Dean’s 2020 Impact Report

Adaptation
“If we fail to adapt, we fail to move forward.”
— John Wooden

2019-2020 NIU College of Business

1675%
Growth in online courses from 2016 to 2020 (eight in 2015-2016 to 142 in 2019-2020).

4
Number of fully online programs.

290
Number of courses transitioned to online mode in spring 2020.

51
Number of faculty teaching online.

40
Number of events delivered virtually (spring 2020).

For fiscal year 2019-2020, donors helped raise $1,866,350 for the NIU College of Business.
The recent disruptions driven by the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to think differently and accelerated the ongoing revolution driven by technology of the way we live, work, and engage. The need to adapt to be successful reminds us of the quote: “It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able to adapt to and to adjust best to the changing environment in which it finds itself,” by Charles Darwin.

Adaptation requires innovation, agility, and resilience, all of which have been a significant part of our DNA in the College of Business. An innovative mindset is characterized by our propensity to test ideas. Agility gauges how well we adapt and how quickly we respond to changing scenarios. Resiliency reflects our determination to bounce back from setbacks and learn from it. In this report, I am pleased to highlight exemplars of our ability to innovate, respond to the changing environment, and learn from moves that didn’t work as we planned.

Innovation
About four years back, we embarked on efforts to focus on “mission and market driven program transformation.” Initiatives under this umbrella particularly focused on using the power of digital technologies to enhance learning in courses and deliver new programs to reach new markets. By the time the pandemic hit, we had already increased the number of courses offered online from eight in 2016 to 142 in 2020. A significant part of this increase resulted from two new fully online graduate programs in cutting edge areas of digital marketing and data analytics. The combined enrollment in just these two programs is expected to reach almost 200 by fall 2020. To put this in perspective, the data analytics program crossed the 100 student enrollment mark in its second year, a goal we had set to be achieved in five years. Building on this momentum, we will be launching two additional programs — MBA and Master of Accounting — in the online format in fall 2020.

Another dimension to remain agile is creating a culture of innovation to experiment with ideas. We are excited that our vision for the Creativity Lab, a platform for students, faculty and staff to build a mindset of innovation, is taking shape. We launched a program, “Dean’s Instructional Innovation Fellow” that encourages faculty to re-imagine their courses for the new age of learning. Two of our faculty — Mark Groza and Federico Bassetti — are featured in this issue on how they fundamentally redesigned the learning experience for students.

Agility
As the pandemic put a pause to activities in the normal mode, we quickly pivoted to using digital technologies to deliver our over 200 courses. Within a span of two weeks, our faculty moved to delivering their classes using synchronous, asynchronous or a combination of both. Exemplifying the outstanding commitment of our faculty to our students, one them wrote this in praise of a professor:

“I just wanted to send a big thank you for a great semester! I know that the second half of the term threw everyone off guard, and I really appreciate you adapting the course so we could still learn and succeed in our studies...I also wanted to say thank you for creating a lighthearted environment during this pandemic. It has been a stressful time, but your jokes and class interaction lifted the mood. Thank you for preparing us for this change and for adapting your teaching to truly help us learn.”

One of the biggest challenges we faced in adapting our courses to the new mode of delivery was our recently launched MBA program in Nanjing, China. With no travel possible to the location and a 12-hour time difference, we were faced with the daunting task of finding a way to deliver an exceptional learning experience for our students in Nanjing. After a few attempts that didn’t work well (more on this in the resiliency section), our faculty member taught the first course online.

We also embraced technology for our co-curricular activities and events as well. Most of the events we planned for to occur after mid-March were delivered virtually. Enjoy reading brief synopsis about the some of the events we held using the digital platform. Interestingly, the attendance at these events far exceeded the numbers we typically get when the event is held face to face. When university canceled the commencement ceremony, our college hosted a virtual graduation celebration (youtu.be/uxKh904iVHg) for students, family and faculty on YouTube.
Resiliency

As mentioned earlier, our ability to deliver the MBA program in China posed a challenge. Even after deciding to continue the program in the digital format, our experimentation with different platforms didn’t yield the desired results and we had to do extensive testing of the platforms before deciding to adopt one. We have learned a lot from the first course we delivered and will apply it as we move forward.

Another exemplar of resiliency was exhibited by our students and faculty coach, Dan Morgan, who accompanied them on the trip to Sweden. As the pandemic intensified this group was stuck in Sweden with great uncertainty to their return. They made us proud by staying calm and didn’t let this dampen their enthusiasm for the trip or erase the learning from their trip. They even made news in the local newspaper! Students described their experience as one that tested their resiliency and was life-altering. This is best reflected in the words of a student who went on the trip:

“My heart was warmed by the kindness of the people of Lidköping, when it looked like we might be stranded multiple residence reached out and offered us a place to stay if needed. Between our business and campus visits the students learned a great deal about the culture, educational system, and how marketing is done in Sweden, also there is a great deal to learn when we are under stress and I learned that this was a great team of students that handled whatever was thrown at them. In the end all went well and the students indeed did have the trip of a lifetime.”

As you read through the stories in this issue, I also hope you get a sense of the outstanding talent in the college that makes us innovative, agile and resilient. Indeed, inside of every Huskie is the grit and resilience to overcome the toughest of challenges, limitless compassion to help others and soaring optimism for the future. Your support has enabled us to invest in technologies, talent, and experimentation of ideas. More importantly, you inspire us to not just be ready for the future but to shape it. Thank you.

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Much progress was made during the 2019-20 academic year to enhance learning through innovation, agility and resilience.

Innovation — Ideas in Action

Program Innovations

• Our Master’s in Data Analytics was the first 100% online, AACSB-accredited master’s degree in data analytics offered by an Illinois-based public university. Our program pushed students to boundaries of learning and exposed them to Hadoop, R, Python, SQL, SAP Predict Analytics, SAS, Tableau and other cutting-edge technologies.
• Our Master’s in Digital Marketing is one of only four programs in the country that are AACSB-accredited and fully online (no other programs are in Illinois). The program continues to innovate and use the latest digital tools to connect with and better engage our students.

Fully Online Programs at NIU’s College of Business

• Master of Science in ACCY for non-accounting majors (MAC).
• Master of Business Administration (MBA).
• Master of Science in Data Analytics (MSDA).
• Master of Science in Digital Marketing (MSDM).

Flipping the Classroom

• Associate Marketing Professor Mark D. Groza has been successfully teaching classes online since 2015. Prior to the pandemic, he produced a condensed, hybrid experience for students that involved instructing for eight weeks — half online and half in person.
• OMIS Instructor Frederico Bassetti used cutting-edge software in the classroom to teach students to value innovation, new technology and an agile mindset. His philosophy includes, “Making mistakes. It is a healthy sign of taking a step in the right direction. There is never a clear right or wrong way of going about it. It is the journey, the struggle through the many road bumps that give us a memorable experience.”

To learn more about activities in this section and how you can support it, please reach out to contact Daewoo Park at dpark2@niu.edu.

“True learning happens outside of our comfort zone. Let’s meet there!”
— Instructor Frederico Bassetti
Agility — Responding to Change

Faculty and students responded to change with great flexibility

“I have long felt it is imperative for our university and college to transition classes toward the online and hybrid formats of instruction. I believe hybrid courses will be especially crucial for our future success as they shift part of a student’s learning online while maintaining some face-to-face interaction and instruction. Essentially, a hybrid class offers the best of both worlds. By leveraging hybrid classes, students can create schedules where they are full time ‘in-person’ students yet only need to commute to our campus once or twice a week.”

— Associate Marketing Professor Mark Groza

“I made modifications to course assignments and the schedule, conducted synchronous (virtual) class sessions at regularly scheduled class times, make recordings of these sessions available to students, and participated in the Remote Teaching Fellows (RTF) program coordinated by our Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) to help other faculty through the transition. I endeavored to maintain order, accountability and a sense of humor (my cat joined me for a few of the virtual class sessions).”

— OMIS Instructor Brian Bender

“The spring 2020 semester was full of surprises, uncertainty and most importantly an opportunity to adapt. During the transition to an online format, I was challenged to host online events through Leaders in Ethics and Academic Discipline (LEAD). These events assisted students with completing graduation requirements as well as gaining further ethical knowledge outside of the classroom. We hosted a total of three ethics events. Students enjoyed the opportunity to engage, provide input and the chance to earn credit on their own time. With great feedback from the events, we are looking forward to hosting more online when we return to our ‘new normal!’”

— Marketing student Tera Lima

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Agility — Responding to Change

Faculty responded by conducting new research relating to COVID-19

- Accountancy Professor Martin Ndicu is working on a proposal to study how organizational crisis management influences individuals’ learning agility and adaptive performance (from faculty and student perspectives) to achieve desired outcomes.

- Management Professor Mahesh Subramony will investigate the experience of remote workers during the pandemic. The research will test a comprehensive model of remote work that explores the job demands and resources that affect worker well-being.

- Management Professor Tim Michaelis is conducting a review of how entrepreneurs can respond to COVID-19.

- Marketing Professor Yihui (Elina) Tang published a March 16 Adweek article on brand response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tang also is planning an empirical study on crisis management for brands.

- Marketing Professor Ursula Sullivan will investigate how direct sellers are managing their supply and demand with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research will examine how companies are managing global relationships within their supply and value chains with the shock of closures and rationing of both raw materials and finished product.

- Marketing Professor Mya Pronschinske Groza is exploring consumer sentiment toward small businesses during the stay-at-home orders and expectations consumers have of small businesses during reopening.

Cocurricular activities transitioned to digital platforms

The ELC teams transitioned to online meetings during respective class times and delivered their final presentations virtually.

“As a coach, I cannot be more proud to be a part of the student experience in such a manner. The insight of these students, their dedication, motivation and perseverance is infectious and inspiring.”

—Director of Business Consulting, Jason Gorham

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Resilience – Bouncing Back

“Shortly after the Executive MBA Program in Nanjing, China launched, the pandemic hit, and classes were changed to online learning. Students discussed how disruptions occur in many forms and how resilient leaders are able to quickly pivot and look for alternative solutions to ensure minimal disruptions to operations. Even though we are not physically with our students in Nanjing, our faculty members continue to have a profound impact upon student learning. Students are determined to engage with faculty via digital learning platforms and look forward to resuming face-to-face classes in Nanjing once it is safe to do so.”

— Assistant Dean for Graduate Business Programs Anthony Preston

“Seven marketing students traveled to Sweden over spring break to attend classes at the University of Skövde when the federal government canceled all flights inbound to the U.S. It took several hard-working people to re-book our flights and find openings for all of us to get home. When we landed at O’Hare, we waited in line for four hours, elbow-to-elbow with thousands of travelers who came in from other international locations. Our students remained cool and calm. Their resilience made me proud to represent NIU in Sweden.”

— Marketing Instructor Daniel Morgan

To learn more about activities in this section and how you can support it, please reach out to contact Anthony Preston at apreston@niu.edu