

Roundtable 4: The Future of Distance and Online Education at URI

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In Fall 2012, over 6 million student enrolled in at least one online course. Over 80% of those live in close proximity to the institution in which they are enrolled online. While the majority are over thirty years of age, 40% are under 30. And 44% of all online students are enrolled in public institutions.

1. What is the future of online education for public universities like URI?
2. What is the role of faculty/educators in the new online environment?
3. How might MOOCs [Massive Open Online Courses] be of value to the University – (by expanding access to excellent materials/good instruction/adaptive technologies)?

Roundtable Notes

What is the future of online education for public universities like URI?

1. Utilitarian: Addressing the practical needs of students
2. Uniqueness: What is URI doing with online education that sets it apart from other institutions? What unique set of courses can URI offer online (ex. Digital Forensics Graduate Certificate)?
3. Repository for unique open source course materials (MOOCs) (ex. Khan Academy Model)

Who is our audience?

- Several different audiences with different expectations:

- Graduates Students
- Undergraduate Students
- Post-baccalaureate Students
- Full-time students vs. Part-time students
- Students already in the work place looking to attain new skills and experiences

-Is the goal to make the online environment as in-person as possible or is the goal to create the best learning environment possible?

- Virtual labs may provide an in-person experience

-Do we want our audience to be international?

- Synchronicity of Time Zones: Students in U.S. and Australia, for example, may have difficulty participating in real-time online class discussions.

-What are our audience's expectations?

- Courses should use emerging technologies
- Courses should allow for mobility
- Course information should be archived and available for perusal at any time.

Is an online format workable for every course?

-How do experiential-based programs transfer their work into an online environment?

- Look at MOOCs to see what others are teaching in that field.

- Instead of taking a course and directly transferring it into an online format, a completely new course should be developed for an online environment.

- Do certain courses, like medical courses, require hands-on experience?

- Example: doctors dissecting cadavers before performing surgeries.

After teaching online, did the group's participants re-evaluate their face to face course pedagogy?

- Yes, they took tools from their online courses, like video-capturing and applied them to their face to face courses

Is there a revenue stream for online education?

- Revenue-sharing Model

Arguments for Online Learning:

- There need to be online venues for students who cannot travel to a physical space (distance students, students with disabilities, etc).

- An online venue allows students with disabilities, for example, to engage in the class without judgment or feel they are being treated differently.

Arguments against Online Learning:

- Lack of diversity of experiences

- Education brings together a variety of different sources, strengths, and experiences.

- You can't receive all life experiences online.

- For some fields, if resources are not available, they have difficulty renewing or developing online content.

Argument for a Hybrid Course:

- People have all different teaching and learning styles.

- If we have the resources, we should try to provide both options.

- Hybrid courses allow for online and experiential learning.

- Sometimes students would like to meet and interact face to face with their peers and sometimes students would like to attend class in their pajamas.

How do you give student experiential learning in an online classroom?

- There is no one answer, it is discipline specific.

- Some programs view experiential learning as guided learning where an instructor is present.

- One solution is to have student use their local environments to gain experiential learning:

- Students can investigate what the unanswered questions are in their community.

- Students who are located near each other can pair up and work on a project.

- Students can have the people in their communities engage in their project.

- Students can also be given videos or tutorials from their instructors that guide how they will select their projects.

How might MOOCs be of value to the University?

- MOOCs can reach a large sum of students.

- What value does it give students?
 - MOOCs seem like a lot of effort for the instructor and only a singular experience for the student.
 - Can MOOCs provide a continuation of learning? Is a semester of specialized learning more educational than a MOOC?
 - How are MOOCs evaluated by the academic world and employers?
 - Are MOOCs evaluated positively or negatively on resumes?
 - If a student does not earn credit, MOOCs may demonstrate motivation for self-learning.
 - What do students earn from MOOCs?
 - Badges

- MOOC materials created by other institutions could be purchased by the University.
 - MOOC programs instead of textbooks.

- MOOCs reduce the cost of higher education
 - Biggest costs are faculty, buildings, and technology (and its replacement).

Additional Information about the Roundtable:

- When asked who had taught an online course at least once, 70% of the group raised their hand.
- When asked who did not incorporate some form of digital material into their courses, no one raised their hand.

Support for Faculty Teaching Online Courses at URI:

- Online Fellows course
- “Quality Matters” program: National bench-marking and checklist for best practices in online instruction.
- Institution of instructional designers
- Advisory Committee
- Joint Committee on Online and Distance Education
- New website: www.uri.edu/provost/online
- Tech support and short technology courses available