

Academics Are Down on MOOCs. Business Schools Aren't

Clark, Patrick. "Academics Are Down on MOOCs. Business Schools Aren't."

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Academic leaders are [increasingly skeptical](#) of MOOCs, so why are top business schools increasingly warming to the online learning model? An annual report on online education published this week may hold a clue.

Babson Survey Research Group polled more than 2,800 colleges and universities for an annual study ([pdf](#)) on online education and found that 39 percent disagreed with the statement that massively open online courses "are a sustainable method for offering courses." That's up from 26 percent who answered the same way in last year's survey.

Meanwhile, [Harvard Business School](#) is experimenting with MOOCs, and Wharton made its [entire first-year MBA](#) course load available for free on Coursera. Five other schools in *Bloomberg Businessweek's* [top 10](#) full-time programs have taken the plunge, including the University of Chicago's [Booth School of Business](#) and MIT's [Sloan School of Management](#).

Enough MBA programs have made classes available through MOOCs that the website Poets & Quants published a course guide for the [MOOC MBA](#). It's an appealing concept: The website followed up with a prospective MBA who plans to piece together a business school education from Harvard, Wharton, Yale, and other top schools for [less than \\$1,000](#). Contrast that with elite business schools, where tuition can run [well more than \\$100,000](#).

Here's what I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, the authors of the Babson report, write about MOOC doubters: "The chief academic officers at institutions with the greatest experience and exposure to traditional online instruction are the least likely to believe in the long-term future of MOOCs."

That might explain why business schools are rolling out MOOCs even as confidence in the model wanes. Most top MBA programs shunned online learning in the 1990s, when schools didn't want to risk their reputations on a model associated with such schools as DeVry University, and a list of top online MBAs published this month by [U.S. News & World Report](#) shows little overlap with highly ranked traditional programs. Interviews with leaders at two business schools that were early adopters of online degree programs revealed doubts that MOOCs will gain much traction as replacements for MBAs.

"MOOCs are basically the 21st century equivalent of reading a bunch of books and saying you got a degree," says Phil Powell, faculty chairman at Kelley Direct, the online MBA program at [Indiana University](#). They can convey knowledge, but are unlikely to teach communication skills, teamwork, and other qualities beneficial to executives, he says: "A MOOC is a transaction, not a relationship."

MOOCs can push MBA programs to improve their offerings. Powell says Kelley Direct is retooling its career services department the better to help online MBAs, who have different needs than full-time students. Amy Hillman, dean at Arizona State University's [W.P. Carey School of Business](#), says that the rise of MOOCs has caused her school's online MBA program, ranked No. 2 by *U.S. News*, to think about how it can use technology better to deliver online content.

"Unless there becomes some widespread acceptance from employers that the collection of expertise from MOOCs is equivalent to a business degree, I don't see them as competitive," she says.

Newman, Lee and Gianpiero Petriglieri. "The Opportunities – And Risks – in the MOOC Business Model." *The Wall Street Journal*. 15 Oct. 2013. Web. 21 Jan. 2014.

Why I'm Skeptical About MOOCs

GIANPIERO PETRIGLIERI : Popular technologies these days elicit the reception once reserved for charismatic leaders. They capture imagination, kindle hope and ignite fierce debate.

Ever since Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) appeared, we have been talking about the widespread need for knowledge, the joy of lifelong learning, the magic of great teachers and so on. We have been talking about the value and cost of higher education. And, most important, we have been talking about education not as a luxury but as a fundamental right that everyone should have equal access to.

I can hardly think of a greater service to society at large, and I am enthusiastic about technology's potential to improve the quality and accessibility of education.

At the same time, I am skeptical about MOOCs. (I recently [argued why](#).) At least about MOOCs' current incarnation—or disembodiment I should say.

MOOCs are a valuable addition to teachers' portfolio of pedagogical means. High-quality ones are [expensive to produce](#) but well suited to efficiently broadcasting knowledge to large, distributed crowds.

Whether we can be satisfied with the extent to which that knowledge turns into learning is another matter. It depends on the perspective we take.

If we view them as [the equivalent of Google ads](#)—infomercial for bodies of knowledge, star professors and their institutions—MOOCs' current [low completion rates](#) are still amazing given the numbers involved. If we regard them as a potential alternative to public education, however, those rates are [more problematic](#). And MOOCs are too frequently positioned as precisely such alternative.

There still is too wide a gap between the idealistic promise of MOOCs as a means to democratize education and the ideological practice of using MOOCs as means to cut costs in already underfunded public universities—and, in fact, augmenting the stratification of educational institutions.

We need more clarity about [whose interests](#) and what ends MOOCs serve. And we need to ask [if their cost isn't too steep](#) for the value of access to great lectures on line.

Lectures have been ads for knowledge long before MOOCs existed, and if that is what MOOCs are I applaud them. Education, however, involves [more than acquiring factual knowledge](#) or even skills that may help one get a job.

As extensions of and enticements toward education, MOOCs may be very useful. As alternatives, or more precisely as surrogates, they are utterly inadequate.

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