

The University of Southern Mississippi transforms workforce readiness through bottom-up Coursera integration



Industry
Higher Education



Location
Mississippi, United States



Size
13,500 students



Overview

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), a Carnegie R1 institution, is dedicated to fostering student success, workforce readiness, and community impact. With programs in technology, business, education, and health care, USM equips graduates for leadership in emerging fields while addressing critical workforce shortages. Recognizing gaps in digital fluency and career-aligned skills, USM partnered with Coursera and adopted an innovative bottom-up approach that empowers faculty, staff, and students to drive integration. This supports USM's "Ready for Life" commitment to preparing graduates for successful careers and responsible citizenship.



We are especially delighted by Coursera's LMS integration, which made it easy to embed content into courses as graded assignments. The ability to create custom Learning Paths and award digital badges has further motivated learners and helped align skill-building with our academic and professional development goals.



Joanne Tran
Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs

Outcomes

500+

course enrollments in the first six months

4.3/5.0

learner feedback rating

900+

total enrollments across Coursera content

The Challenge

Attuned to evolving workforce demands, USM identified a need to improve digital fluency, support career development, and provide flexible, industry-aligned learning pathways. The institution needed a powerful learning solution that was scalable across its diverse, multi-campus environment, serving some 13,500 students as well as faculty and staff. Traditional top-down implementations risked low engagement. USM required an approach that would build organic momentum; ensure widespread buy-in across students, faculty, and staff; and create sustainable transformation aligned with academic excellence and career preparation goals.

The Solution

USM selected Coursera for Campus to advance its workforce readiness strategy, implementing a grassroots model that fosters ownership at every level. This bottom-up approach included several key initiatives:

- **Seamless LMS integration:** Faculty have embedded Coursera content directly into curricula as graded assignments and learning paths, which they can award digital badges for. With full LMS integration, further academic adoption is expected.
- **Career Services partnership:** Students are encouraged to supplement academic degrees with Coursera's industry credentials to enhance workforce preparation.

- **Strategic HR alignment:** Staff development is linked to the Professional Standards Program (PSP), creating salary incentives for continuous learning through Coursera completions.
- **Innovative faculty development:** USM plans to incorporate Coursera workshops into new faculty orientation and retreats, introducing high-quality teaching tools and fostering pedagogical innovation.
- **Peer leadership model:** Launch of a Coursera Ambassador Program will cultivate certified educators and sustain engagement through peer-to-peer advocacy.

This holistic approach ensures that workforce development becomes embedded in the institutional culture, driving engagement and innovation across all campus constituencies.

The Results

Within six months, USM has realized tangible results that lay the foundation for long-term transformation...

Engagement metrics:

- 500+ course enrollments across students, staff, and faculty (and 900+ total enrollments to date)
- 230+ course completions in high-demand fields including data analytics, IT, and social media marketing
- 4.3/5.0 learner feedback rating

Institutional integration:

- Faculty embedded Coursera into general education and upper-level courses, enhancing curriculum relevance and engagement
- First-year students in learning communities now build foundational skills in Excel, digital marketing, and project management.
- Career Services standardized Coursera certificates in student job preparation, improving readiness and enhancing resumes and internship applications with industry-recognized skill credentials.
- Professional Standards Program integration created direct salary incentives for staff, driving continuous learning adoption.

USM's success demonstrates the power of empowering campus communities to drive their own transformation. The university has created a replicable framework for institutions seeking sustainable, campus-wide workforce development and a culture of lifelong learning.

Impact Snapshot

360°

integration across students, faculty, and staff

230+

courses completed in high-demand fields

Staff upskilling

tied to salary incentives via Professional Standards Program

Career Services

partnership supporting student job readiness

Coursera Ambassador Program

to drive peer-led engagement



Scale future-ready skills across your campus

Equip students and faculty for long-term career success with Coursera.

[Explore Coursera for Campus](#)