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Technology, partnerships help MU's business college

By TAYLOR STUCK May 19, 2019 Updated 2 hrs ago



Lori Wolfe/The Herald-Dispatch From left Dr. Marc Sollosy, Lewis College of Business Dean Dr. Avinandan Mukherjee and instructional technologists Rick Bledsoe demonstrate lightboard technology in the Lewis College of Business on Tuesday, May 7, 2019, at Marshall University in Huntington.

HUNTINGTON — Standing behind a glass panel, associate professor and director of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at the Marshall University Lewis College of Business, Marc Sollosy picked up a neon yellow marker and began writing on the glass.

Standing on the opposite side of the glass from Sollosy, the words were backward. But looking at the television monitor, the words can be seen, seemingly floating around Sollosy's head.

Marshall is the first university in the state and one of 350 in the world to have a new Learning Glass Lightboard thanks to a generous donation by the Hoops family. Housed in the Hoops Video Studio on the third floor of Corbly Hall, the leaders of the College of Business hope the technology will make online courses more engaging as the world of higher education transitions to a more online format.

"Have you ever taken a class online? They are kind of boring," Sollosy said. "They are pretty much 'read this' and take a test. What this does is all of a sudden it allows you to interact with the instructor. It's like you are in the room with the instructor."

The Lightboard is just one of the ways the college of business, under the direction of Dean Avinandan Mukherjee and in partnership with business leaders like former Intuit CEO and Marshall alumnus Brad Smith, is leading Marshall into the future.

"What Brad is challenging us to do is reimagine the entire college and its academic functions," Mukherjee said. "It's really a challenge to create a bold future for the college and to be unique and distinctive in many ways."

The college is already distinct. The Princeton Review and College Consensus recently named the college one of the best in the nation to receive an MBA.

Evaluating and adding new, in-demand curriculum - online and in person - and new student supports like the Innovation Center paired with a new building in the near future are all a part of how the COB is blazing a trail to the future.

Let there be light

As the college of business and Marshall as a whole works to strengthen its online program offerings, Sollosy said he believes the new technology will help make the courses even more attractive.

While working on a project commissioned by Jeff Hoops for the Grand Patrician Resort he is building in Milton, Sollosy also was researching ways to make online courses more engaging and found the Learning Glass Lightboard technology, which is fairly new. When discussing how Hoops could compensate Sollosy and the university for his time and service, Sollosy pulled out a proposal he was working on to request funding to purchase the technology.

"Fund this," he told Hoops.

So after an approximately \$20,000 donation and a new wall, the technology rests in the Hoops Visual Studio, available for faculty members to use to enhance their courses.

The setup is similar to a green screen used by a TV meteorologist. The Lightboard is the screen, and flips the image so it appears correct on video. Instructors can write out equations, draw on maps, show PowerPoint presentations and interact with them, and get creative in interacting more with students.

"I teach a capstone class, and one of the things I have found frustrating is I use a simulation and out of that simulation comes a lot of output. In the classroom, I'll put the output up on the board and we will talk about it and we can point it out," Sollosy said. "I have tried for a number of years to accomplish a similar effect in my online classrooms, using an iPad, using Camtasia - all that."

Now, Sollosy can put the simulation on the Lightboard and do all of the same drawing, writing and explaining he does in a campus classroom.

Sollosy said every time a new person tries the board out, they come up with new ways to use it. He plans to practice and try things out over the summer. He said he also wants each faculty member to create an introductory video and he would also like to create a tutorial video library, with short videos explaining an equation learned in freshman year, for example.

Stacy McGhee, a graduating online MBA student, said she thinks the Lightboard will be a great addition to the online learning experience.

"The main thing you are missing is what you get in a physical classroom," she said. "To be able to put an equation up on the board, more or less - it takes a lot more time to teach yourself an equation than it does to have someone show you how to do it."

Virtual learning

McGhee is a full-time working mom, so when she decided she wanted to get a master's degree to strengthen her skill set and ensure a stronger future, she knew online was the only way it was going to be accomplished.

Living and working in Kanawha County, McGhee said she had always heard great things about Marshall even though she was unable to attend during undergrad. So she emailed inquiring about an online MBA, unsure if it was even an option. It was perfect timing - Marshall was accepting its

first class into the online-only MBA program.

"It's difficult," said McGhee, who graduated this month with a 4.0 GPA. "Instead of class time with a professor, it takes a lot of discipline because you have to teach the material to yourself. And it's not really like you can do it all at once. You have due dates just like the physical classroom setting. It's tough when you are working and a mom to be responsible and make yourself sit and work when things are due. ... In the end, I finished it and I feel really good. I don't think it would be impossible for anyone. You just have to have the motivation to do it."

It's because of students like McGhee that Sollosy says online programming is here to stay. That, and more students now will have grown up using computers and learning on computers, so online college will be a good fit.

That is why along with more online graduate degrees, the college of business is now working on an online undergraduate general business degree. Though an online undergraduate degree foregoes the traditional "college experience" many are still looking for, Sollosy said he believes more students will be looking for ways to obtain a degree that has more flexibility.

Marshall as a whole is looking to further promote its online programming, with President Jerome Gilbert telling board of governor members during the last meeting the communications department was meeting with a marketing consultant to strategize ways to better market those programs.

Innovating

The new technology is just one of several new and exciting things at the college of business. With two years under his belt, Mukherjee said this is the college's best year yet.

Along with the online undergraduate degree, the college is planning a doctoral business administration program, which Mukherjee said he believes will be a high-demand program, helping fill holes in the consulting sector as well as faculty positions at business school. The program will be a hybrid, meaning it will be mostly online with five in-face meetings a year. It will be the second doctoral program in the COB.

The college will also be adding more certificates. Starting next fall, all business students will receive a certificate in Microsoft Office.

Mukherjee said for the first time in a decade, the college is reviewing and reimagining the core courses, which are the base courses all business students take regardless of major.

"It will help us build a curriculum that is state-of-the-art for the new generation and new industry that we face," he said. "Our huge effort right now is entrepreneurship and innovation. This college is all about entrepreneurship and innovation. We want every student in the business school to learn design thinking. Again, I cannot thank Brad Smith enough for his interest in how we teach and how we deliver our education to energize young thinkers to be entrepreneurs and innovators."

Smith will work with faculty this summer to help them incorporate design thinking - a way of identifying problems and finding solutions - into regular coursework.

"The average number of careers an American will have in a lifetime is about five, and between five to 17 jobs in their lifetime, according to different studies," Mukherjee said. "We are looking at a time called the gig economy. It requires a global mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset. It requires the ability to quickly learn, experiment, fail, learn from it again and move forward. That's where we are trying to play a role. We are trying to be in the lifelong learning process. No matter the age, experience, background, there is something for everyone in our programs."

The innovative learning is coupled with new spaces to enhance the learning experience. Along with the video studio, Corbly Hall houses the new Innovation Center, or I-Center. Supplied with 3D printers, white boards and space to discuss, the center serves both the community and students.

Similarly, the recently unveiled Brad D. Smith Business Incubator will help students and community members with viable business ideas get started and flourish.

Again thanks to Smith, the college is also working toward building a completely new building. Smith has donated \$25 million - a large chunk of the funds - but more still needs to be raised. Mukherjee said they are looking at a five-year timeline.

"Innovation is the answer to disruption," Mukherjee said. "I think higher education is in disruption right now because all the rules we knew are breaking. We used to think everything needed to be three credits. Now we are talking about stackable credits, micro-credentials and nano-degrees, and modular construction so you can make your degree what dreams come true. When we see these trends, it's up to us to innovate fast enough to be on top of these trends so we are not held behind."

To learn more about the programs offered in the Lewis College of Business, visit www.marshall.edu.

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