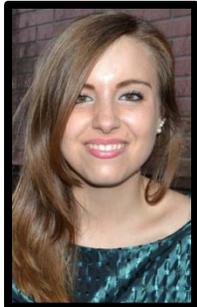




From the Editor

MOOCs: Massive Opportunity or Mucky Mess?

by Megan Schmidt, editor



Distance learning and online classrooms are nothing new, but massive open online courses (MOOCs—which, by the way, is pronounced “mook”) have taken higher education by storm. What distinguishes MOOCs from their ancestors is that anyone can enroll, they’re free, all you need is an internet connection and they can accommodate hundreds of thousands of students at a time.

MOOCs have produced a polarized debate. MOOC cheerleaders herald the format as one that will revolutionize higher education. Everyone, regardless of their economic status or locale, can receive an Ivy League education at no cost. The MOOC-averse say it’s “McDonaldization” of education—fast, cheap and plentiful but not very nutritional. Since a business model hasn’t been established to sustain the concept, critics also fear that MOOCs may do to education what mp3 technology did to the music industry, what Craigslist did to classified advertising and what Wikipedia did to the encyclopedia.

In this issue of *ASQ Higher Education Brief*, we take a look at both sides of the MOOC debate. In “[Beware of MOOCs](#),” Gerry Canavan, an assistant professor of English at Marquette University in Milwaukee explains why MOOCs are bad for students, teachers and academia. In “[A MOOC with a Mission](#),” Robert Hoar, a mathematics professor and the director of the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse Institute for Innovation in Undergraduate Research and Learning presents a different argument—that MOOCs have a place in higher education and that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Also, don't miss "[Why Have Students Been Left Out of the MOOC Discussion?](#)" which makes the point that those on the receiving end of MOOCs haven't had much of a say in the development and delivery of the offering.

I'm not sure how I feel about MOOCs. I've never taken a MOOC, but I am thinking about enrolling in one soon for the experience. In college, I completed two online courses, one about art history and one on media theory. I found that I preferred traditional, face-to-face courses. There was something missing—maybe it was the the chance to hear diverse viewpoints from my peers, the ability to ask questions, or even the feeling of sitting in a marginally comfortable chair in a lecture hall, sipping coffee from my thermos and taking in the words and passion of a scholar.

What's your view on MOOCs? What do you think MOOCs will, won't or might do? If you've taught a MOOC or have been a student in a MOOC, tell Higher Education Brief how it went. Email Megan Schmidt, editor at mschmidt@asq.org.