

MOOCs: Tips for Enrollment Professionals

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are courses offered for free for any students with an Internet connection. Many institutions now offer free MOOCs, including prestigious state universities and private schools. MOOCs are differentiated from ordinary online classes in several ways.

Some MOOCs may have as many 50,000 students enrolled in a course at the same time. Most courses are tuition-free. Most MOOCs do not count for college credit, except in California. Successful MOOC students do receive a certificate of completion from the hosting institution.

MOOCs can be described as a grand experiment in higher education and explaining MOOCs in simple terms as “a large research project by many institutions and corporations” is an easy way to explain this new educational tool to the curious prospective student.

For the enrollment professional, enrolling in a MOOC is an opportunity not only to learn something new, but also to gain an intimate understanding of how MOOCs work. The experienced MOOC student/enrollment professional may confidently answer questions from parents and prospective students about the MOOC experiment. Signature MOOCs could be suggested to a student to try out what your particular school has to offer in the form of MOOCs.

For any enrollment professionals, signing up for the MOOCs offered by their institution can help them personally identify the faculty members on campus who may already be well known worldwide by the MOOC community.

How are MOOCs used today?

1. Interactive textbooks for flipped classrooms (publishers are getting involved)
2. Corporate training
3. Interactive learning and collaboration between institutions

4. Personal and professional development
5. Core curriculum for multiple universities
6. Non-profit schools can undercut for-profits by offering free courses
7. Hiring (some corporations will hire high-performing students)

How MOOCs could be used at your institution:

1. To help students decide on a major
2. An opportunity for non-traditional or returning students to enter a higher education environment without initial cost, therefore making higher education more accessible to larger groups of students
3. As a marketing opportunity

What to tell students and parents about MOOCs:

1. MOOCs are a grand experiment in higher education with many collaborators.
2. edX, Coursera and MIT are all examples of MOOC platforms representing many different institutions.
3. Describe the MOOC as a class with as many as 50,000 students. There is no personal interaction with the professor in a MOOC. At this point, also mention that online courses with paid tuition at your institution have an enrollment cap that provides students with an opportunity to interact with other students and the instructor.
4. Know what MOOCs are available (if any) from your institution.
5. If they are interested, encourage the students and parents to sign up for a free MOOC, but only if recommending this opportunity is aligned with your institutional mission.
6. Explain that the “signature track” is available in some courses as a method being tested to better ensure the identity of students taking online courses. The signature track service for MOOCs requires a fee.

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7. State that a successful course completion of a MOOC awards certificate is *not* currently accepted as course credit except in rare cases.
8. Gauge your answers for the audience and add more details for more receptive students/parents.

MOOCs For Enrollment Professionals

Enrollment and admission representatives should sign up for a MOOC or two while they are still free of charge. It is an excellent opportunity to experience the student perspective of online courses, as well as become more aware of current trends in higher education. Signing up for a free MOOC in a home institution or even from a competitor's institution, helps dispel any mystery about this new technology.

MOOC Faculty Members

MOOC faculty members are in a public role and represent a significant marketing advantage over more conventional higher education marketing methods. Many universities have powerful brands that have been traditionally represented by communications and marketing departments and those brands are now being leveraged in online learning communities.

The MOOC faculty member provides a much more personal and educationally relevant method for a student to experience the university before even visiting the campus.

Lurkers

Signing up for a MOOC is also a wonderful learning opportunity for staff and faculty. Online students who enroll in MOOC for the purpose of seeing the techniques, content, technology and pedagogy are known as “lurkers.”

At the University of Michigan, I signed up for three classes taught by my colleagues. Casually “lurking” in the virtual crowd of students, I could see firsthand what faculty members were doing in their respective MOOC’s, learning from the experts.

Here are my impressions of the three courses I took at the University of Michigan, hosted at Coursera.org:

Social Network Analysis

with *Lara Adamic*

Description: “This course will use social network analysis, both its theory and computational tools, to make sense of the social and information networks that have been fueled and rendered accessible by the Internet.” (Coursera, 2013)

Dr. Adamic’s course was the most challenging of the three for me. The course included a great deal of mathematical theory and practice, as well as assignments created with downloaded software applications and included a requirement of interaction with other students. Dr. Adamic’s MOOC required students to do peer grading on some

assignments. Other assignments were graded by a computer program or “robot grader.” There were large forums for discussions filled with students communicating in many different languages. Unless a student was part of a smaller group, navigating the forums could quickly become an overwhelming task. It was a truly eye-opening experience to use a widget to extract the data representing my personal social network activities in visualizing a 3D graphic.

The History of the Internet

with *Chuck Severance*

Description: “The impact of technology and networks on our lives, culture and society continues to increase. The very fact that you can take this course from anywhere in the world requires a technological infrastructure that was designed, engineered and built over the past 60 years. To function in an information-centric world, we need to understand the workings of network technology.” (Coursera, 2013)

Dr. Severance’s fascinating video interviews with the founders of the Internet hardware and world wide web software make taking this course feel more like viewing a professionally-produced documentary. He carefully explains complex technology in a manner that is very accessible to a wide audience. He also personalizes his course by offering the opportunity to meet in person or online with him for office hours in cities around world, then posting videos of office hours for all MOOC students to view. His office hour videos were made with a hand-held camera, and included introductions of all of the students attending. Most of the office hour meetings were held in coffee shops.

Model Thinking

with *Scott E. Page*

Description: “We live in a complex world with diverse people, firms and governments whose behaviors aggregate to produce novel, unexpected phenomena. We see political uprisings, market crashes and a never-ending array of social trends.” (Coursera, 2013)

Dr. Page’s lectures are recorded in a soundstage. He patiently explains very complex mathematical models in a friendly and approachable manner. I quickly found that many of the mathematical proofs I learned in high school have since had name changes, resulting in a very steep learning curve for this particular lurker. I found that my study skills were quite rusty and my attention span seemed shorter than it used to be. It took a great deal of discipline for me to make progress in learning the material, but this was an excellent reminder of challenges facing today’s college students.

Conclusion

The MOOC experience was very positive for me. I would recommend it to any curious adult learner, and even high school students would enjoy the varied topics and lively discussions. Every day more information about MOOCs is published and discussed. It is not yet known how MOOCs will ultimately affect the landscape of higher education enrollment, but in the meantime institutions can use this exciting new technology to assist students in their search for the college or university of their dreams.sh

Reference: www.coursera.org (accessed May 12, 2013)



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