

Rutgers University Senate
Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee

Charge: S1308: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) Reconsidered: *Reconsider and make recommendations regarding the current and rapidly changing situation with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and Rutgers policies and procedures related to MOOCs. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by January 2014.*

In February 2013 the Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee presented a report to the University Senate on *MOOCs: Massive Open Online Courses*.¹ The report looked at the development and then-current state of the MOOCs phenomena, and at Rutgers MOOC initiatives. The Committee offered ten recommendations. The first three dealt with oversight and support for any Rutgers MOOC initiatives; the final seven were meant to be preemptive in nature, providing guidelines in case of any future endeavors to offer Rutgers credits for MOOC courses.

The report and recommendations were accepted by the Senate at that February meeting.

In its report, the Committee noted that

What MOOCs are, how they work, who participates, what they're used for and how they fit into institutional structures—these are all things that seem to be changing on almost a daily basis.²

Since the report was issued, the changes have continued although perhaps not at the lightning speed experienced earlier and perhaps with a growing sense that this was not the technology that was going to disrupt and completely reinvent higher education. There are still increasing numbers of institutions that are developing and offering courses using the platforms developed by providers such as Coursera, Udacity, and EdX. There are still those developing what they hope will be transformative programs using MOOCs or MOOC technologies.³ However, there are also those who feel that it's time to slow things down and assess what's been happening.⁴ Reports of MOOC experiments that have not worked out the way it was hoped, such as the recent one from San Jose State,⁵ have added to the sense that too much was being attempted too fast.

¹<<http://senate.rutgers.edu/ICAConMassiveOpenOnlineCoursesFebruary2013AsAdopted.pdf>>

²*MOOCs* p.5

³See, for example, Carl Straumsheim. "50,000 Strong to Change Higher Ed," *Inside Higher Ed*, November 4, 2013. <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/11/04/duke-u-professor-plans-massive-collaborative-effort-tackle-challenges-facing-higher>>; Carl Straumsheim. "Don't Call it a MOOC," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 27, 2013.

<<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/08/27/ut-austin-psychology-professors-prepare-worlds-first-synchronous-massive-online>>

⁴Ry Rivard. "Beyond MOOC hype," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 9, 2013.

<<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/07/09/higher-ed-leaders-urge-slow-down-mooc-train>>

⁵Carl Straumsheim. "The Full Report on Udacity Experiment," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 12, 2013.

<<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/09/12/after-weeks-delays-san-jose-state-u-releases-research-report-online-courses>>

In his October 24, 2013 response to the Senate report and recommendations—received after the current charge was issued—President Barchi made it clear that MOOC efforts at Rutgers were also being curtailed. He noted that the courses currently being developed as Coursera MOOC courses were the same three that had been initially proposed and described in the February report. He further stated that:

Despite the potential benefits MOOCs could provide to the University, at this point in time, these first three MOOCs are the only ones being offered and proposed. As long as MOOCs remain so costly to produce and there is no monetization plan for revenue from these courses that could be used to sustain the process, only proposals for new MOOCs that are accompanied by significant funding will be considered.

In regard to the COHLIT Advisory Council, the group charged with overseeing and developing guidelines for MOOC and other online initiatives at Rutgers, President Barchi goes on to say:

I can report to you that the COHLIT Advisory Council, which has significant academic representation among its members, has been consulted on all decisions regarding these online courses. This group is being reconstituted and reorganized in consideration of COHLIT's current priorities. Since our decision has been to begin with only these three MOOCs on a trial/pilot basis, general MOOC guidelines and strategies are not being established at this time. Should we decide to initiate additional MOOCs in the future, such guidelines and strategies will be developed by an advisory group and shared with the Senate ICA Committee for review at that time.

As several members of the Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee were members of the COHLIT Advisory Council, we were somewhat puzzled at the notion that the Council “has been consulted on all decisions regarding these online courses.” The Council met once and did approve accepting the invitation to join Coursera and move ahead with the three proposed courses. No minutes from that meeting were ever forthcoming; there was no further communication regarding the development and implementation of these courses, nor was the decision to curtail MOOC development at Rutgers except for these three courses discussed or communicated with the Council. While this could be attributed to some things falling through the cracks during a change in administrative leadership—the then Vice President for Continuing Studies and Distance Education left the University not long after the initial meeting—it is an unfortunate instance of a lack of the transparency needed to assure members of the Rutgers community that online programs, be they MOOC or not, for credit or not, receive the oversight needed to ensure that they meet Rutgers standards. There need to be institutional standards for *all* courses that reflect the Rutgers name.

In further discussion with Richard Novak, the Vice President for Continuing Studies and Distance Education, he stated that he was “moving forward with a smaller group, probably with some sort of term limits, primarily with those who are already actively engaged and knowledgeable about online learning.” We would certainly urge that as per our first recommendation in the February report this new Advisory Council should have “significant academic representation—faculty and students” so that those most deeply interested and involved in the utilization of online learning have a say in its direction at Rutgers.

In light of these developments, the Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee does not feel that there is any great impetus to “reconsider” its recommendations of February 2013. Seven of the recommendations were meant to be there as a safeguard against actions that might or might

not be proposed in the future. The University Administration has accepted and indicated its agreement with these recommendations. The first three recommendations were specific to the oversight and development of MOOCs. It appears that for now at least, no new MOOCs are under consideration for development. Consequently, we feel that at least for now our February report and recommendations adequately address MOOC-related issues at Rutgers.

Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee

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