

**Teaching and Learning Labs at UIS:  
Workforce Readiness and Revitalization of a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education**

Office of Academic Affairs

Academic Year 2018-2019

The revitalization of a liberal arts and sciences education requires that we temper the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies from the classroom with meaningful interdisciplinary and collaborative real-world problem-solving experiences. The combination of soft interpersonal skills and competencies along with the more analytic and technically-based hard skills are both essential features of what employers are seeking in the modern workplace.

The conceptualization and implementation of specialized teaching and learning laboratories will provide faculty with state of the art support for teaching, scholarship, and outreach. These labs will also provide students with learning experiences that build upon highly demanded soft and hard skill development.

Examples of labs that are already common on many campuses include: Digital Humanities Labs; Student Technology Centers; GIS Lab; Social Media Lab; Speech Communication Lab; Survey Research Lab; Quant Lab; Robotics/AI Labs; Commodities/Trading Lab; etc. Again, these labs can (and whenever possible, should) be designed to support and enhance faculty teaching, scholarship, and outreach – and student-focused learning through active and experientially –based pedagogies.

For example, a Geographic Information Science (GIS) Lab would provide access to students and faculty from multiple academic programs and disciplines to industry standard software and hardware as well as to expert faculty with extensive knowledge and experience in the use and applications of these tools. GIS has rapidly become an interdisciplinary tool used to better conceptualize and understand topics as diverse as transportation/logistics, environmental science, health disparity and access to health care services, land use and community and regional planning, public health threats, patterns of civic engagement and voting behavior, historical landmarks and battlefields, and population migration patterns. Students who possess this methodological and technical skill will be better prepared to land meaningful work more quickly upon graduation. The quality and impact of faculty scholarship and impact in service outreach will also be optimized. **This is the promise and the opportunity – collaborate in creating labs that will allow UIS to transform teaching and learning, support scholarship, and create greater impact in our service to the region and state.**

Almost all of these labs serve a broad swath of the students, faculty, and staff at the university. Their applications transcend disciplinary boundaries and are limited only by the imagination and creativity of those engaged in the creation process. The most successful labs I have been involved in developing were driven by the institution's strategic plan (UIS Compass) and followed a general pattern in which:

- a. There was an institutional commitment to creativity and innovation in teaching and learning coupled with a creative and engaged faculty who were committed to continuous improvement in teaching and producing deeper student learning.
- b. There was an institutional commitment to planning that would permit an investment of resources necessary to provide both the one-time and recurring funding necessary to operate the lab effectively.

- c. There was a coalition (usually interdisciplinary) of faculty who were able to conceive of the types of facilities needed, were willing to collaborate with other professionals, and were committed to providing students with the best possible academic experience in and out of the classroom.
- d. The institution was willing to provide support for a thorough review of the feasibility of the proposed facility, including travel support for small teams to visit existing high performing labs similar to those being proposed.

### **UIS Commitment – The Strategic Revitalization Fund**

UIS has committed to constructing a Strategic Revitalization Fund that will provide support for the planning and implementation of approved proposals. These revitalization funds are to be used for space renovation, technology acquisition, and training.

### **Recommended Process**

#### STEP 1: Informal Conversations

I invite all of my colleagues to begin thinking about the opportunity outlined above.

What types of teaching and learning laboratory facilities would facilitate and elevate the quality and impact of active and engaged teaching and learning that you are currently unable to provide for your students?

What other allied or affiliated academic programs or professionals on campus might be approached and engaged in this conversation?

How would this proposed lab facility enhance both the academic quality and academic distinctiveness of your programs and UIS?

To what extent would these facilities attract potential students to your programs and UIS as a destination of choice?

#### STEP 2: Request Formal Recognition

Request of Dr. Cecilia Cornell (AVCGE – responsibilities include faculty development) formal recognition of the working group interested in exploring the concept and feasibility of the possible teaching and learning laboratory facility. The main webpage of the Office of Academic Affairs will list each formal working group so that duplicative efforts can be identified early. The primary contact person and the stage of the process will also be shared on the site. Receiving formal recognition assures participants that there is enough perceived merit in the exploration of the concept to advance to the Planning Step. The Formal Recognition Step is intended to provide feedback early enough in the process that valuable faculty and department time and effort are not invested in proposals that are unlikely to be implemented.

### STEP 3: Planning

Receiving Formal Recognition leads to the Planning Step. The Planning Step is a more focused and comprehensive examination of the proposed lab to revitalize the teaching and learning, scholarship, and service of the engaged faculty and departments. The Planning Step is likely to lead to identification of efficiencies and synergies that have implications for how we approach teaching and learning at the level of curriculum, how we fully engage teaching, scholarship, and outreach talent and expertise both within and between units, and how we better prepare students for a lifetime of opportunities in an evolving economy and workplace.

The Planning Step should also involve exploration and, when possible, site visits of comparable high-performing facilities implemented at other institutions. The support team for the Planning Step includes:

- Cecilia Cornell, AVCGE, will serve as the primary contact for working groups, manage campus and working group communications, and facilitate connections with the right problem-solving personnel on campus.
- Kara McElwrath, ITS, will assist in identifying comparable facilities and with developing any technical specifications associated with the proposed facility.
- Jerry Joseph, CFO, will assist with coordination of budget planning including costs associated with space, renovation, and technology acquisition.
- Jeff Lorber, Foundation, will provide advice about potential for securing individual and/or corporate donations for sponsorship or naming rights to provide excellence at the margins and will serve as liaison to the Office of Advancement.

### STEP 4: Requesting Formal Review

At the conclusion of the Planning Step, the fully developed plan should be submitted to the VCAA and Provost. The Provost will share the proposal with the Deans & Directors Council to evaluate the proposal's merit. If meritorious, the project will be prioritized and placed in the queue for implementation pending the availability of strategic reinvestment resources. There will likely be several projects in the queue at any given time awaiting resources from the annual refreshment of the Strategic Reinvestment Fund.

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