

MOOCs as Outreach

Massive Open Online Courses as Outreach for Online Degree Programs

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Introduction

Massive Open Online Courses, MOOCs, are free educational opportunities with large enrollment of students consisting of diverse backgrounds (Rouse & Wigmore, 2013). There are currently 718 prestigious universities offering MOOCs, 128 certificates available for students, and thousands of courses in a variety of subjects including 1,194 business courses, 546 health and medicine courses, and 515 engineering courses (Class Central, 2017). The recent MOOC course report found that 1,700 courses began in July 2017 alone demonstrating that MOOCs remain prevalent in higher education (Shaw, 2017).

Students participating in these educational opportunities do not live in the same community or come from the same demographics making MOOCs the ideal setting for diverse United States and international students to congregate and learn. MOOCs have held popularity since their inception in 2008 with registrants including traditional college students and members of the workforce enrolled to obtain different goals by blending learning, technology, and social media into their studies (Carver & Harrison, 2013; Rivard, 2013).

MOOC registration in collaboration with online degree programs will increase enrollment and success rates by enhancing institution access, exposure, and diversification of thought processes utilizing current trends in technology and harnessing skills of the current generation to improve knowledge acquisition.

Rationale

The rationale for MOOCs integration in online degree programs stem from its development as a tool to bring education to the masses. Education is a human right not a privilege (Carver & Harrison, 2013). MOOCs offer quality education to those living in areas

without access to a university, those without financial means, and those do not currently qualify for entry in the university (Carver & Harrison, 2013; Faller, 2017).

MOOCs also provide exposure to diverse thought processes. Thurns artificial intelligence course in 2011 enrolled 160,000 students representing 190 countries (Carver & Harrison, 2013). These numbers represent opportunity for cultural awareness, development of communication skills, and networking opportunities in our global economy.

Finally, college students of today bring an extensive use of technology to higher education. Students are versed in computer use for learning and social media interactions resulting in effective communication within this media (Smith, Rainie, & Zickhur, 2011). MOOCs empower today's college students by using their technological skills to improve knowledge acquisition while diversifying thoughts due to the global collaboration of students.

Process of Implementation

To implement effective MOOCs in online degree programs, a committee review of platforms and business partnerships are necessary. In 2017, 19 MOOC platforms were compared using a variety of metrics such as credentials and diverse course offerings. Results found top MOOC platforms included Coursera, edX, and Udacity, with Coursera being ranked first (Reviews.com, 2017). Therefore, Coursera is a logical platform choice for implementing MOOCs in online degree programs.

Successful business partnerships provide a source of income and students for the institution. The partnership between Starbucks and Arizona State University (ASU), Starbucks Achievement Plan, is a successful example of such relationship where Starbucks provides tuition-reimbursement for online degree programs for its' employees (Faller, 2017). MOOCs have expanded the versatility of an online degree with the Pathway to Admission Partnership

allowing employees to achieve enrollment requirements and transition to the Starbucks Achievement Plan (Faller, 2017). This successful example demonstrates the effective implementation of MOOCs in online degree programs. Following committee review of platforms and relationships, implementation begins with collaboration of involved parties and launching the program.

Involved Parties

MOOC implementation is a collaborative effort between admissions, counseling, student services, the office of institutional effectiveness, and faculty to ensure success. On campus tech support and facilities services will not be utilized as the MOOC platform will provide technological assistance to students and faculty and faculty can monitor from their home office.

Admissions technicians will be required to guide enrollment in the institution and MOOC guaranteeing successful transition from MOOC to tuition based online degree path. Counseling and other student services such as online library resource guidance, can be performed via chat room to guide students in MOOC selection and research. The office of institutional effectiveness will be highly involved throughout the process for assessment of enrollment and success rates and demographic information to ensure outreach to a diverse U.S. and international student body. Faculty will be involved based on content of the course and will be trained in moderating MOOC classroom experiences and discussions.

Challenges and Resolutions

Research has discussed challenges of MOOCs in higher education including high dropout rates, lack of personal interactions, lack of integration of scientific journals, and no financial contribution to the institution which can make implementation difficult (Agarwal, 2013; Docksai, 2013; Vazquez-Cano, 2013; Veletsianos, Collier, & Schneider, 2015).

High dropout rates have been reviewed in literature and found to be as high as 92% (Docksai, 2013). However, the number of students completing MOOCs is substantially higher than the number of students that can complete traditional or online classes (Khalil & Ebner, 2014). Agarwal (2013), discussed these numbers and concluded that 40 years of teaching would be required to reach the number of students he served in one MOOC. When placing the numbers in perspective, the high dropout rate is not a challenge but an opportunity of mass exposure for the online degree programs for the institution.

Successful MOOCs have harnessed the power of social media prevalent in today's students to improve personal interactions increasing success and retention rates (Veletsianos, Collier, & Schneider, 2015). Gasevic, Kovanovic, Joksimovic, & Siemens (2014), argue that MOOCs do not offer the time frame needed to solidify and learn through social relationships. To resolve this issue, MOOC length will be consistent with the 16-week semester. Also, Veletsianos, Collier, and Schneider (2015), found that social interactions take place in domains outside the MOOC platform, increasing opportunity of relationship formation to improve retention and success.

Lack of inclusion of scientific journals has been noted due to the different format of video delivery present with MOOCs and the written format of journals (Vazquez-Cano, 2013). Vazquez-Cano (2013), suggests the structure of journals be modified to accommodate MOOCs. Another resolution could include student support service personal and online chat features directing MOOC students to research through the university library databases, creating a connection with the institution.

To resolve the financial challenge, Agarwal (2013), suggests the institutions create revenue by selling MOOCs to other colleges. Furthermore, students wishing to receive a

certificate without transfer to the full online degree program can pay a fee at completion which also has been found to improve retention rates in MOOCs (Harvard Gazette, 2015).

Projected Outcomes

Implementation of MOOCs in online degree programs will result in increased enrollment, exposure, and global thought patterns to improve today's interconnected world. MOOCs can be used as a marketing tool to project the institution brand to a large audience (Shrader, Wu, Owens, & Santa Ana, 2016). MOOC implementation will also support the Lumina Foundation goal of 60% of Americans obtaining a high-quality degree by 2025 by decreasing cost associated with higher education (Lumina Foundation, 2012).

MOOCs will enhance online degree program success by providing remedial content to prepare students for course completion (Hanover Research, 2014). They can also supplement courses in online programs, offering an opportunity to explore content deeper with international opinions. Additionally, MOOCs offer institution exposure by providing education to professionals to enhance their career (Selingo, 2014).

Relevancy

The collaboration of MOOCs and online degree programs has been proven successful with Starbucks and ASU however is still innovative due to the infancy of these types of programs (Faller, 2017). The sustainability of MOOCs with online degree programs is high due to demand-cost relationship of higher education (Lumina Foundation, 2012). Finally, MOOCs and online degree programs will remain a trend in higher education because of the flexibility, access, and optimal resource utilization they make available to students (Mehta, 2017).

Providing rationale, challenges, implementation, outcomes, and relevancy, the support is in favor of MOOCs in online degree programs for outreach to U.S. and international students.

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