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**The University System of Maryland Academic Course Redesign[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In 2006, the University System of Maryland (USM) began what became a series of initiatives to redesign courses across the system, especially multi-section, lower division, gateway courses with unacceptably high DFW rates. Faculty engaged in redesign began by clarifying the learning goals of a course and then developed a teaching strategy with the potential to achieve equivalent or better learning outcomes while using fewer faculty resources.

To each redesign team, the System Office, offered $20,000 seed grants which institutions had to match with at least $20,000 of additional support. It took considerable effort by the initiative’s leaders to attract enough faculty; they visited campuses and worked with their provosts throughout the process. Once a cohort of redesign teams had been assembled, workshops convened them about four times a year to learn the rudiments of redesign, to receive coaching as they developed and evaluated their new courses, and to support one another. The USM work has been inspired by the National Center for Academic Transformation; NCAT had previously defined and evaluated the concept of course redesign at other institutions and provided extensive consulting help to USM in administering the first round of funding. Later faculty cohorts were supported by a team of USM administrators and Faculty Fellows who had each redesigned one of the first round of courses.

Fifty-seven courses were ultimately redesigned during the funded project, incorporating many new learning-centered practices such as group work and computer tutorials in class, online homework with rapid feedback, use of video and online materials to substitute for some live lecturing, and coaching by undergraduate learning assistants. At the same time steps were taken to reduce the demands for faculty, such as reducing classroom lecture hours or increasing section sizes.

Close to 35,000 students a year, mostly first- and second-year students, are benefitting from their improved teaching approaches. When a pilot section or sections were run simultaneously with sections using the traditional design, students in the redesigned sections often earned higher grades on final exams. Meanwhile DFW rates declined by an average of seven percentage points, suggesting that about 2,300 more students pass these courses every year thanks to their redesign. Through Academic Year 2013-14, over 143,000 students had registered for these enhanced courses.

The success of the pilot projects led the USM Regents to include academic transformation as a central goal for their 2010-20 strategic plan and to establish a new Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation to support and expand academic redesign efforts. The mission of the Kirwan Center is to capitalize on recent findings from the learning sciences, as well as the capabilities of emerging technologies, to increase the accessibility, affordability, and quality of higher education *simultaneously*.

1. Source: Pushing the Barriers to Teaching Improvement: A State System’s Experience with Faculty-Led, Technology-Supported Course Redesign, September 14, 2015, Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation, University System of Maryland. <http://www.usmd.edu/cai/course-redesign> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)