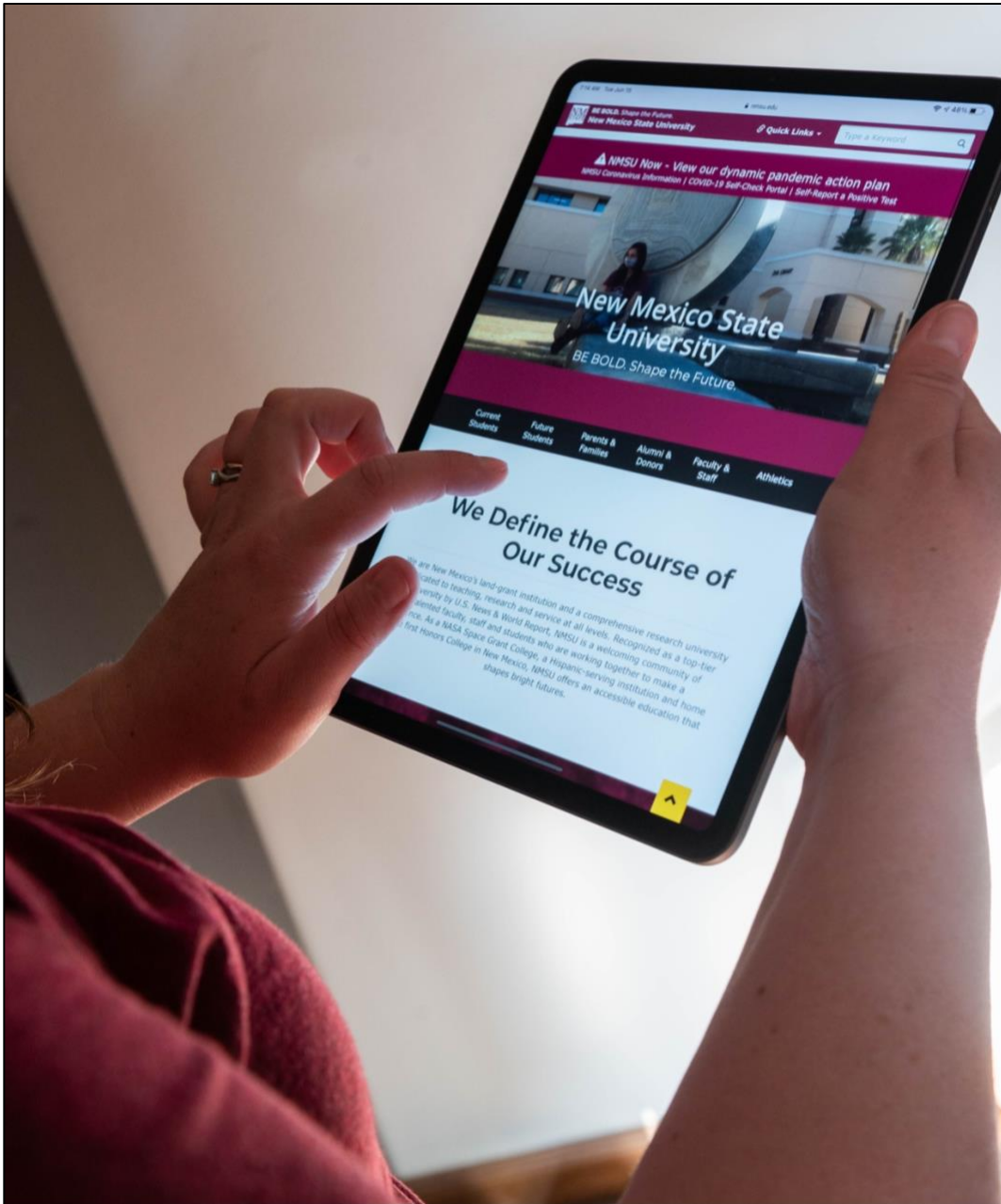**Aggie Launch Pad**
2021: Year 1 Report
December 2022

Renay Scott, Ph.D.
Division of Student Success

Student Centered | Solution Oriented | Future Focused

Executive Summary
The 2,076 students who entered NMSU in the Fall of 2021 and the Spring of 2022 were the first beneficiaries of the Aggie Launch Pad Initiative, a program to provide first-time freshmen at the Las Cruces campus with a free 8th generation iPad, Apple Stylus Pencil, case and keyboard, 4-year Apple Care plan, and digital literacy workshops focused on strengthening technological and academic skills for college success. The Aggie Launch Pad initiative supports NMSU LEADS 2025 Goal 1: Enhance student success and social mobility by improving student access to the technological tools needed for success in college.

Technology is integrated throughout higher education, both in and out of the classroom. Access to current technology is required for students to:
- Succeed in courses (Canvas, Microsoft Office 365, Zoom, other learning software).
- Understand and manage their educational progress (Navigate, Star Degree Audit).
- Explore opportunities for employment (Handshake) and involvement (Crimson Connection), which allow students to develop workplace and leadership skills, plan for future careers, and contribute to their college costs.
- Manage their student business (myNMSU), schedule and attend tutoring sessions, use other free academic support software such as Grammerly, Quizlet, and the Khan Academy.
- Understand the importance of self-care (You@NMSU) and take advantage of programs on financial literacy (ECMC Project Success)

At the fall and spring iPad distribution events, 1,953 iPad bundles were distributed to 94% of the students in the entering classes. Students who received an iPad returned to NMSU at 2.3 percentage points higher than students who did not receive an iPad (75.2% versus 72.9%). Next year's analysis will include statistics disaggregated by socioeconomic status.

This program will continue next year, modified to incorporate feedback from students and technology advisors. Funding will come from reallocation of funds within the Division of Student Success budget.

Rationale: Why is this initiative important to NMSU students?

Students nationally experience difficulty with both unadequate technological devices and unreliable, insufficient, or non-existent connectivity (Gierdowski 2021), as reported in a 2020 study from Educause. Among the findings of that national study:
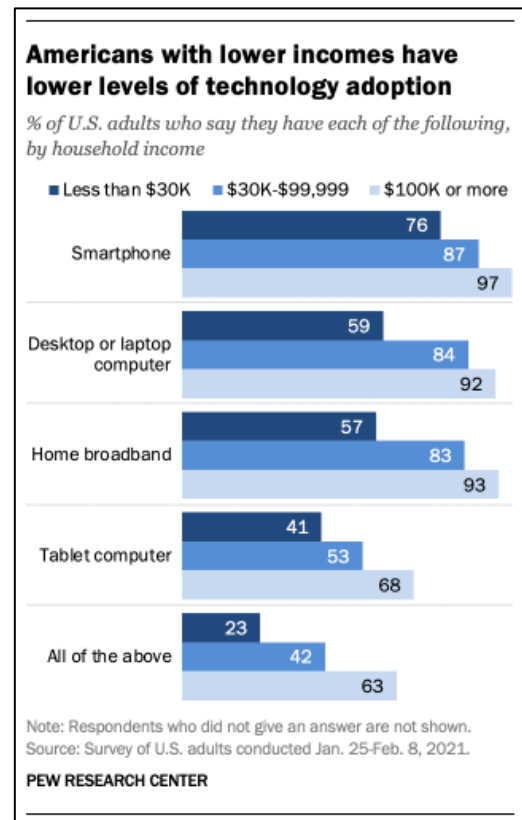
- *Inadequate access to devices.* Although many students have access to technology, the ability of those devices to meet the demand of highly wired learning varies greatly. Students at NMSU report the same concerns as those in the Educause study, including laptops that are old and unable to run multiple software programs; difficulty with applications like a lockdown browser; and sharing a device among multiple family members.

- *Internet access is part of this problem.* According to the Educause study, 36% of students always, very often, or sometimes struggle with internet connections that meet their academic needs. This concern was reported by 62% of students with insecure housing situations, and in Fall 2021, nearly half (45%) of NMSU students reported housing insecurity.
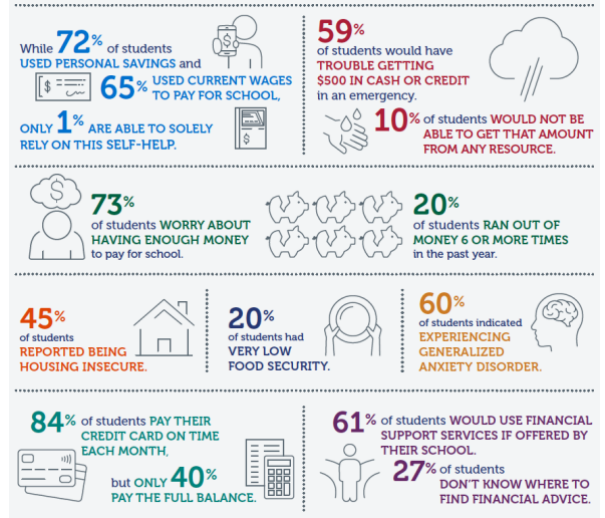
Access to a computer is crucial for college. The pandemic shifted course tools online, and now even classes that are in person are likely to use increasingly sophisticated and complex technology. To deal with ongoing pandemic concerns, faculty reserve the option of hybrid coursework, and many services, such as tutoring, advising, and even health care, have shifted to online delivery.

These access issues are tied to income. While people with income below $30,000 a year are likely to own a smartphone, these devices cannot handle the demands of higher education (Pew Research Center 2021). Only 59% of people in this income range report owning a desktop or laptop computer. For Fall 2021, the NMSU Office of Institutional Analysis reported that 48% of NMSU students are low income, as measured by eligibility for federal Pell Grants.

Training in use of the technology is also important for students who might have limited experience with its use. For many reasons, faculty are not necessarily able to mentor students in technology use (Guillot 2021). However, with our use of many software tools that support student success, the Division of Student Success is well-positioned to play this role. Just a few examples of software that supports student success are Handshake employment platform, Navigate for advising, and Crimson Connection for student engagement in campus life.

Americans with lower incomes have lower levels of technology adoption

% of U.S. adults who say they have each of the following, by household income

Less than $30K / $30K-$99,999 / $100K or more

	Less than $30K	$30K-$99,999	$100K or more
Smartphone	76	87	97
Desktop or laptop computer	59	84	92
Home broadband	57	83	93
Tablet computer	41	53	68
All of the above	23	42	63

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

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Implementation
This project was co-chaired by Dr. Renay Scott, Vice President for Student Success, and Dr. Tony Marin, Assistant Vice President for Student Engagement. They led a Steering Committee (Appendix A) with representation from the Division of Student Success, ICT, faculty, Marketing and Communication, and other partners. The Steering Committee was charged with all aspects of this program, including logistics, purchasing, programming, student support, evaluation, and communication (Appendix B). Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) were used to purchase these devices (Table 1). Additional tech bundles were purchased with institutional funds for distribution to staff in offices that would be assisting students with their new technology, such as the ICT Help Desk and the Student Success Center. Members of the Steering Committee (Appendix A) also received a bundle.

Legal considerations: Who owns the tech bundles?
Through consultation with Financial Aid and University General Counsel, the Steering Committee determined that the tech bundle would be the property of the student and not NMSU. The implications of this determination included that we would not ask for the bundles back if students left NMSU, although some departing students returned the bundles. Also, NMSU could not manage the devices, meaning, for example, that we were limited in the software we could install.

Objectives and measures for assessment
Aggie Launch Pad supports the following NMSU LEADS Objectives for Goal 1:
- 1.3 Enhance student learning, retention, and degree attainment and close achievement gaps.
- 1.4 Through engagement in high impact practices, enhance student life climate, health and wellness, and professional development leading to improved academic and career outcomes

To measure the effectiveness of this initiative, we established a baseline for metrics that will be tracked in the future. These include:
- ***Co-Curricular measures:*** student use of the employment platform Handshake and student use of NMSU's financial literacy platform.
- ***Retention:*** For both fall and spring recipients, we will examine the following:
    - How many first-time, full-time students who received an iPad bundle dropped out prior to the conclusion of the first semester?
    - How many first-time, full-time students who received an iPad bundle dropped out between fall 2021 and spring 2022 and between spring 2022 and fall 2022?
    - We will track first-year retention for this entering cohort of students, for the entire cohort, and disaggregated by ethnicity and income status.

Table 1. Budget.

	Item	Cost per unit	Cost
1	Tech bundle: 8th generation iPad, Apple Stylus, case and keyboard, 4-year Apple Care plan		$1,569,680.75
2	Indirect costs (IDC), charged for HEERF funds		$775,187.89
	Total		$2,344,868.64

Results

Thanks to the extraordinary coordination and cooperation of all partners, Aggie Launch Pad logistics went as flawlessly as possible. Bundles were ordered, received, and distributed with no concerns (Table 2). ICT and Follett are particularly to be commended for their contributions. We ordered 2,285 bundles, 1,953 of which were distributed, reaching 94% of the 2021 incoming fall students and 89% of the 2022 incoming spring students.

Table 2. Initial iPad bundles distributed to students, 2021–2022 academic year.			
	Fall	**Spring**	**Total**
Bundles distributed	1896	57	1953
Enrollment	2012	64	2076
Percent	94%	89%	94%

The remaining bundles were distributed to students who:
(1) demonstrated financial need;
(2) participated in an educational opportunity program (Examples: TRIO or CAMP); or
(3) demonstrated need for technology.

Academic and co-curricular performance

In the years preceding the 2020 global pandemic, NMSU had shown steady improvement metrics that pointed to progress in overall student success. One-year retention improved from a recent low of 71.7% in for the 2015 cohort to 75.5% for the 2019 cohort. Four-graduation rates improved from 26% (Fall 2015 cohort) to 32% for the 2017 cohort. Those improvements were reversed during the pandemic (Table 3).

For the entering class of 2021, we began to again see progress. Students who received an iPad returned to NMSU at 2.3 percentage points higher than students who did not receive an iPad (75.2% versus 72.9%; Table 4). These improvements held also for students from low-income backgrounds (Pell eligible) and men. Other academic performance metrics are reported in Table 4.

Fall 2021 freshmen used software packages that support students at a much higher numbers than Fall 2020 freshmen (Table 5). Although we cannot directly attribute these increases to Aggie Launch Pad, we did provide students with a resource guide that included these programs and we promoted these programs in several venues.

Table 3. First semester and first year retention, pre-pandemic (2019), pandemic (2020), and recovery year (2021) for entire cohort and for specific student populations.		
	Retention	
Entering class of	**First semester**	**First year**
2019		
Entire class	87.1	75.5
Pell eligible	84.0	70.4
Men	87.2	71.7
Pell + Men	84.8	68.3
2020		
Entire class	85.2	71.6
Pell eligible	83.0	67.4
Men	83.5	68.2
Pell + Men	80.8	65.8
2021		
Entire class	85.6	72.6
Pell eligible	83.7	70.1
Men	83.5	75.1
Pell + Men	80.5	68.0

Table 4. Retention and academic metrics for students who received an iPad bundle (1,880 students) and who did not receive a bundle (107 students), Fall 2021 to Fall 2022. *Retention is complex and can be affected by many factors in and out of the classroom in addition to factors totally external to NMSU.*

	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022
Retention			
iPad, %	NA	86.4%	75.2%
No iPad, %	NA	87.9%	72.9%
iPad, N	NA	1,624	1,414
No iPad, N	NA	94	78
Credits attempted			
iPad	15.84	15.71	14.67
No iPad	16.22	15.81	14.79
Credits earned			
iPad	13.24	13.41	NA
No iPad	13.15	13.38	NA
% Completion			
iPad	84.4%	87.8%	NA
No iPad	80.4%	85.4%	NA
Term GPA			
iPad	2.81	2.78	NA
No iPad	2.85	2.81	NA
Cumulative GPA			
iPad	2.85	2.97	NA
No iPad	2.9	3.01	NA
% GPA increase			
iPad	NA	32.6%	NA
No iPad	NA	31.9%	NA
% GPA same			
iPad	NA	8.1%	NA
No iPad	NA	8.5%	NA
% GPA decrease			
iPad	NA	59.2%	NA
No iPad	NA	59.6%	NA

Table 5, Co-Curricular measures. *Fall 2021 freshmen used software packages that support students at a much higher numbers than Fall 2020 freshmen. Although we cannot directly attribute these increases to Aggie Launch Pad, we did provide students with a resource guide that included these programs and we promoted these programs in several venues.*

Item	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Software purpose
Handshake	377	1,183	Student employment
Financial literacy modules	34	1,332	Financial management

Students who did not receive an iPad performed better on some first-semester metrics (retention, term GPA) than students who did receive an iPad. Next year we will include Pell eligibility as a variable to investigate if differences the difference was consistent among students who are and are not eligible for federal Pell Grants.

Next steps
Because the federal HEERF funds that supported the 2022 implementation of Aggie Launch Pad were non-renewable, funds to continue this project will come from the Division of Student Success budget.

Students and their families gave Aggie Launch Pad overwhelmingly positive reviews. Other feedback we received included:
- The iPad bundles had some compatibility challenges with some of the exam platforms.
- Faculty and ICT staff expressed that desire to supply laptops, to better meet the needs of students.

In preparation for the 2022–2023 academic year, College ICT staff reviewed feedback and options and recommended that Aggie Launch Pad 2022 feature a choice of an Apple or Dell laptop, to be selected by the student at the Aggie Welcome and Orientation (Appendix C). These devices will better support learning needs, and Canvas testing and will allow the use of lockdown browser.

In addition to the metrics used this year, assessment for next year will include a survey in of students that will investigate the experiences of students with their technology packages. We will also consider tracking student engagement with Navigate and Canvas.

References
1. Gierdowski, Dana. April 5, 2021. Student Experiences with Connectivity and Technology in the Pandemic. Educause. https://www.educause.edu/ecar/research-publications/2021/student-experiences-with-connectivity-and-technology-in-the-pandemic/introduction-and-key-findings
2. Guillot, Craig. March 10, 2021. Bridging the Technology Knowledge Gap in Higher Ed. EdTech. https://edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2021/03/bridging-technology-knowledge-gap-higher-ed

Appendix A: Aggie Launch Pad
Steering Committee

	Name	Representing	Role
1	Renay Scott, Co-Chair	DSS	Student support, Faculty, Evaluation, Communication & marketing, Project management
2	Tony Marin, Co-Chair	Student Engagement	Outcomes & programming, Faculty, Evaluation, Communication & marketing, Project management
3	Julian Moreno	Student Engagement	Student support, Outcomes & programming, Set up & deployment
4	Laurie Ferguson	Aggie Service Center	Outcomes & programming
5	Seth Miner	University Admissions	
6	Phillip Johnson	University Admissions	Communication & marketing
7	Vandeen McKenzie	Financial Aid	
8	Sherry Kollman	NMSU Online	Student support, Faculty
9	Ann Goodman	Dean of Students	Outcomes & programming, Evaluation
10	Randey Bamford	ICT	Student support
11	Diana Toups Dugas	ICT	Student support, Faculty
12	Justin Bannister	MarComm	Communication & marketing
13	Chris Kielt	ICT	Student support
14	Collin King	Follett	Project management, Set up & deployment
15	Francisco Martinez	ICT	Student support
16	Michael Lopez	College IT	
17	Cindy Garrett		Scheduler, Communication & marketing

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