Chapter 7

Inclusivity Instead of Exclusivity: The Role of MOOCs for College Credit

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ABSTRACT

Higher education has been perceived as exclusive to those who have the means to purchase the coursework. Many students globally have been alienated from advancing their education, not because of a lack of access, but due to financial barriers. Online education has already transformed the delivery and accessibility of courses for traditional credit toward degrees. MOOCs have been proposed to help bring education to global audiences at little or no cost, creating an inclusive environment for education and skill development. MOOC offerings by colleges provide a method that is disrupting the ways to receive academic credit. Using third-partner vendors to certify knowledge in a similar manner to assessment processes for advanced placement, credit for work experience, and prior learning, MOOC completion is being accepted for college credit. This chapter reviews the extant model, programs, and available outcomes for the MOOC credit acceptance process.

INTRODUCTION

Access to global networks and open education have allowed learners from a myriad of countries to reach education that has been limited by geographical bounds for generations (Baker & Passmore, 2016). Learner engagement in an open education experience has resulted in enacted cognition, where the learners create meaning through interactions with the global members, and the development of global citizenship (Childs & Wagner, 2016). One modern source of open education includes the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), an online course that usually has open access via the Internet to large-scale
enrollments. Education within a MOOC exceeds what is learned in the textbook through the enrichment of the course by the diverse cultures and geographic regions represented in the participants (Chan, 2016). “The astonishing global reach of MOOCs permits students to access U.S. (United States) higher education who normally would not have had an opportunity to do so” (Sandeen, 2013, 39).

MOOCs have offered students a stepping stone to other educational experiences by gaining prerequisite knowledge and academic program credit (Ng & McRae, 2017). Colleges and universities began to accept credit for MOOC participation shortly after the introduction of MOOCs. In 2012, the University of Helsinki was one of the first institutions to offer college credit for work performed within a high-quality MOOC (Kurhila, 2012). Analysis of MOOC enrollment and completions indicated that more students finish a MOOC when they have committed to earning credit (Chamberlin & Parish, 2011). MOOCs are accessed through a number of academic platform providers, among which are Coursera, edX, Udacity, Kadenze, and FutureLearn (Shah, 2016a), and business platforms in partnership with academic institutions such as OpenSAP (SAP, 2017).

**BACKGROUND**

The focus of this chapter is to review the extant model, programs, and available outcomes for the MOOC credit acceptance process. How has higher education’s exclusive nature changed to be more inclusive? What has been the role of online education to increase accessibility to a global audience? How have MOOC enrollments changed since the initial offerings of modern MOOCs in 2011? How have external vendors helped to document learning and performance? Which colleges and universities have offered MOOCs for college credit? What are the challenges for offering MOOCs for college credit and their solutions? What is the focus of future research of MOOCs and college credit?

The volume of literature on MOOCs has expanded similarly to the number of MOOCs available globally. Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education, the first MOOC, was offered in 1999 within The Open University, United Kingdom (UK), to 800 students. In 2016, more than 6,850 MOOCs were offered through over 700 universities and institutions (Shah, 2016a). In 2008, the first MOOC related paper was published and over the following years, the number of published papers and articles increased annually (Liyanagunawardena, Adams, & Williams, 2013). Searches within Google Scholar with a custom range of 2016 – 2016 for MOOC “Massively Open Online Course,’’ and MOOC “Massive Open Online Course” as search terms resulted in 74 MOOC-related articles published for the first search and over 2,380 results for the second search. Adding “and ‘college credit’” to each of the searches with the custom range 2016 – 2016 resulted in 28 articles for the first search and 54 articles for the second search.

Initially, the plans for MOOCs were to provide free courses on a variety of topics with an expectation that awarding credits would have a negative impact on enrollments and require additional resources and structures for testing and validation (Gaebel, 2013). A driving factor of participating in MOOC offerings was to extend the university brand to a larger domestic and international audience (Leeds & Cope, 2015). The goal of MOOCs for credit was to have rigorous design and requirements for the students. An offering of a degree program made up of MOOCs by a university was “…intended to carry the same weight and prestige as the one it awards students in its regular on-campus program” (Kahn, 2013). Faculty using MOOCs have reported favorably about the use of the platforms. Results from a survey conducted by