



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO

Office of the Provost



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

June 5, 2013

Welcome back to the Summer 2013 session!

MOODs & MOOCs: Last week, UNM was one of ten institutions that signed an agreement with Coursera to use their platform and services. Since then, many of you have reached out to express both support and dismay about UNM jumping on the Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) bandwagon. Today, I would like to start a Massive Open Online Discussion (MOOD) about MOOCs using the blog (see the end of this message) but wanted to make sure that we all share the same information. The agreement with Coursera is not exclusive, and does not obligate our faculty to offer nor to accept a MOOC for credit. In fact, UNM already has an agreement with another provider (Udacity) that was vetted by the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee and the computer science and electrical and computer engineering departments to accept one introductory course for credit at UNM. UNM also has one course available on iTunes and we will probably use other providers and our own platforms to offer future online courses.

Specific to the Coursera agreement, you can find more information in [the guidebook for new instructors](#).

I would like next to quote from an article in Trusteeship magazine (January/February 2013):

However, lest we be consumed by MOOCs as the truly ‘new new,’ it would be useful to recall that there is a long history of ‘technology enabled’ free or low-cost courses from a variety of colleges and universities that dates back some eight decades, to the early days of both radio and television. Indeed, in their respective keynote addresses at an October 2012 Sloan-C conference, both Jack M. Wilson, president emeritus of the University of Massachusetts System who directed the launch of UMass Online, and Stanford professor and Udacity co-founder Sebastian Thrun each confirmed the placement of MOOCs as another point on the continuum of online education.

For example, during the 1920s and 1930s, several land-grant universities offered extension courses and home-study courses over the radio airwaves. During the explosive growth of television in the 1950s, CBS, in partnership with New York University, broadcast full college courses at 6 a.m. in its *Sunrise Semester* series. The first class, a comparative literature course, enrolled 177 for-credit students; another 120,000 people took it without credit. (CBS cancelled *Sunrise Semester* in 1982, replacing it with a morning news program.)

In 1976, Bernard J. Luskin, the founding president of Coastline Community College in California, led the development of the first “campus-less” community college, broadcasting college courses and leveraging local learning centers for student support and assessment services. (See article [here](#) for Coastline’s most recent online initiative.) Some observers, myself included, view Luskin as the father of MOOCs for his work at Coastline and later for his role as the chief academic operating officer of the accredited, for-profit Mind Extension University, which broadcast college courses over cable networks.

And now that MOOCs have emerged? As of this writing, MOOC-provider Coursera, founded by two Stanford professors, has 33 institutional (primarily American) partners, and offers some 209 courses. Udacity, led by another Stanford prof, is promoting 19 courses, while edX, a collaborative initiative between Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, lists nine courses from six institutional partners. In contrast (and in response to my recent email queries), Google (which owns YouTube) reports that some 400 colleges and universities are currently posting “lectures and/or full courses online” on YouTube, while more than 1,000 institutions worldwide are posting courses to Apple’s iTunesU; over half of those courses are publically available.

None of these efforts has greatly disturbed the university model, so what makes the new reincarnation of MOOCs any different? Should we be afraid of them? I believe that some of our faculty will become pioneers in this new medium and, after the dust settles, MOOCs will retreat to being another tool in our toolbox we can use to engage our students and to increase their success. Some of our students are already using freely available content, and many of our instructors are supplementing their lectures using online resources. What the Coursera agreement provides us is the opportunity to discuss and experiment with the latest incarnation of the online course offering—I do not believe that a college education can be reduced to the passive act of watching an online lecture. Indeed, I know that while some of our faculty and students may use content from other institutions, just like we have used textbooks and other published materials, we will adapt the external content to our ends to provide our students with a more complete educational experience. And, we will generate our own content to be used by many around the globe.

In the weeks and months ahead, there will be campus forums (physical and online) and discussions with the Faculty Senate to find a proper place for MOOCs within our UNM curricula.

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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