THE CENTER FOR
EXCELLENCE IN
DISTANCE LEARNING
at Wiley College

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL

Q: What is the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning at Wiley College?
The Center for Excellence in Distance Learning promotes the sharing of resources, experiences, best practices and innovation in distance learning among the HBCU community. It offers an affordable path to building strong distance learning programs that might otherwise be out of reach to many HBCUs.

Currently the Center's most visible shared resource is a growing set of online courses in high-demand subjects that we work to develop collaboratively with faculty members. Designed using open educational resources, these courses are tailored by HBCU faculty for the students and educational context served by these institutions. The Center is building a catalog of online courses, programs and supplemental resources that HBCUs can use to build distance education programs more efficiently and effectively. Read the Center's conceptual plan here.

Q: Why was the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning founded?
Many HBCUs are struggling to develop high quality distance learning and online education programs, largely because they lack sufficient resources and internal expertise to build out these types of new programs. With many HBCUs facing similar challenges creating online education that is a good fit for the types of students they serve, leaders at Wiley College saw an opportunity to help more HBCUs get further, faster using a collaborative approach. The Center for Excellence in Distance Learning was founded in 2013 to encourage collaboration and innovation in online learning within the HBCU community.

Q: What are open educational resources (OER), and what role do they play in the work of the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning?
Open educational resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under a copyright license that permits their free use and repurposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, journal articles, and any other tools or materials used to support learning.

The Center's online courses are designed using OER because they offer several advantages over commercial textbooks for addressing challenges faced by many HBCU students. These include:
- **Cost:** OER are free, so students do not have to buy expensive commercial textbooks

- **Course design:** OER provide faculty with the freedom to design a course that works for their students, which is particularly important for educating HBCU students. Faculty can excerpt, modify and rearrange course materials to align with learning outcomes.
- **Student success:** With OER, faculty have greater freedom to add elements that encourage student success, such as study aids, embedded assignments, culturally-relevant examples, and materials that fit different reading levels or learning preferences.

Q: What is Lumen Learning, and what is its relationship to the Center?
Founded in 2012, Lumen Learning is a private company that is partially owned by a charitable foundation. It provides services to assist educational institutions with adopting and using OER effectively to reduce textbook costs and improve student success. Through the Center, Lumen Learning provides training, professional development and support to assist them with creating and teaching high quality courses using OER.

Q: How can I get more information about the Center?
More information is available on the Center's website, www. cexdl.org. You can also contact the Center's director, Dr. Kim Long, at klong@wileyc.edu, or Lumen Learning CEO Kim Thanos at kim.thanos@lumenlearning.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Q: Who is invited to become a member of the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning?
Membership is open to any Historically Black College or University (HBCU) that is interested in joining this collaboration initiative. The annual membership fee is $25,000.

Q: What is the process for joining the Center?
After sharing initial information about the Center and how it works, new prospective members meet with the Center's director, Dr. Kim Long, to discuss their online learning goals and how the Center may help them progress towards these goals. Once we have confirmed good alignment, new members review and sign membership agreements, and we bring them on board.

Q: What is the annual cost of membership?
The annual membership fee is $25,000. This fee represents a rock-bottom rate the Center has negotiated with Lumen Learning for collaborative design and support for open courses. For this flat fee, institutions may pilot and offer all the high-demand open courses the Center is developing with support from Lumen Learning. This membership fee represents excellent value in comparison to the average estimated cost of $25,000 to develop one single online course from scratch.

Q: What services and benefits do members receive?
Primary services and benefits of membership in the Center include:
- **Pre-built online courses** in high-demand subjects that can be adapted and customized to the needs of each institution and the HBCU students it serves
- **Zero textbook cost** for all courses designed through the Center, leading to thousands of dollars in cost savings every time a course is taught
- **Expert faculty training and professional development** in course design and teaching effectively using open educational resources (OER)

- **OER course support** including assistance with instructional design, finding and curating open content and correct licensing/attribution
- **Pedagogical support** for helping underprepared students succeed online
- **Supported online homework system** for math and other quantitative courses
- **Recommended course improvements** each term based on student success data
- **Access to a growing catalog** of courses, best practices and other resources for building distance learning programs efficiently and effectively.
- **Collaborative community** for developing grant proposals, dialogue, networking and innovation in distance learning at HBCUs
- **Connection to peers** within discipline at institutions across the country

Q: What type of return on investment are the Center's members seeing?
To date, the Center's members are seeing return on investment in several areas.

1) **Dramatic reduction in course development costs.** While course development costs can vary widely, some reports estimate the cost of developing a new online course at up to $25,000 per credit hour. Through the Center, members have access to a growing catalog of collaboratively-developed open online courses they can use as-is or easily adapt for their learning objectives, student needs and accreditation requirements. As of January 2014, Center members offered 40+ online courses, with 25-30 more under development for summer 2014.

2) **Textbook cost savings.** Using OER-based courses, students pay nothing but have 100% free digital access to all course materials on the first day of class. This translates into thousands of dollars in savings each time a course is taught, as illustrated in the sample cost calculator below:

avg. commercial textbook cost	# of students per course	est. savings per course	est. savings for ten courses
$150	40	$6,000	$60,000

3) **Applying textbook savings to achieve quicker time-to-degree.** Wiley College is offering discounted tuition for summer term online courses, allowing students to apply their savings in textbook costs to pay for additional courses. This boosts tuition revenue while encouraging students to complete their degrees more quickly.

Q: Are there established criteria and expectations for institutional membership around dues, the number of courses they offer, etc.?
There is no set expectation about the number of courses an institution will pilot. After becoming a member, each institution sets these targets and priorities based on their own distance learning goals.

There is a flat annual fee of $25,000 per institution to become a member of the Center. This fee entitles Center members to take advantage of the OER-based courses that have already been designed through the Center. Current plans are for Lumen Learning to provide and support 65 OER-based courses in high-demand subjects. The annual membership fee entitles Center members to use and adapt all these courses.

Center members may also receive advantageous pricing for Lumen Learning to support additional OER-based courses in high-demand subjects if additional courses are deemed necessary.

Q: How are institutions' specific course goals and objectives considered in the collaborative design process?
We recognize that each institution has a unique set of student learning outcomes in courses, and we never want the institution to redesign curriculum to implement an online course. For this reason, we use a modular, outcomes-driven approach to course design. First we ask faculty to give us their student learning outcomes. Then we align course materials to these outcomes. When we review the course materials with faculty members, the content reflects the mapping to their learning outcomes. Using this approach, courses designed through the Center can use the same set of materials across multiple institutions but still have them align to each institution's own curriculum and outcomes.

We tend to find a lot of commonality in learning outcomes for the same course offered by multiple institutions. Faculty members take the lead on adapting and enhancing courses to address learning outcomes unique to their institution or program, with support from Lumen Learning. As they make these modifications, their contributions can be shared with other Center members and even with the broader open education community.

Q: Which institutions are currently members of the Center?
In addition to founding member Wiley College (Marshall, TX), as of March 2014 other members include Oakwood University (Huntsville, AL) and Florida Memorial University (Miami Gardens, FL). Wiley College is in discussions with other HBCUs interested in joining the Center.

ONLINE COURSES AND INSTRUCTION

Q: What process does the Center use for developing online courses?
The Center's collaborative process works like this:
- Member institutions identify priority online courses and programs.
- Lumen Learning, a partner to the Center, provides training, support, and initial online course frameworks composed of open educational resources (OER) rather than commercial textbooks.
- Using the course frameworks as a starting point, faculty from multiple institutions work together to review and curate OER content that maps to the course learning outcomes.
- Faculty members further customize and enhance the courses as desired, typically through revising, adapting, remixing and/or adding new content such as culturally-relevant examples. Lumen Learning team members help facilitate this process and provide faculty support in areas such as identifying new OER, licensing/attribution issues, and instructional design.
- Final courses are shared with all members, so others can re-use the courses designed and customized using the Center's process.

Q: Are the courses that are currently part of the Center's inventory designed by beginning vs. advanced online course developers?
The current set of courses is designed by faculty members at a mix of experience levels, and this offers advantages. There are experts with strong experience and longevity. We also have new eyes bringing in fresh perspectives to online learning and the collaborative process. The courses and pre-built "shells" are constantly undergoing a design process. This gives the Center's courses an optimal design.

Q: What is included in the pre-built courses (course shells) and how do faculty members use them?
The pre-built courses used by the Center's members are effectively a complete textbook replacement. Each course always includes a complete set of readings and a set of sample assessments that the faculty member may use or adapt. All courses include some level of built-in video delivery and interaction. This is the starting point.

A faculty member who is new to online learning will typically deliver the course as designed, at least initially. Faculty who are more experienced with online course development typically make significant edits and revisions, and most often they delete text. This is because instructors struggle to get students to read assignments. In open courses, they try to streamline the content around the learning outcomes to make the course materials better aligned, more efficient and more effective for students.

The Center's process also works closely with faculty members to increase the level of interactivity and engagement. This is where we help instructors customize their courses and how to bring face-to-face interaction into the online environment in ways that engage their students.

Q: How does the collaboration work in practice? Does each institution offer their own version of a course that has been designed collaboratively, or does one institution open up spots for students of another institution?
The collaboration is primarily in the up-front course design. Faculty members in the same discipline have the opportunity to work together to curate and map content to their learning outcomes to create the online course, with support from Lumen Learning. Once the course is designed, faculty members offer the course to students through their home institutions. At this point the Center is not using a cross-enrollment mode.

Because the course is open, instructors do have the option to modify or customize the course to their own instructional style and preferences. Faculty members share the same core set of materials, and they also continue to collaborate to share best practices, results and recommendations to improve the course in the future.

Q: How are courses loaded into the institution's learning management system (LMS)?
The Center's courses are built within a platform that can be easily accessed by different learning management systems. We use an integration protocol to support single sign-on, so students and instructors experience the courses as a cohesive experience using the institution's LMS. Current members of the Center use a variety of LMS solutions to deliver the online courses we have designed, including Blackboard, Jenzabar and Desire2Learn.

Q: Who owns a course once it has been developed through the Center's collaborative process?
Everything the Center develops with support from Lumen Learning is considered an open educational resource and is licensed using a Creative Commons Attribution License. This means anyone can use the courses we develop freely, even institutions that are not members of the Center. However, only members receive the training, collaborative engagement, professional development and faculty support services provided through the Center for Excellence in Distance Learning.

We will discuss with each institution the terms and licensing for any materials developed by individual faculty members, but our hope is that most of what faculty members contribute also carries an open Creative Commons license. This allows us to share the content easily across institutions, and others can easily adapt, modify and continue to augment the Center's course content. With open content, we can

build on and improve the courses we develop much more rapidly than if we were dealing with the restrictions of traditional copyright.

Q: What is the timeline from when an institution joins the Center to being able to launch courses?
This process requires an absolute minimum of six weeks if everyone is prepared to move quickly after signing. Ideally we recommend 12-16 weeks to allow faculty members sufficient time for training, review and preparation.

Q: Does the Center engage with institutions that already have a strong faculty certification process for teaching online?
The Center would love to share best practices around certification processes for faculty members and online education. The current Center members have been focusing on this area. This is a topic where we see opportunity and interest in sharing what's working for institutions that want to do this better, as well as finding ways to build on the excellent work and progress some institutions have already achieved.

Q: Is the Center doing anything with tutoring services for distance learning courses?
Each institution takes its own approach to tutoring services. This is another area with good potential for sharing best practices. The Center has developed a student orientation course to online learning which we are happy to share.

Q: How is testing and proctoring managed?
There is not a single way this is managed or required through the Center. Each institution makes its own decision about how to manage testing and proctoring in online courses. For example, Oakwood is using Respondus to help with security in online testing. To some extent the solution depends on to what extent a midterm or final exam is machine-gradable. This is another area where there is opportunity for members to come together around best practices and how we might learn from each other and build on the progress each of the members has made in this area.