



Online Readiness

The Digital Learning Hub advances teaching and learning excellence and increases access to education on the UC San Diego campus and beyond using digital technologies. We collaborate with faculty, teaching & instructional assistants and academic administrators to strengthen the quality and breadth of educational offerings. We work in close partnership with Education Technology Services to enhance the application of campus technologies and address strategic education goals including the [Educational Innovation Initiative](#) (formerly Strategic Academic Program Development).

UC San Diego launched the Strategic Academic Program Development (SAPD) Initiative in the spring of 2018 to catalyze the development of innovative academic offerings. One focus areas of this initiative, graduate offerings, has a specific call out for new Master's offerings that "enable pace, diversity and/or flexibility, particularly online degrees". Master's degree programs across the United States are increasingly offered online and the rate of enrollment in online Master's courses and programs has increased substantially over the last ten years. Our campus currently has no online Master's programs and only a small number of fully online credit bearing courses. The SAPD initiative resulted in two proposals for fully online Master's programs, both from Health Sciences. Concurrently, outside of the SAPD initiative, Computer Science and Engineering and HDSI, proposed an online Master's in Data Science.

The Academic Senate reviewed the proposal for the online Master's in Data Science over a period of seven months, while identifying the need to ensure program quality and student experience in the online modality. A second online Master's degree from the School of Pharmacy was sent to the Academic Senate for review in spring of 2019. While the Senate has not yet approved either degree, they did appoint a designated summer work group to prepare a set of guidelines for approving online programs. With fully online Master's degrees on the horizon, the Digital Learning team is developing needed student and faculty resources to ensure teaching and learning success in an online environment.

Starting an online degree or certificate program can be intimidating to students who are new to the online modality and unfamiliar with current technology, virtual communication and independent, self-motivating learning. It is important for students to know what they are getting into and to understand the kind of commitment that is required for success in an online program. To that end, Digital Learning is developing an online readiness self-assessment. The self-assessment (built in Qualtrics) consists of a series of questions that prompt students to reflect on a variety of factors that might influence their experience as online students, ranging from study habits to time management to technical skills. As students work their way through, they are presented with strategies and tips on topics like getting technology support, building a learning network, creating a calendar with due dates and deadlines, and effective study habits.

After the survey is completed, students receive an infographic summary of resources and tips for online learners.

Faculty development for online instruction is also critical for quality instruction and student success and retention. The training should include both technical training in the use of the learning management system (LMS) and training in effective pedagogical methods for online instruction. Aware of the growing limitations on educator's time, Digital Learning is creating a guide to online teaching – a series of self-paced, online modules on a plethora of topics, including how to effectively engage students, creating inclusive communities, academic integrity, assessing student learning, and much more. The guide draws on cognitive science of how learning works, and both instructional design research and the scholarship of teaching and learning to recommend research-based course design and teaching methods for the online environment. This guide will also be useful for training instructional assistants (IAs) on best practices for facilitating and managing online learners.

The ultimate goal is to build resources that support successful online programs. Setting expectations early on is critical for students new to learning online. We plan to pilot the online student readiness assessment this fall at the beginning of an online Education Studies course. Faculty new to online course design and delivery need to understand how technology can mediate effective communication, participation and learning. The guide to online teaching has a modular design and we plan to use it for on-demand faculty training and to supplement faculty consultations and online course design sessions.