



## Libraries and MOOCs

*MOOC - A massive open online course (MOOC; /mu:k/)*

Traditional universities face a new competition in the form of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that threatens to change the landscape of Higher Education. Traditional private and public non-profit universities have been passing on their rising costs to students in the form of ever higher fees. Small universities are having trouble balancing their books and many seem caught in a “death-spiral” of rising costs and declining enrollments. At the same time demand for higher education continues to grow with increasing percentages of the population obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees. Who is going to serve all these new students? While traditional brick and mortar universities are investing in shiny student centers, beaches, graduate centers, libraries, and residential suites to attract new students, MOOCs have gained a toehold in the higher education pie with their low startup costs and economies of scale. Libraries are a particular case in point.

Very few if any MOOCs have extensive brick and mortar libraries. They rely instead on the remote student using a local

university library or copyrighted materials embedded in the course. This presents traditional university libraries with a number of user dilemmas. For example often database licenses require that either the user be a member of the local university community or be physically present in the brick and mortar building for access. This means that your local Starbucks barista taking courses at Arizona State University will probably not be able to receive networked databases from home. If this person wants to borrow a book from a local brick and mortar university they are presented with yet another problem. What is the library going to do when presented with a large number of community borrowers enrolled in these MOOCs? Hopefully in the long run the MOOCs will be required to obtain a licensing model that gives access to databases for a national and international student body. Currently traditional universities can give access to their students regardless of where they live, but with MOOC students this is not an option. One model that has been suggested is one whereby MOOC students pay an additional access

fee to the traditional brick and mortar university, for which the local university would provide access and track database usage. This model however would create a sub-class of users who pay for access, something traditional universities have not done before. The ever present danger here is from individuals who would like to download entire databases to re-market to others. Academic libraries who traditionally have offered their services free to walk-in customers, may have to re-evaluate this concept if large numbers of MOOC students begin to demand services.

What are we going to do? Are we going to just toss these students out on the street and say that we will not help them? I don't think so, as libraries have always been in the business of helping patrons locate materials, not denying access to materials. One of the most endangered group of libraries under this system would be those “middle-tier institutions, which produce America's teachers, middle managers and administrators.” These institutions could be replaced easily by online courses offered at a lower cost by MOOCs located

anywhere in the world or Arizona for that matter. Weaker community colleges without local employer tie-ins would be subject to the same fate.

The opportunities for education on the internet are limitless. Libraries used to be the place people came to read and learn. Now the information formerly held by libraries is available not in a building but on your cell phone. Universities were founded to provide a place for discussion, education, learning, and thought

to occur in a group setting. Can this be accomplished using Skype, GoToMeeting, or MeetingBurner software? One of the most frequent comments I get from my online students is that they miss the personal interaction with the other students that you get with a face to face class. MOOCs are good at content delivery; if you want to learn something, take a test, and go away. Will future students want to pay a premium for face-to-face group learning? Will they want to pay a premium

to use library resources at a local university library? In the past students have given high marks to personal learning interaction in a classroom setting. Will they be able to afford to in the future, or will most be priced out of that market by MOOCs? In any case local brick and mortar university libraries will need to come up with solutions to the problems posed by MOOC students.



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