Comment

LINK's Comment page is an opportunity for Network members to share their opinions, ideas and insights. In this issue, with MOOCs seeming suddenly ubiquitous, **Ravi Murugesan** offers a catch-up guide for those of us feeling left behind.

MOOC stands for 'massive open online course', and nowadays this acronym is commonly used to refer to the free online university-level courses offered by three major American initiatives – Udacity, Coursera, and edX – in association with a number of leading universities.

MOOCs offer a potent mix of excellent content, videos of passionate professors teaching, cutting-edge web technology for content delivery and assessment, plus the cachet of whichever top university is offering the course.

I took a MOOC offered by edX and Harvard University late last year, and it was probably the best university course I have taken (I have studied in India and the US). I completed the course along with 5,000 other students from around the world, and we were among 37,000 students who had enrolled in the course since it began. Such mind-boggling numbers are normal for MOOCs.

Like it or not, MOOCs are changing the face of higher education – probably on a global scale. Librarians are often the vanguard of information in higher education, and I think academic librarians in developing countries particularly can play a vital role in supporting staff and students in making sense of – and making the most of – MOOCs.

Check out a MOOC

This is an obvious first step but worth mentioning nonetheless! The websites of Coursera, Udacity, and edX list and describe their forthcoming courses. Feel free to enroll on a course just to take a look – and feel free to drop out. The usual conventions around enrollment and attendance don't apply in a MOOC: anyone can drop in and out – although actually studying can be hard work! Librarians and others in higher education should at least get a feel of MOOCs by joining a few, even if they don't intend to complete them.
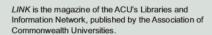
Using and creating

Once you've developed a well-informed opinion on MOOCs, consider whether they could complement the teaching at your university. Could faculty use MOOC-content in their classes? Perhaps students could take MOOCs on topics that are not yet taught at your university? Promoting a course made elsewhere may seem unusual, but I think it's best to accept MOOCs and make good use of them, instead of rejecting them or considering them a fad.

If you're in a developing country, you're probably at the receiving end of MOOCs at the moment; whereas universities in the US, UK, and other developed countries are increasingly talking about creating and offering MOOCs. But it doesn't have to be this way. MOOCs can be very expensive to create, but maybe we'll soon see MOOCs, or MOOC-like initiatives, from developing countries. These could be created under tight budgets and yet offer excellent learning opportunities, especially in the local context – public health training particular to a specific country, for example. Librarians – with their bird's eye view of institutional content, copyright and licences, as well as the availability and accessibility of e-resources – are surely well placed to lead this change.

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