MOOCs, SECs, ONLINE CLASSES, ON-THE-GROUND CLASSES AND OTHER CLASS-ICAL THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Traditional educational models have recently been invaded by disruptive or transformative educational models. Two of these models are massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Hyman, 2012; Straumsheim, 2013) and short electronic courses (SECs) (*The Economist*, 2013). In 2012, top U.S. universities (i.e. Stanford, MIT, Harvard, Princeton, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, etc.) made selected classes available online to countless students worldwide, turning the courses into MOOCS and exposing many who may never have the opportunity for higher education to this higher learning (Hyman 2012). Giving competition to MOOCs are the plethora of short electronic courses, many as short as a 20-minute lecture offered online (*The Economist*, 2013).

The first MOOC was launched in 2008 by Stephen Downes and George Siemens. This first MOOC had its origins in a for-credit course at the University of Manitoba, called "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge 2008". The enrollment appeared to the creators to be a huge amount with 2,200 people signing up for the course (Marques, 2013). More recently, two Stanford professors, Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig, offered a course called "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence." At the time, both Thrun and Norvig were associated with Google and that fact, along with the course being offered by a prestigious university, helped draw initial enrollment for the course of 160,000 students (Hyman, 2012; Marques, 2013; Martin, 2012). Now, universities are jumping onto the MOOC bandwagon and producing these courses left and right; there are hundreds of MOOCs now being offered by universities with good reputations internationally. However, many are concerned about where this is leading higher education.

MOOCs have the potential to provide education on a global scale. But the notion that they will become competitive with higher education classes that actually lead to a degree is still questionable. Universities should be concerned that the average MOOC costs $15,000-$50,000 to produce and that a professor typically invests 100 hours or more in building a MOOC, and another 8-10 hours per week teaching the massive course (Colman, 2013). In addition, the proportion of people who enroll in the course and actually finish it is abysmally low. The Thrun and Noorvik class began with 160,000 students enrolled, but only 23,000 completed the course, for a completion rate of 14% (Hyman, 2012). And that was one of the higher completion rates. One recent study revealed that the average MOOC offered by a prestigious university is generating an average of around 50,000 students in initial enrollment. About 3,700 students actually finish the course, for a completion rate of around 7.5% (Colman, 2013).

An additional concern is the MOOC business model. No one has yet determined how to make the MOOC model self-sustaining; the current emphasis is on delivery, not recovering costs and generating income. Another concern is how to evaluate students. Even having multiple exam quizzes and exams that are graded automatically by the online system can be quite cumbersome in a class of 50,000. Asking students to perform written work, presentations, group discussions, etc., make this issue even more insurmountable. Another concern is how to give professors credit for creating and teaching MOOCs. Since MOOCs are not part of degree programs, they cannot really be considered to be part of a professor's academic workload. Currently, the most common thing that students who complete a MOOC receive is a certificate (Hyman, 2012). Some universities are beginning preliminary work with having their regular

students who have been admitted to their university and who are seeking a degree enroll in the MOOC and pay for it like a regular class. These students will then have additional assignments beyond the assignments, exams, etc., that the mass of free takers of the course have.

Another recent phenomenon is the proliferation of SECs. One reason this format seems to be successful is seen when comparing them to MOOCs. MOOCs are long and lack interaction. Many enroll in them and then either flunk out or drop out long before the course is completed. The SEC is usually a micro-course presented in an online lecture and delivered by a sharp-dressed and dynamic spokesperson. These SECs are usually 20 minutes in duration or less. This format gives students quick knowledge about a specific topic without getting bogged down in details. However, this knowledge is very shallow and does not lend itself to any academic credit. However, the prevailing business model seems more sustaining than does the MOOC model. Many organizations offering these courses are charging for them. However, there is rarely any take-away for the students, such as a certificate or degree (*The Economist*, 2013).

So, do MOOCs and SECs pose credible threats to what we are doing in our online and on-the-ground courses at our universities? As we all realize by now, the modern university experience is much larger than a collection of classes that students take for a degree. Among other things, students derive great benefits and enjoyment from their university experience by being in close contact with their peers, participating in campus activities, etc. It may be that a MOOC is a decent replacement for an average, large-sized lecture course, if it can be worked out how to give academic credit and collect tuition for it. A MOOC format may also be appropriate in creating a flipped classroom (Martin, 2012; Vardi, 2012). However, replacing this "total university experience" that can be so beneficial to students with a completely MOOC-driven environment is likely impossible. The same can be said about SECs.

Perhaps MOOCs and SECs should be viewed as more opportunities than threats. Both formats seem to provide a unique opportunity to communicate with those outside of the current student body of our institutions (potential new students and alumni). Can they be used as recruiting tools, continuing education opportunities or even outreach opportunities to our stakeholder populations?

In this special session, the panelists discuss literature and their own experiences in the classroom and their thoughts on MOOCs and SECs and how these formats of education compare to online and on-the-ground university courses for credit. After short presentations by each panelist, the session is opened for discussion of this topic among the panelists and attendees.

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