Foreword

The world of higher education has been rocked recently by a new form of online learning, the MOOC. A MOOC is a massive open online course, and is typically characterized by open access, little or no cost to the learner, and requiring no prerequisites for joining. MOOCs typically provide certification of successful completion and an added benefit of many MOOCs is that they are developed and delivered by the best universities in the world. MOOCs can offer high quality online learning resources, developed by leading academics across a variety of subjects and disciplines, and delivered in ways that engage and support the learners.

With such opportunities and advantage it is no wonder that many MOOCs have received widespread attention and have experienced enormous enrolments. MOOCs have become the talking point of educational delivery in higher education and few leaders in academic circles have not at some stage been asked to consider their response and to reflect on how MOOCs might impact their institutions. In fact, the groundswell of interest among administrators, teachers and students, have led many commentators to reflect on their potential and ongoing impact on the way higher education will be delivered in the future. The phenomenon has caused many to predict that MOOCs are a game-changer that will influence the way in which higher education is delivered.

This book explores the phenomenon that is the MOOC and provides an in-depth review of the space. It discusses possible scenarios for the future and seeks to answer many of the questions that have been raised through an evidence-based discussion based on contemporary research.

The book is edited by well-known and well-reputed academics and researchers in e-learning who have designed a broad and encompassing framework for its structure. The editors have chosen leading writers and researchers to make contributions and the result is a comprehensive, focused and timely discussion.

The various chapters explore the many questions that emerge from the MOOC phenomenon. For example:

- How have MOOCs impacted higher education?
- What are the opportunities and challenges that MOOCs represent?
- How are MOOCs designed?
- What are the optimal design characteristics of successful MOOCs?
- What patterns emerge from student usage?
- What forms of learner engagement can MOOCs support?
- How is assessment best managed?
- What are possible futures for MOOCs?
This book is a valuable read for students, academics and those involved in the provision of educational services. It offers insights for those who are seeking information about how best to design MOOCs. It provides guidance to those considering the potential of MOOCs in their own settings as well as providing information to guide and inform their design and development. For administrators, it provides insights into the vexing questions about the impact of MOOCs on campus enrolments, the opportunities for flexible delivery as well as strategies for recognition of students’ informal and formal learning through MOOCs.

I commend this book for its broad treatment of the topic, its comprehensive outlook and insightful ideas, and the depth and scope of the views and ideas expressed by its many contributors. It will be a valuable resource for students within the field of eLearning, as well as teachers and administrators to whom MOOCs are, and should be, of interest.

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