Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Report represents the work that the institution has undertaken to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor   5 MAY 2021
                                                                         Date

John T. Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H, M.B.A., FACS; President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED)

Name of Institution

Rootstown, Ohio

City and State

The institution uses the template below to complete its Quality Initiative Report. The institution may include a report it has prepared for other purposes if it addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the narrative in the template. This template may be used both for reports on initiatives that have been completed and for initiatives that will continue and for which this report serves as a milestone of accomplishments thus far. The complete report should be no more than 6,000 words.

The report must be submitted by June 1 of Year 9.

Submit the report as a PDF file at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiatives" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. The file name of the report should follow this format: QIReport[InstitutionName] [State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Date: May 10, 2021

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Report Categories

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a one-page executive summary that describes the Quality Initiative, summarizes what was accomplished and explains any changes made to the initiative over the time period.

A multi-year collaboration between the Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) and Kent State University (KSU) was created to extend distance education offerings at the smaller of the two institutions-NEOMED. Through a formal *Shared Services Agreement*, the institutions worked together to transition traditional in-person curricula to a distance delivered program by using the established technology infrastructure and instructional design services at KSU. The project prompted NEOMED to advance its infrastructure to prepare for distance education programs, (e.g., related HLC approvals, membership in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), improvements to its learning management system (LMS), planning for instructional design support and other elements).

Both universities received strong support for the project from their presidents and the state of Ohio legislature. The project embodied Ohio's prioritization of statewide and regional collaborations among its public universities to realize efficiencies that keep education affordable in Ohio.

Key stakeholders in the NEOMED Master of Science in Health System Pharmacy Administration (HSPA) program benefited from the collaborative project. HSPA program faculty gained first-hand instruction in distance education curriculum development, including training in Quality Matters. HSPA program students, who are largely practicing pharmacists, benefited from greater flexibility in the online delivery of courses. The project also improved the overall accessibility of the program for in state and out-of-state students. Hence, the project has positioned the HSPA program for future enrollment growth.

To implement the project, the collaborating institutions developed careful plans for project coordination and communications to address stakeholder needs and maintain program quality. Essential components of the project included the Information Technology infrastructure, educational technology teams, and registrar teams at both institutions. The resulting *Shared Services Agreement*, related new policies, and new faculty resources are important artifacts of the project. No significant changes were made to the Quality Initiative project.

The collaborative arrangement required monitoring project implementation through the appointment of a special task force composed of personnel from both universities. Clear and consistent communication between the two universities was essential for the project's success. The shared goal of a high-quality experience for the students, faculty and staff at both institutions was also an essential contributor to the project's success. Based on the recommendation of the task force at the conclusion of the *Shared Services Agreement*, the project contract has been renewed with modifications for the continued provision of faculty development in the areas of online teaching, including student engagement and course review methodologies.

Accountability for the collaboration was overseen by the NEOMED vice president for academic affairs to ensure swift removal of obstacles and provision of adequate resources. Unexpectedly, improvements resulting from the Quality Initiative enabled NEOMED to expedite its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Scope and Impact of the Initiative

2. Explain in more detail what was accomplished in the Quality Initiative in relation to its purposes and goals. (If applicable, explain the initiative's hypotheses and findings.)

Background

The Quality Initiative was the outgrowth of an effort to respond to the learning needs of NEOMED's graduate students in its Master of Science in Health Systems Pharmacy Administration (HSPA) degree program. NEOMED's HSPA program was established in its College of Graduate Studies in 2012 to provide training to experienced pharmacists interested in pursuing management and leadership positions in hospital and health-system pharmacy practices. Students in the program are licensed pharmacists, or must be eligible for licensure, and may opt to complete the degree in combination with a residency program involving a concurrent two-year specialized residency in pharmacy administration at a NEOMED hospital system affiliate. As practicing and resident pharmacists, students in the HSPA program have demanding schedules that often create obstacles for the pursuit or completion of further graduate study. By 2017, though the HSPA program was well-established, college and program administrators sought to find an effective way to address the scheduling demands of the program's prospective student demographic. Converting the traditional graduate program to distance education was identified as the most promising way to address this need. However, NEOMED was not equipped to deliver programs via distance education. An exploration of the requirements necessary for the university to convert the HSPA program to a distance delivered program was initiated by NEOMED's vice president for academic affairs and a collaboration with a neighboring comprehensive public university that had an extensive infrastructure and long-time experience in distance education was selected as the best option to transition the HSPA program fully online.

Purpose

The purpose of the Quality Initiative was to implement a collaborative agreement between NEOMED and KSU to transition and deliver NEOMED's HSPA program courses online by using KSU's infrastructure and associated services for distance education. The collaborative agreement would enable NEOMED to accomplish this transition in a high-quality, cost-effective way and would serve as a pilot to consider future program offerings through distance education. Additionally, it was anticipated that program enrollment and sustainability would be enhanced by transitioning the HSPA program to a distance education offering.

Goals

The formal goals of the Quality Initiative were to: ensure a high-quality educational experience for NEOMED students and faculty; use the KSU-NEOMED collaborative agreement as a pilot for NEOMED to develop other online programs; and develop and disseminate lessons learned from the Quality Initiative for educational scholarship.

Accomplishments

The collaborative agreement was designed to support the continuous delivery of the existing program to minimize disruptions for current students and faculty and provide optimal support for

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tasks involved in converting curricula and program delivery to an online environment across two universities' systems. The resulting *Shared Services Agreement* was developed by the partnering universities in 2018 and provided a detailed project plan and contract for the inter-university collaboration to extend distance education at NEOMED (see Appendix A, *Shared Service Agreement*). Selected elements of the *Shared Services Agreement* are summarized here to illustrate the dimensions involved in the collaboration, which included three major categories: technologies, course and faculty development, and student enrollments.

- The **scope of services** provided by KSU included access for HSPA program faculty, staff and students to KSU's user accounts, learning management system, video hosting and delivery system, instructional design, educational technology, faculty and staff training services, Help Desk and technical support, and other similar tools and resources.

- **Instructional and educational technology design consultation** involving the sequence and schedule for the development of online course content through KSU's instructional designers and HSPA program faculty were clearly defined on a timeline in the *Agreement*.

- **Program details**, such as curriculum, courses for degree requirements, credit hours, the sequence, schedule and duration of courses, academic terms, student enrollment, designated program personnel, and the target launch dates for courses were identified in the *Agreement* as necessary elements to be shared between the universities to ensure project success.

- **Cooperation and communication** expectations between the partnering universities, were outlined to address the exchange of information and materials, confidentiality, access to personnel, intellectual property ownership, and liability.

- A section describing **relationship administration** in the *Agreement* identified key personnel and contacts at each institution and created an implementation team for the *Shared Services Agreement* comprised of administrative and operations personnel from each institution.

- A **fee schedule** included NEOMED's financial obligations to KSU and represented the majority of the project cost.

The purpose of the Quality Initiative was accomplished with a high degree of satisfaction and benefit for both institutions. NEOMED's HSPA program will complete its second year as a fully online program at the end of academic year 2021. The transition to a distance-delivered program was accomplished within a years' time without NEOMED's investment in the significant infrastructure and resource-intensive support services required for distance education programs. Additionally, the Quality Initiative was congruent with the Ohio Legislature's long-time focus on higher education affordability and efficiency through the use of one public university's existing distance education infrastructure by a neighboring public health sciences university, (i.e., NEOMED), that was interested in program expansion.

Meanwhile, KSU used the collaboration as an entrepreneurial pilot for a new business model to leverage existing distance education and instructional design resources for prospective future collaborations with external entities. The business model was developed in response to challenges faced by higher education, e.g., funding model changes, emerging technologies,

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emerging societal and employer needs, innovations in teaching and learning, shifting demographics, and globalization. Recognizing the value of their existing resources, KSU adapted its instructional design, faculty development, and project management services to address NEOMED's needs and was able to do so almost seamlessly during the Quality Initiative. To implement the collaborative agreement with NEOMED, KSU expected to have difficulties with its third-party vendor technologies. However, they ultimately found that the provision of technology services to NEOMED was within the scope of its contracts. Furthermore, each of KSU's vendors were willing to accommodate the arrangement such that their contracts did not present as much of a difficulty as anticipated.

Finally, from KSU's perspective, the last potential obstacle to the collaboration with NEOMED was student enrollment, which involved long-established practices at KSU with a requirement for admission to the university before granting access to university services and resources. While KSU was able to find a work-around for NEOMED students, that component of the project prompted many university discussions about how enrollment and registration processes might be made more flexible to encourage the engagement of non-traditional students.

Ultimately, the collaboration with NEOMED presented KSU with a low-risk opportunity to engage in a serious analysis of resources, determine how they might be used in new and innovative ways, and explore a new business model that capitalizes on its rich existing resources for distance education.

Goal 1 – Ensure a high-quality educational experience for NEOMED students and faculty

This goal is the foremost important component of the initiative. Careful project management plans were developed and communicated to ensure proper course sequencing, faculty development, course support and student support that would infuse quality throughout all teaching and learning endeavors.

The HSPA program student learning outcomes and faculty teaching experiences resulted in positive feedback from both stakeholder groups. After year one of implementation, both faculty and students were surveyed about their satisfaction with their online experience. One hundred percent of faculty were satisfied or very satisfied with their online teaching experience, and 80% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with their online learning experience. Additionally, all faculty and students were satisfied or very satisfied with the support services they received (see Appendix B, *Faculty Satisfaction Survey*, and Appendix C, *Student Satisfactions Survey*).

Faculty professional development was enhanced through training in online course development and an introduction to online and active learning pedagogy through KSU's instructional designers. KSU provided HSPA program faculty and staff access to their training and support resources, including online learning and development platforms and a training library with over 13,000 courses (see Appendix D, *Listing of Faculty Development Resources in Blackboard*).

KSU's experience and proven success with distance education considerably reduced the time required for the NEOMED HSPA program's transition to distance delivery while ensuring that a high-quality online student experience was being developed. KSU used the Quality Matters rubric as a guideline. Quality Matters is a nationally recognized organization that sets the standard for quality assurance in online education.

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In summary, the initiative allowed for comprehensive and collaborative analysis, design, development, training, review, and project management for continuous monitoring and improvement of the HSPA program.

Goal 2 -- Use the collaborative agreement as a pilot for developing other online programs

To implement the *Shared Services Agreement*, NEOMED submitted a substantive change application to the HLC in 2019 to offer the HSPA program as a 100% distance-delivered program and increase its distance education activities from *distance education limited to courses and one program*, applicable to its Master of Public Health program, to HLC's level 3, *distance education courses and programs.* The application was approved later in 2019, positioning NEOMED for future online program growth. Furthermore, the ability to expand distance education offerings enabled NEOMED to join the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) to position the HSPA program and the university for future enrollment and program growth.

Goal 3 -- Develop and disseminate lessons learned from the Quality Initiative for educational scholarship

In Fall 2020, after the conclusion of the original *Shared Services Agreement*, NEOMED submitted a proposal for presentation to the HLC Annual Conference to formally share the results of the Quality Initiative. One of the KSU colleagues involved in the *Agreement* was invited as a co-presenter to provide the perspective from both universities in the presentation. Titled *Inter-university Collaboration to Extend Distance Education*, the proposal was selected for presentation at the 2021 annual conference and presented twice, in the pre-conference Accreditation Program and in the General Program (see Appendix E, *Conference PowerPoint Slides).*

3. Evaluate the impact of the initiative, including any changes in processes, policies, technology, curricula, programs, student learning and success that are now in place in consequence of the initiative.

The initiative has had a significant impact on the HSPA program. Transitioning the course work from traditional face-to-face lectures to distance education learning offered increased flexibility for students to complete their course work. Previously students were required to attend classes in-person two evenings a week, which was challenging since they were working in full-time positions at their practice sites across the northeast Ohio region. The distance education format provides students with increased options on timing for the completion of course work. A recent student satisfaction survey supports this benefit from the initiative (see Appendix C, *Student Satisfaction Survey).*

An added benefit to offering the HSPA program as distance education is the opportunity to increase the enrollment of students who would have been unable to attend in-person classes. The distance education format no longer prohibits enrollment by prospective students who may live outside northeast Ohio, or those with conflicting work schedules or competing professional or personal commitments. Additionally, NEOMED was able to open enrollment to prospective students at partner health systems out of state. The HSPA program is currently working to partner with pharmacy administration residency programs for additional applicants to the program.

NEOMED did not have adequate resources to develop and support distance education and lacked personnel with expertise in developing online courses. Transitioning courses to a distance education platform was a new endeavor for the program faculty. Most had little to no formal

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training with this modality. In addition, this initiative provided access to KSU's learning management system (LMS), Blackboard Learn, and instructional design experts to assist faculty in converting their courses to this new format. Furthermore, KSU had developed their own "Design to Teach" framework for assisting in the development of online courses. The framework incorporates the Quality Matters rubric and focuses on designing a course that promotes active teaching and learning opportunities within the course. Part of KSU's approach is to embed "training" into the act of doing which was actualized in this project by pairing an instructional designer with a faculty course developer (or multiple developers) to guide them through the process so that faculty internalize knowledge as they build their course. Faculty also learned how a course is best designed to facilitate teaching. KSU's instructional designers also continued to provide on-going support to enable effective instruction in an online course.

KSU had become aware that the expertise they had developed over a couple of decades of offering distance learning was a valuable asset. They were interested in the possibility of using their online infrastructure and expertise in entrepreneurial ventures. Knowledge-sharing and efficient use of expensive technology solutions makes sense in an era of restrictive budgets.

KSU and NEOMED have a history of cooperation and both welcomed the idea of finding areas of shared services. Because KSU has contracts with third-party vendors, to be able to host NEOMED on these technology platforms, it was first necessary to make sure this was within the scope of current contracts. The learning management system (Blackboard Learn), video hosting platform (Kaltura), and Help Desk service, provided by Blackboard Student Services and KSU's Division of Information Services, did not object to KSU serving as an intermediary in the *Shared Services Agreement* business transaction. Fortunately, KSU learned that their respective agreements did not present insurmountable barriers, which allowed them to move ahead in the partnership with NEOMED.

A standardized course template, course syllabus, and schedule of classes were created (see Appendix F, *Course Template, Sample Syllabus and Schedule*). Guided by the KSU instructional design experts, HSPA faculty reviewed and revised course learning objectives, created weekly assessments, prepared slide presentations, and incorporated other learning materials for their course(s). A recent faculty survey includes positive comments regarding the assistance received from the KSU instructional design team in transitioning their courses (see Appendix B, *Faculty Satisfaction Survey*).

To further help the faculty, this initiative also included access to learning resources to aid in one's development in concepts related to distance education (see Appendix D, *Listing of Faculty Development Resources in Blackboard*).

An added benefit related to the course transition was access to additional faculty for the HSPA program. NEOMED has been able to recruit highly qualified faculty who, due to challenges with teaching live classes on a regular basis, would otherwise not have been able to participate in the program. To ensure consistency with course development and delivery of courses, an adjunct faculty contract outlining faculty requirements and responsibilities was developed as a result of this initiative (see Appendix G, *Faculty Contract*). KSU provided a template for the contract, which NEOMED adopted. The contract provided clarification to adjunct faculty about position expectations, payment information, and the commitment and ownership for intellectual property and course content.

Recognizing that students likely would complete course work anytime during the day, evenings or weekends, provisions for technical support to address possible problems with the LMS, (e.g., inability to download course material, broken hyper-links, lost passwords) were delineated in the *Shared Services Agreement* to provide students and faculty with KSU Help Desk technical assistance 24hr/7days a week. Students and faculty were surveyed about their level of

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satisfaction with the KSU helpdesk. Survey results indicated that 100% of students were satisfied. Of the faculty respondents, 67% were very satisfied and 33% were satisfied.

The Quality Initiative also resulted in teaching and learning enhancements at NEOMED. Given challenges and limitations of the existing NEOMED LMS, the university recently approved plans for its upgrade. NEOMED is also working on a plan to operationalize an office of Online Education in the future, modeled on many of KSU's Office of Continuing and Distance Education (OCDE) course management procedures.

Finally, because the Quality Initiative prompted NEOMED to obtain the highest level of approval from the HLC to offer courses and programs via distance education in 2019, the project unexpectedly contributed to the university's overall confidence in 2020 to temporarily pivot all courses online in response to the Governor of Ohio's statewide order to shut down in-person classes across all higher education institutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Explain any tools, data or other information that resulted from the work of the initiative.

NEOMED faculty and staff have access to KSUs file sharing (Egnyte), and LMS (Blackboard), which allowed faculty and staff at both institutions to share files easily and efficiently. File sharing continues to be a valuable tool for continuous updating and management of course content. Project management was facilitated by KSU's use of Team Dynamics which has been customized for tracking their online program/course development. This software is used to monitor the progress of the HSPA by mapping out dates of course delivery and development, responsible faculty developers and instructional designers and notating any issues occurring during the course development process. The detailed project management allowed staff at both NEOMED and KSU to always be aware of progress and any issues. The continual access to updated information was a key component of monitoring the quality of work and for keeping all development on schedule.

Communication between the two universities was managed in a variety of ways. In addition to the task forces that were established to oversee the implementation of *Shared Services Agreement*, each university assigned a single point-of-contact/project manager. These project managers worked together and with their respective university departments to ensure processes were in place that worked for both universities to share communication, access to systems such as to Blackboard and file sharing, student course registration and grades, and billing. This was accomplished by creating 1) a Cross Registration File, an excel file used each semester and shared across both university's departments (see Appendix H, *Cross Registration Form*), and 2) the KSU/NEOMED Processes Roles and Responsibilities, which included detailed timelines and rules of engagement about who does what and when (see Appendix I, *KSU/NEOMED Processes Roles and Responsibilities*).

Throughout the Quality Initiative, both universities made significant changes. KSU was in the final stages of a request for proposal process for a Learning Management System (LMS) and felt it important for NEOMED to understand that a change might occur to the LMS for which KSU would be committed to transition the NEOMED courses and familiarize NEOMED faculty to a new system. NEOMED was given time to strengthen its educational infrastructure and expand its capacity for program growth. NEOMED upgraded many technologies to enterprise solutions such as Zoom video conferencing, Turning Technologies student response system, lecture/desktop recording software assessable on/off campus, and in Fall 2021 will be introducing a new LMS.

5. Describe the biggest challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing the initiative.

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The majority of challenges encountered in the Quality Initiative involved increases in workload for students as well as faculty, which were related to course assignments. One example of increased workload was the assessment of student achievement of course learning objectives. For these assessments, students were asked to complete assignments following each weekly course module, (e.g., writing a short essay, solving a case problem, preparing an annotated bibliography, or participating in a discussion forum). Some students were challenged in managing their time to complete these assignments, which resulted in past due submissions. This trend was troubling to the faculty who were unsure of how to handle these situations. Upon consultation with a KSU instructional designer, the HSPA program developed a late assignment policy (see Appendix J, *Late Assignment Policy).* This policy provided a clear message to the students regarding the impact of submitting an assignment late as well as a consistent procedure for the faculty to deal with the problem. Once implemented, the policy significantly reduced the amount of late assignment submissions from students.

The increased number of course assignments described above also required more time from program faculty to grade the assignments. In one instance an individual faculty member was spending nearly eight (8) hours per week grading course assignments. This obviously would not be sustainable especially if program enrollment expanded in the future. With guidance from KSU, to help minimize the time required for grading while still providing learners with feedback, the HSPA program employed the use of grading rubrics (see Appendix K, *Sample Grading Rubric).* The rubrics simplified the grading process by reducing faculty time but still allowed for written feedback.

The Quality Initiative also enabled NEOMED HSPA students to transition from the use of two LMS systems that had been deployed in the existing NEOMED program to a single easy-access, user-friendly LMS while increasing flexibility for graduate students to complete course work in conjunction with their careers and personal lives. Additionally, NEOMED hoped to expand enrollment in the HSPA program by targeting individuals who would otherwise be unable to regularly attend face-to-face classes as well as those that may reside outside Northeast Ohio.

NEOMED HSPA program directors and faculty experienced the opportunity to work and learn directly from KSU's established best practices and procedures to transition a face-to-face didactic master's degree program to a distance education platform. KSU's Office of Continuing & Distance Education (OCDE) provided high quality instructional design guidance to NEOMED faculty. OCDE develops distance education programs using standards set forth by the Quality Matters (QM) higher education rubric, a national benchmark for online course design. The QM rubric requires proper alignment of each course assessment to the student learning objectives, which enabled NEOMED to ensure students were adequately mastering each course objective as well as the overall program objectives.

During this collaboration, as mentioned in responses to other questions above, NEOMED was given the opportunity to enhance and equip NEOMED's distance education infrastructure while continuing to meet current program needs.

Commitment to and Engagement in the Quality Initiative

6. Describe the individuals and groups involved at stages throughout the initiative and their perceptions of its worth and impact.

The Quality Initiative was driven by multiple entities throughout the project timeframe, most of which were ultimately accountable to NEOMED's vice president for academic affairs (VPAA).

NEOMED's Quality Initiative grew out of an exploration by an appointed task force that considered the options available to convert the traditional courses in NEOMED's HSPA program

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to distance delivered courses. The interest in this conversion was a response to the learning needs of program students who are typically practicing pharmacists or resident-pharmacists at health systems pharmacy practice settings. Three possible options were explored: 1) expansion of NEOMED's infrastructure for online learning; 2) distance education platforms offered by Online Program Management vendors; and 3) a partnership with Kent State University (KSU) for online course development and delivery. The task force identified the third option, collaboration with KSU, as the preferred course of action. The resulting recommendation prompted the creation of a two-year *Shared Services Agreement* between NEOMED and KSU, which was signed by both university presidents in an [August 2018 formal signing ceremony](#). The ceremony symbolically recognized this inter-university collaboration that would advance the Ohio legislature's push toward statewide and regional collaborations among its public universities as a means to realize efficiencies that keep education affordable in Ohio. In addition to the university presidents, members of Ohio's senate, Inter-University Council, and Chamber of Commerce were in attendance at the ceremony to support the collaboration and show public support for the project (see Appendix L, *Signing Ceremony Program*). Both NEOMED's and KSU's presidents considered the collaboration an innovative, affordable, and convenient way to capitalize on the significant resources of Ohio's public universities (see Appendix M, Shared Services Agreement Press Release).

In 2018, to ensure the smooth implementation of the *Shared Services Agreement*, the VPAA appointed an Online Education Task Force charged to: monitor implementation; recommend necessary adjustments to ensure HSPA program success; and, nearer the conclusion of the two-year *Agreement* in 2020, recommend continuance of the *Agreement* or a viable alternative for continuing online delivery of the HSPA and possibly other NEOMED programs. The selection of members for this task force was strategic to enable the task force to fulfill its charge. Membership was comprised of key individuals from both universities (see Appendix N, *Online Education Task Force Membership*). The Online Education Task Force met multiple times to establish operations, review progress and strengthen communications between the universities. In its final report to the VPAA, this Task Force reported on the successes of the collaboration, identified possible enhancements, and ultimately recommended an extension of the *Agreement* with modifications. In summary, the Online Education Task Force found the shared services collaboration to have fully addressed the HSPA program needs for technology, course development, registration, and enrollment. The final recommendation of this task force was to extend the *Shared Services Agreement* with modifications, including additional faculty development for program faculty and alterations to account creation at KSU (see Appendix O, *Online Education Task Force Final Report to VPAA*).

In 2019, the VPAA appointed the HLC Quality Initiative Task Force to oversee the development of a Quality Initiative (QI) Proposal for submission to the HLC, including the articulation of the significance of the QI to NEOMED, necessary resources and key stakeholder involvement, milestones, intended outcomes, and a process for monitoring and evaluating progress (see Appendix P, *NEOMED HLC Quality Initiative Task Force Membership*). The QI Task Force was also charged to apprise the VPAA of any obstacles that arose in the implementation of the QI and recommend necessary adjustments. Finally, the charge included the development a Quality Initiative Report for submission to the HLC. Membership of the QI Task Force included representatives from NEOMED and KSU who had key roles in the HSPA program, the NEOMED College of Graduate Studies where the program was housed, NEOMED and KSU's distance education and educational technology areas, and NEOMED's accreditation team. Over approximately 22 months, the QI Task Force:

- o Authored and submitted the QI Proposal, including the accompanying required Consortial Agreement and Distance Education Substantive Change applications. These agreements received approval from the HLC in 2019.

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- Monitored the *Shared Services Agreement* through the work of the Online Education Task Force and the shared members with that committee.

- Proposed and delivered a session presentation for the 2021 HLC Annual Conference to share the concept, implementation, and outcomes of the inter-university collaboration quality initiative with higher education colleagues.

- Prepared the QI Final Report for submission to the HLC.

An important benefit of this task force was the continuous interaction between the two universities from a strategic perspective, including NEOMED's aspirations for program growth and accreditation considerations and KSU's entrepreneurial goals and aspirations for the *Shared Services Agreement*. Given size and scope difference between the universities, the perspectives about the Quality Initiative were diverse while mutually respectful, supportive, and beneficial. Those perspectives were shared as part of the related presentation for the HLC Annual Conference program and underscored the complimentary nature of each institution's goals for and benefits resulting from the initiative, especially the ability to transition and deliver the HSPA program online using high-quality best practice distance education with minimal cost; strengthening each institution's distance education infrastructure and related procedures; and strengthening the long-time relationship between the two universities (see Appendix E, *Conference PowerPoint Slides*).

7. Describe the most important points learned by those involved in the initiative.

The participants involved in the Quality Initiative included executive level officers of both institutions, NEOMED's College of Graduate Studies leadership, HSPA program leadership, faculty, and staff, academic technology and instructional staff, student enrollment/registrar staff, and accreditation staff.

Important lessons learned were that:

1) Shared values and goals between the collaborating institutions are essential for this type of collaboration to produce mutual benefits. The *Shared Services Agreement* and Quality Initiative enabled NEOMED and KSU to collaborate on the transition of the HSPA program to a fully distance-delivered program with the same aspiration of a high-quality experience for the faculty, students and staff involved at both institutions. Had the desire for quality been unequal across this partnership, the outcomes of the initiative would likely not have been as satisfying for one or both institutions.

2) A well-articulated contractual agreement provides a strong foundation for shared values and goals by clearly delineating expectations and schedules for project management, including deliverables, timelines, responsibilities of both institutions and their respective personnel, constraints, procedures for operationalizing, e.g., registration, billing, sharing grades, course development, and project monitoring. Both institutions were very pleased with the contractual agreement and were able to use the *Shared Services Agreement* as the basis for project management in the context of two university systems.

3) Early and frequent communications between the two institutions and the key individuals with authority for project implementation was essential to the success of the project. Ensuring that key contacts at both institutions were identified in the contractual agreement and that they were endowed with the authority to steer the project at their respective institutions created a consistent and reliable flow to the work of the project. Also, the task forces appointed to monitor project implementation provided a crucial platform for ongoing communication between the two partners to hear from one another their perspectives on how the project was progressing.

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4) Having support and buy-in from all levels of both institutions created a level and unswerving path for the project managers to execute the many moving parts of the project. Because executive leaders marked the kick-off of the collaboration through a public ceremony that celebrated the partnership, broad attention was drawn to the project, which made it possible to reference the importance of the project over time. We believe this more easily cleared the path of possible obstacles across the many departments involved.

Resource Provision

8. Explain the human, financial, physical and technological resources that supported the initiative.

<u>Human Resources</u>

Many personnel at NEOMED and KSU were essential in supporting the Quality Initiative.

Prior to transitioning the program online, NEOMED appointed one of its pharmacy faculty members as the HSPA program director. In addition to providing supervision for the program coordinator who was designated as NEOMED's key contact for KSU in the *Shared Services Agreement*, the HSPA program director underwent the process of course development with KSU's instructional designers early in the project and was then able to model the value of KSU's design process to other faculty colleagues as they were scheduled to undergo the online course development process. The HSPA program director has played an integral part in all aspects of the project, including leadership roles in the Online Education Task Force and HLC Quality Initiative Task Force.

The HSPA program coordinator served as NEOMED's key point of contact in the *Shared Services Agreement* for KSU. The coordinator is a full-time position within the College of Graduate Studies of which 0.5 FTE of her position is dedicated to the HSPA program. In addition, the coordinator served as the first point of contact for the HSPA program faculty and students as the transition to distance-delivered courses was occurring. She fielded access and technology problems to the appropriate service offices at KSU and played an integral role in all aspects of the project throughout the duration of the initiative. She served as a member of both task forces that provided oversight for the project.

The director of NEOMED's Academic Technology Services was an integral part of the collaboration between KSU's instructional design team and NEOMED. The director worked with the program coordinator and KSU to prepare HSPA online courses. KSU shares HSPA course development file access with NEOMED. As NEOMED retained the intellectual property rights for all courses.

Throughout the initiative, NEOMED recruited adjunct faculty interested in teaching in an online environment (Appendix Q *HSPA Faculty Listing)*. Regional hospital systems who are longtime affiliates of NEOMED's College of Pharmacy also regularly demonstrated their commitment to the HSPA program by helping to identify prospective teaching faculty. Hospital affiliates include the Cleveland Clinic, SUMMA Health System, and University Hospitals. These affiliates provided strong support for the HSPA program in general since it impacts patient care and effective hospital administration in their respective facilities. They have also provided strong encouragement for NEOMED to transition the HSPA program to a distance education platform to make the program more widely available.

NEOMED's vice president for academic affairs (VPAA) and dean, College of Pharmacy, initiated the original exploration to determine the best course of action for transitioning the HSPA program to distance education. This individual has been involved in the Quality Initiative throughout its

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implementation. The VPAA has also played an essential role in the advocacy for university funding to support the project and the extension of the *Shared Services Agreement* into the upcoming academic year.

KSU's instructional designers and educational technologists provided course development and delivery through consultation and training for NEOMED faculty to transition HSPA traditional courses to the distance education platform. KSU's instructional designers used established best practices for online teaching, and course maintenance to enable NEOMED faculty to fully utilize the KSU LMS and related resources. KSU's Information Services staff provided a portion of the Help Desk assistance employed to support the HSPA program faculty, staff and students. Finally, KSU's registrar team coordinated registration and course enrollment through the exchange of required data with NEOMED's registrar as outlined in the Services Matrix in Schedule A of the *Shared Services Agreement (see Appendix A)*.

Financial Resources

NEOMED secured the necessary resources for this initiative as outlined in the *Shared Services Agreement* through a commitment from its university president. Terms of payment for the *Agreement* included a fee for services and a percentage of HSPA student tuition as described in Schedule D of the *Agreement* (see Appendix A, *Shared Services Agreement*). In addition to providing annual fixed funding for the HSPA program, NEOMED demonstrated its commitment to this initiative through the dedication of additional financial resources to execute the *Agreement* for a period of two years. An extension to the *Agreement* with modifications from the original was begun in the 2020/2021 academic year with continuing financial commitment from NEOMED.

Physical Resources

No physical resources were needed for the Quality Initiative.

Technological Resources

In addition to personnel, academic technology resources were critical to this initiative. The *Shared Services Agreement* carefully outlined the technologies that were included in the project (see Schedules A through E in Appendix A, *Shared Services Agreement*). The systems and software required to deliver the HSPA courses online involved KSU's LMS, video hosting service, and Help Desk for program faculty and students.

Plans for the Future (or Future Milestones of a Continuing Initiative)

9. Describe plans for ongoing work related to or as a result of the initiative.

Several improvements and adaptations for the Health Systems Pharmacy Administration (HSPA) program have been planned as a direct result of the Quality Initiative:

- Transitioning HSPA to distance-delivered program facilitates the ability to expand and meet student enrollment goals. Three students who would have been unable to complete the program had it remained a face-to-face offering were recently enrolled. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted graduate school enrollment, work is currently underway to market and recruit qualified candidates within northeast Ohio and beyond.

- Providing effective distance education graduate programs can be challenging for faculty who are more experienced with the traditional delivery of courses. Achieving high-quality

student learning experiences through the distance education modality is a primary emphasis of the HSPA program. To achieve this goal, with assistance from KSU, we are identifying additional faculty development resources. Planning is underway to create a series of online resources that faculty can easily access and complete. These training resources expand on current offerings available through the LMS and focus on methods to improve engagement with students, create assessments, and alternative methods to deliver course material.

- In the near future, the HSPA program will begin the process of obtaining Quality Matters certification for each of the courses in the program. This is an extensive process as each course will separately undergo a thorough review by experts in distance education. While the existing courses were designed based on Quality Matters standards, it is anticipated that some revisions will be needed to obtain certification.

10. Describe any practices or artifacts from the initiative that other institutions might find meaningful or useful and please indicate if you would be willing to share this information.

Practices

Procedures for operationalization of registration and billing were developed for the exchange of information between the two university systems. Communication between the two universities was managed in a variety of ways. In addition to the task forces that were developed to oversee and monitor the *Shared Services Agreement*, each university assigned a "point-of-contact" to ensure effective and expeditious communication. NEOMED assigned its HSPA program coordinator to this role and KSU assigned its Office of Continuing & Distance Education (OCDE) projects director to the role. These two points-of-contact worked with their respective universities to ensure processes were in place and working for access to systems such as the LMS and file sharing, student course registration and grades, and billing. NEOMED and KSU registrars and college financial managers helped in the development of processes to operationalize each of these services (see Appendix I *KSU/NEOMED Processes Roles and Responsibilities*). Both points-of-contact had regular check-ins and worked together to organize meetings as needed to address issues as they arose.

The following tools were developed to ensure the correct information was collected from students and communicated to both institutions.

- A Cross-Registration Form was developed to register NEOMED students into KSU courses (see Appendix H, *Cross Registration Form*). This form is used by both institutions' registrar offices to ensure they are reporting information to external stakeholders in the same way. Additionally, a Cross Registration Spreadsheet was created to share information across multiple departments that need the information to complete a task (see Appendix R, *Cross Registration Spreadsheet*). The KSU Registrar's office used the document to confirm student course registration, to share Banner Username and ID numbers for access, and to report grades. KSU's Accounting Office used it for billing. The contract type indicated which billing process to follow. The billing amounts per credit hour were clearly stated. KSU's OCDE used the document to identify which KSU courses NEOMED students were enrolling in, so they could ensure the registration sections were combined for student access.

Artifacts

Shared Service Agreement and Schedules (please see Appendix A).

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The documents included in this section may be de-identified of any names of personnel and payment figures and shared with other institutions.

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