ABSTRACT
The fully online program at the University of Central Florida was launched in Fall 2016. Currently, it is only promoted to transfer students. This opportunity for transfer students to enroll in University of Central Florida Online is provided through collaboration with Florida state colleges called “enhanced partnerships”. One benefit of these enhanced partnerships is the no-cost option to take the lightly-facilitated online course, OnRamp, which is designed to welcome, introduce, and guide Florida state college transfer students to the university and University of Central Florida Online. Participants in OnRamp are not only welcomed to the digital Online community, but they are also encouraged to connect with their local University community and alumni. Several departments collaborated in the development of OnRamp. The course developers, Beth Nettles, Bren Bedford, and Karen Tinsley-Kim, from the Center for Distributed Learning, would like to share the journey thus far of building the OnRamp course and expectations of where it is heading.

KEYWORDS: Digital community, Enhanced partnerships, Learning management system, OnRamp, UCF

INTRODUCTION
Effective recruitment and engagement of students at a distance with a new fully online program is a complex challenge for any institution and perhaps more so for a notably large university. Prospective students may not have clear understanding of expectations related to participating in a fully online program nor how to successfully use an unfamiliar learning management system (LMS). Other issues include helping prospective students feel welcomed as genuine students of the institution; not simply online students participating at a distance. It is crucial to provide useful student resources, such as success coaches and campus information, opportunities to support students with decisions regarding majors, and advice on endeavoring to complete a degree completely online is achievable. It remains to be seen how effective an online course might be in introducing and guiding prospective students to completion of an online degree. The OnRamp course being built for students of University of Central Florida (UCF) Online Enhanced Partners seeks to provide this transitional support for students currently enrolled in colleges in the State of Florida.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA
The University of Central Florida is one of the largest universities in the United States and it has the highest institutional enrollment in the State of Florida. Receiving multiple awards and national
rankings, it has recently been recognized for their innovative academic programs: US News - Most Innovative 2016; Kiplinger, The Princeton Review and Forbes - Ranked as a best/great value; top rated in Psychology, Health Services Administration, Criminal Justice and Digital Forensics. Additional accolades are celebrated on the University Facts and University Today websites:

University of Central Florida ranks alongside Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and Duke among the most innovative universities in the country, according to U.S. News & World Report’s Best Colleges 2016 guide. University tied for 13th place with Georgia Tech and the University of Southern California for the “Most Innovative School”. University of Central Florida is also ranked among the top 100 public universities by U.S. News & World Report. (College & Campus News, 2015)

University of Central Florida has a twenty-year history of innovation in educational technology, delivering online courses, and supporting faculty and students with online course needs. The Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) has been instrumental in the development of online education at UCF over these last two decades. However, as educational trends change to more expansive online offerings, other divisions are participating in this growing online education initiative. At University of Central Florida this now includes Regional Campuses with support from University Marketing. Together, they created a new initiative called “UCF Online”, which is designed to be a fully and exclusively online degree program to currently serve transfer students in Central Florida, the southeast region of the United States, and beyond.

UCF Online

This new collaborative vision of University Online builds on the experience of three University departments: The Center for Distributed (CDL), Regional Campuses (RC) and Marketing. The role of the Center for Distributed Learning is to provide faculty and online course support. One of the teams within CDL, Instructional Development (iDev) lead the design and development of the OnRamp course which will be discussed in more depth later. The OnRamp course developers are Beth Nettles, Bren Bedford, and Karen Tinsley-Kim. More information about the course developers is available on the Instructional Development Team website. The Regional Campuses, through the Online Connect Center provide University Online student support, while Marketing directs online promotion, leads, website optimization, and web content. University Online began and is expected to continue as the collaborative endeavor of CDL, RC and Marketing.

Goals of UCF Online

The primary goals of University Online are to increase student access, especially for nontraditional and underserved students, reach place bound students who still desire access to a University education, reduce student costs, promote improved student success and associate’s degree attainment through enhanced advising services, and increase Florida statewide baccalaureate degree attainment. In addition, programs offered at the graduate level offer a convenient option for professional development for nontraditional students.

Instructional and Strategic Intent

The instructional and strategic intent of University Online is not to replace University students on campus taking face-to-face, mixed/blended, and online courses but rather to complement these existing modality offerings with fully-online bachelor, certificate, master, and doctoral programs to meet the diverse needs of Florida’s growing population that cannot attend classes at one of University’s campuses. The world-class faculty that teach face-to-face courses also teach University Online courses ensuring the same high quality learning requirements regardless of course delivery method. The current marketing focus of this fully-online learning initiative, University Online, is to serve place bound transfer students without having to relocate to Orlando, Florida.

Enhanced Partnerships

One benefit for students of Enhanced Partner institutions is that they can declare their intent to transfer into University Online while still pursuing their associate’s degree. A unique and associated service for students is to have access to University Online Coaches who will work with them to help them progress toward graduation at their current institution, and then guide them through the admittance process into University. State institutions become University Online Enhanced Partners with University after collaborative discussions between the institutions and signed agreements in the form of memorandums of understanding (MOU).

Examples of UCF Responsibilities

University and Enhanced Partner responsibilities per an MOU include a number of agreements and are specific to the individual partnering institution. For University, these usually include promoting online undergraduate degrees that are not offered at the partner institutions, such as graduate degrees, and graduate certificates. Among the others offerings are online programs with reduced fees, and online student success coaching to the partner institutions’ students both before and after students transfer to University. Examples of additional University responsibilities may be to collaborate with the partner institutions’ advising office on the best strategies for assisting students in earning an associate’s degree, contact alumni of the partner institutions to make them aware of the University Online opportunity as well as provide informational and marketing material about University Online. Whenever feasible, University will provide contact information of students denied entry into University Online and have the potential of earning an associate’s degree at the partner institutions. The University Associate Vice President of Distributed Learning serves as University’s designated point of contact for all MOUs with partner institutions.
**OnRamp Online Course**

OnRamp is an online course designed to introduce University and University Online programs to Florida state college Enhanced Partner institution transfer students. OnRamp is a no-cost, lightly facilitated, online course to be publicly delivered via University’s learning management system (LMS) Canvas by Instructure.

**Purpose.** The purpose of the OnRamp course is to encourage and support students towards graduation from their State College and transition to UCF with successful admission into UCF Online. OnRamp is designed so that participants can join at any time during their enrollment in a State College and before they have been admitted to UCF Online. Communication will also be encouraged between University Online Coaches and prospective students as they progress through the sequential modules of OnRamp. As participants mark completion of hours of coursework at their current institution as well as activities in the respective modules in the OnRamp course, digital badges will be offered to celebrate incremental progress toward enrollment in University of Florida Online.

**OnRamp Course Content**

There are six modules in the OnRamp course, including:

- Module 0: Get Started
- Module 1: Get to Know UCF Online
- Module 2: Determine Your Career Goal
- Module 3: Evaluate Online Academic Alignment Options
- Module 4: Prepare for UCF Online
- Module 5: Matriculate to UCF Online

Students are expected to progress through the modules in accordance with their current academic status at their respective state colleges. Concurrently, students are invited to take reflective opportunities at the end of each module, called Guiding Personal Success, or GPS. Checkpoints, and Milestones to consider whether participating in a fully online program is personally desirable and suitable. The full version of OnRamp is also expected to have the following in each module: an introduction video; supplemental online reading material, activities, and links to external websites; assessments; and digital badges for successful completion of module milestones.

The current status of the OnRamp course as of January 2017 is that it is under content review with the intent to move from the development stage to Beta by the early May. Content enhancement continues with a goal of including level-appropriate engaging activities and resources. The testing of OnRamp is expected to include current University Online students, future University Online students, CDL staff, as well as faculty and University Online Coaches. The module introduction videos are under development, and the exploration of integration of digital badges and other supportive credentialing continues.

**Conclusion and Future**

The future of OnRamp shows strong promise of meeting the set benchmarks and deadlines. OnRamp 2.0 is projected for delivery by Fall 2017. Prospective University Online Enhanced Partner students are encouraged to participate in OnRamp early and throughout their state college enrollment. OnRamp will initiate and support the relationship between University Online Coaches and the enrolled (or prospective) University Online Enhanced Partner students. Student connections made through OnRamp will be encouraged to develop local University communities, such as gathering to watch University sporting events at a local establishment. Participation in the OnRamp course is not only expected to increase enrollment in a University Online program for Enhanced Partner students, but the course is also anticipated to facilitate the successful completion of their associates and higher level University Online degrees since students will remain enrolled before and throughout their University Online academic experience.

In summary, the University Online OnRamp course has been specifically designed by three partnering departments at University: CDL, RC, and Marketing, and is in the process of being implemented to serve as a recruiting, guiding, and supportive opportunity for prospective and enrolled University Online Enhanced Partner students. Revisions and updates to the content will keep the course current to the needs and offerings of University Online since OnRamp is provided through the institutional LMS. The most valued expectation of OnRamp is to facilitate authentic relationships and communities between University Online students, coaches, faculty, and staff despite delivery via a digital environment. Regardless of the physical location of University Online students, the goal of OnRamp is to provide an engaging academic experience leading to completion of an undergraduate or graduate online degree which transforms into a lifetime student pride of being a University Knight.
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