMUC's efforts: a workplace-relevant, personalized, student-centered learning experience that is fully supported both academically and technologically. This will allow UMUC to continue and expand its tradition of leadership in the radically new world of higher education.

One of UMUC's greatest strengths lies in the dedication and commitment of its staff to serve its students. UMUC staff possess broad and far-reaching experience that truly makes UMUC a world-class higher education institution. The highly dedicated UMUC staff will be instrumental in providing more personalized support to students as they progress through their programs at UMUC.

c. Workplace-Relevant Curricula and Programs

Undergraduate and graduate programs will all share a definition of learning mastery that emphasizes not just knowledge of a field but also the ability to apply that knowledge in the real world. Students will not only memorize and recall but work through real-world projects and produce authentic deliverables. Several initiatives support this objective:

- UMUC is developing close relationships with employers to inform program curricula, including development of workplace-relevant projects and assessments aligned with the competencies employers need, in order to ensure that the skills gap is being closed for our graduates;
- The university will create clear, accelerated pathways from undergraduate to graduate degrees;
- The university will also collect, summarize and provide rich academic data that will enable program chairs to maintain and continually improve the relevancy and quality of curricula;
- UMUC will align open-source learning resources with specific competencies, so that the most relevant and up-to-date resources help students move toward mastery; and
- UMUC students will graduate with proven abilities to immediately contribute to their employers and communities—and many will be able to contribute in new ways even before graduation.

d. Roles of Faculty

Developing programs and learning spaces that allow students to demonstrate learning at a personalized pace will shift the roles of faculty:

- One of UMUC's greatest strength lies in the scholar-practitioner faculty members who brings years of real-world experience to the classroom, coupled with solid academic credentials. UMUC students, who demand a curriculum that is practical and relevant to today's competitive and evolving global marketplace, consistently praise the real-world perspective that the university's faculty bring to the class. The highly qualified UMUC faculty will work directly with individual students to help each learner progress, demonstrate competencies and access course materials to develop new knowledge and skills. These faculty roles—as mentors, guides and coaches—will enrich interaction with faculty and among students while increasing individual learning. The university's scholar-practitioner faculty will contextualize the information for students by drawing on their rich applied knowledge.
- To support faculty in these new roles, the university will provide enhanced training and professional development.
- As always, faculty will be integrally involved in the design of curriculum, the delivery of faculty development models and other roles arising from this new model.