History of MarylandOnline

The online higher education consortium MarylandOnline (MOL) was launched in 1999 with 12 charter member institutions. Over the 22 years since its launch, the consortium has served more than 20 Maryland member colleges and universities that are active in online education. For the past several years MOL has had a core membership of 19 schools, including all 16 of the state's community colleges.

MOL's founding purpose was to promote online learning; help students get started and find institutions with online programs; foster collaboration among member schools; and provide professional development for faculty and administrators engaged in online teaching and learning. Institutions located in Maryland, licensed by the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and accredited by a federally recognized institutional accrediting association are eligible for membership.

In 2001, MOL merged with the Maryland Community College Teleconsortium (MCCT), an organization founded in 1998 with similar goals, and the two organizations went forward together under the name MarylandOnline. MOL is one of the first state-based consortia in the country to be focused on online education and, as one of the longest-established, it still is looked to as a leader among state and system online consortia.

MOL has changed with the times. By the early-to-mid-2000s, member institutions had developed their own online-student-serving capabilities and websites, and MOL's focus shifted from working with students directly to preparing and supporting online education practitioners through professional development and interinstitutional collaborations.

Significant Programs

Current Programs

The Seat Bank
In 2003, MarylandOnline formally implemented an online course sharing program called the Seat Bank. The Seat Bank enables interested MOL member schools to share available seat space in designated online courses. When a school has a course section that has "unused" seats remaining by the start of class, it can make those seats available to other MarylandOnline institutions. Although informal online course sharing had been taking place prior to this program, it was not until 2003 that a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by representatives of MarylandOnline member institutions. In 2004, for the first time, all Seat Bank numbers were calculated by one central body, MarylandOnline. With a new, streamlined platform, the Seat Bank is still used by members today.

The MarylandOnline Leadership Institute (MOLLI)
Started in 2017, MOLLI has become one of MOL's premier programs offered to member colleges and universities. The Institute's mission is to enable MOL to steadily expand and nurture a strong Maryland-based network of emerging leaders in online education.

The centerpiece of MOLLI is a four-day, small-group, immersive summer Residential Program (RP) held at Historic Inns of Annapolis. (In 2020 the RP was suspended because of the pandemic and replaced by a virtual program.) In October of 2021, the fourth Residential Program was held in Annapolis, and the next RP is planned for June of 2023. The Residential Program is subsidized by MOL, making it affordable, and participants are nominated by their MOL institutions.

In the five years since its first Residential Program, MOLLI has grown beyond a single event. The Institute now has multiple facets, including year-long team projects, leadership webinars throughout the year, and a professional network that crosses cohort groups and encompasses and serves all MOL institutions.
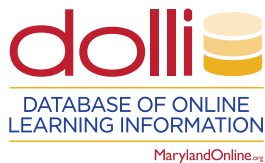
The MOL Database of Online Learning Information (DOLLI)
MarylandOnline was built on common interests and collaboration, and one of the most valuable assets of the organization is the ability of Board representatives and others at the member institutions to share information and best practices in online learning. The goal of the DOLLI project is to create an easy-to-use, searchable database of online general information, guidelines, and best practices that includes MOL schools and may eventually expand to other Maryland schools, and possibly beyond. The build of the database began in 2017 and the several tables of information and best practices needed to complete the database were finalized in 2021. DOLLI will continue to be updated on a continuing basis so that it can serve as valuable repository of information for MOL institutions.

Previous Programs

Quality Matters (QM)
In 2003, MarylandOnline received a three-year, $509,177 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) for "Quality Matters: Inter-Institutional Quality Assurance in Online Learning." The goal of the project was to develop a replicable pathway for inter-institutional quality assurance and course improvement in online learning among institutions in Maryland. The project created a rubric of standards and implemented a peer review process to evaluate the quality of online courses.

By the end of the grant period, the successful QM project had attracted attention from beyond the state of Maryland, and when the grant expired in 2006, the MOL Board voted to continue Quality Matters as a self-supporting organization through subscriptions and other fee-for-service offerings.

QM grew quickly, providing, at a modest fee, institutional subscriptions with access to QM tools and services to colleges and universities throughout the country. At the time, online education was just beginning to gain significant momentum, and many colleges and universities sought guidance in ensuring their online courses were equivalent in quality to those in the traditional classroom. QM went on to develop standards and quality assurance processes as well as professional development for a variety of education and training-related sectors.

In 2014, to ensure flexibility in QM's operations, MOL made QM a separate 501(c)(3) and legally designated it a supporting organization of MarylandOnline. As the supported organization and parent of QM, MarylandOnline owned the QM intellectual property and received annual revenue for the consortium through a license fee and QM subscriptions for MOL member institutions.

To enable QM to continue to grow and develop under separate, qualified governance the two organizations signed a new agreement in 2020 that granted independence to QM beginning in 2021. Today QM serves more than 1,500 subscribing institutions, organizations, and individuals in the U.S. and abroad.

Certificate for Online Adjunct Teaching (COAT)
In 2008, research conducted at Maryland higher education institutions showed a need for, and an interest in, a statewide training program for adjunct instructors focused on developing online teaching competencies. With the help of a $2,500 grant from MOL, an online professional development course called the Certificate for Online Adjunct Teaching (COAT) was created. The course encompassed the major competencies needed to successfully teach online and QM principles of course design. A successful pilot of the course was conducted in 2010, and additional funds of $7,500 were granted for further development.

Though COAT was designed primarily for adjunct faculty and, unlike QM, targeted individuals rather than institutions, enrollees were not limited to adjunct faculty; some institutions also used the COAT course for faculty training. As a self-sustaining unit of MOL, COAT continued to grow, added adaptations of the course to serve K-12 and continuing education clients, and won awards. In 2015, through an amendment to the MOL-QM License Agreement and license fee paid to MOL, COAT was transferred to QM for further development and became the foundation for QM's Teaching Online Certificate.

Faculty Online Technology Training Consortium (FOTTC)
Funded by a $700,000 grant from the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland Faculty Online Technology Training Consortium (FOTTC) was formed in 1999 to improve the ability of faculty in Maryland to develop and effectively deliver online and other technology-based educational course components and to enhance faculty collaboration in using technologies. Administered by

MarylandOnline, FOTCC was composed of the 16 Maryland community colleges, UMUC (now UMGC), UMBC, University of Baltimore, and Capitol College

The consortium trained nearly 4,000 full-time, part-time, and continuing education faculty over the two years of the project. The collaboration also resulted in the development of a comprehensive web-based curriculum for training faculty to teach online and produced a cohort of faculty trainers.

Project Synergy

In July of 2001, the documented success of FOTTC led to the funding of a second faculty training grant of $375,000 from MHEC for Project Synergy and OnlineEducators (see below). Project Synergy was a unique model that capitalized on the intellectual synergy resulting from faculty and institutional collaboration. Built on the foundation and partnerships established in FOTTC, Project Synergy created discipline-specific training and professional development collaborations across the 23 partner institutions that comprised MOL at the time.

OnlineEducators

In 2003, building on the work done through FOTTC and Project Synergy, OnlineEducators (OE) was launched to offer comprehensive consulting services and faculty instructional technology training to higher education institutions and high schools. The goals for the program included promoting the resources developed through FOTTC and Project Synergy,

showcasing the extensive faculty and staff expertise of MOL, and providing an additional revenue stream for MOL's distance learning initiatives. OnlineEducators consulting was later discontinued because of staffing, the OE website provided a wealth of resources for online faculty and those

Online Tutoring

In 2001, MHEC granted $50,000 to MOL to develop a partnership with a private vendor (SmarThinking) to provide tutoring for online students. The partnership project was piloted from September 2001 to August 2002. Due to the varying levels of maturity of online education in member institutions, not all MOL member schools were in a position to take advantage of the project.

Though the online tutoring project turned out to be ahead of its time, the grant underscores the confidence placed in MarylandOnline throughout the state and online education community. Since 1999, beginning with the massively impactful FOTTC project and later Quality Matters, now an international program, and continuing to today with new programs under development, MarylandOnline provides unique services and a voice to online education practitioners in Maryland.

MarylandOnline 2022

Evolution of MOL Logos

1999

2011

20-year anniversary – 2019

2021