

COLUMN



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Crack TOEFL through a comfortable platform

The TOEFL MOOC provides general information about the sections of the test, the skills we test, and also how the test is scored and is used by higher education institutions. It provides foundational information as well as a deep dive into everything a test taker needs to know on test day.

An important way test takers can prepare for a test is to familiarize themselves with the format and review the content areas the test will cover. The MOOC is designed to provide all of this information about the TOEFL test in six weeks.

While all students will leave the course with a deeper understanding of the test sections and the types of questions they can expect, they will have all entered the course at different levels of English. Upon completion of the MOOC, students are encouraged to continuously practice their English skills, as well as take practice TOEFL tests, to prepare for test day. Many young people access content with their mobile devices or on laptops, so this course will be accessible on various devices and platforms, and will meet students and learners in the modes with which they are most comfortable.

Excerpts from an e-mail interaction with Rajaram Sukumar



Aastha Singh
Student, Noida International University

MOOCs cannot replace the physical classroom due to the absence of laboratory work. Practical experience plays a very important in learning science subjects. So MOOCs works as an extension of the physical world classroom rather than replacing it completely



Dr Sanjeeva Srivastava
Associate Professor, Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering, IIT Bombay

The long-term vision is to encourage the competitiveness of Indian industry in the global scenario by enhancing the reach and range of education. Also, the quality instruction and education will make the students enrolled in a distance learning programme more proficient in their field

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Andrew McKenna
Executive Director, Big History Institute, Macquarie University

A unique MOOC offering: Big History

In our constantly changing world the only way we can begin to understand the present and to answer the question “how did we get here?” is to explore the past. By tracing the Earth’s evolution from incredible simplicity to today’s world of increasing complexity and innovation, we can even begin to investigate the possibilities of the future.

Professor David Christian, who coined the term ‘Big History’ and taught the first course in Big History at Macquarie University in 1989, surveyed the past on the largest possible scales, including those of biology and astronomy. Big History is a history of everything that covers 13.8 billion years, from the Big Bang to today’s complex societies.

Students around the world now have free access to Macquarie University’s global classroom through the launch of the new “Big History: Connecting Knowledge” MOOC on Coursera. The course provides students a new framework to evaluate and approach problems in fundamentally new ways which is as critical to the challenges faced by business leaders today as it is for scientific research, politics, and entrepreneurship.

Excerpts from an e-mail interaction with Nimesh Chandra

Defining the future of learning

As the world makes a transition towards a well-connected knowledge economy, MOOC plays a vital role in delivering good quality distance education...

by Team Careers360

If you are at the fag end of your college days, wondering what to do next with your studies, this message in your inbox from social platform LinkedIn is sure to catch your attention. It says ‘MOOC on data journalism opens for registration’. If your curiosity makes you click on the link, it takes you to the website of Journalism and Media Studies Centre at The University of Hong King (See photo above). Before you start wondering what MOOC is all

about, just analyze what you did now. You are on your computer, laptop, tab or whatsoever, connected to the wide world through Internet and using social media platform to stay updated. Yes, you are ready for Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs, which is revolutionizing the sphere of education just as the invention of printing press impacted literacy and in its wake, society.

What is MOOCs

It is a free web-based learning programme offered to a large number of

people. The term MOOC was coined in 2008 by Dave Cormier of the University of Prince Edward Island and it came into existence through open educational resources (OER) movement which is freely accessible for learning and teaching. With the penetration of e-learning, digital literacy and students’ aspirations for quality education at affordable prices, MOOCs provide a platform of courses on diverse range of subjects providing best online lectures, debates and discussions, assessment and quizzes in the pedagogy system across the world.

How it works

The lectures are delivered by professors to students via video files, PDFs, Power-Point presentations and even computer

simulations. A story that appeared in thewire.in* illustrates how it works. “In 2011, as the legend goes, the celebrated Stanford professor [Sebastian Thrun] left his classroom, went home, and using a hastily-put-together digital camera set-up and napkins, started teaching a course on artificial intelligence. Over the next three months, students of his online course received every bit of material that his Stanford students got: lectures, assignments and exams. His online course ended up attracting over 150,000 students from around the world and history was made. The MOOC (Massively Online Open Course) was born, and Thrun’s company Udacity played a huge role in making American higher education catch MOOC fever. Nearly every university

First-Ever TOEFL® MOOC

Platform: edX, the non-profit online learning destination founded by Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Commencement: Monday, June 13, 2016

Duration: Free 6-week Prep Course For: Designed for Test Takers Worldwide

Objective: To help test takers prepare for the TOEFL® test and develop English language skills that universities, agencies and institutions look for in applicants

Skills tested: Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing — then concluding in week six with test-day information and other helpful tips

What to expect: A mix of short lectures, including “Inside the TOEFL Test” videos for each question type and sample questions from past tests complete with answer explanations. There will be several opportunities to take short quizzes so that you will have a good sense of what to expect on test day. During the Speaking and Writing lectures, the test team will review a handful of responses and provide evaluation and feedback. You will also get to meet and share information with students from around the world through discussion boards.

Weekly commitment: Not more than two hours per week.

Certification: Although the course is free, you will have the option to sign up for a paid certificate that will highlight the knowledge and skills you gained upon completing the MOOC

Benefits: You will walk away with a broad understanding of the sections of the test as well as helpful tips to prepare for the TOEFL test. You will also find out how to register, how the test is scored and where TOEFL scores are accepted. Source: ETS NEWS

in the US started offering a few courses on at least one of the major MOOC platforms that sprung up.”*

MOOCs in India

The Human Resource Development ministry in 2014 launched a portal SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-learning for Youths Aspiring Minds) where MOOCs is available to Indian students. Running on openEdx platform SWAYAM offers courses from Indian and foreign universities. Courses like Quantum Mechanics and Quantum Computing (offered by UC Berkeley), Introduction to Computer Programming (provided by IIT, Bombay) and Thermodynamics (offered by IIT, Bombay) are some of the popular options.

IIT Kanpur; IIT Bombay; IIT Kharagpur; IIT- Madras; IIT- Guwahati; IIT-Delhi; IIT Roorkee; Jawaharlal Nehru University and IISc Bangalore are some of the well-known universities offering online courses to students. Recently seven of the IITs joined hands with IISc-Bangalore and IIMs to launch the NPTEL portal which offers around 100 courses as web-based supplements along with 100 complete video courses, for 40 hours of duration per course. The contents are based on model curriculum suggested by the AICTE.

How it helps

The new mode of learning is quite popular among students. “MOOCs courses in Computer Sciences and Engineering from IIT Kharagpur have helped me a lot to gain more inclusive knowledge of the subject. The project assignments and examinations are designed in such a manner that it helps to develop the analytical and problem solving ability of students,” says Sneh Nehra, student of B.Tech in Computer Science and Engineering, Amity University.

“Along with my job, I did a few MOOCs Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences Certificate courses from MIT after the completion of my BSc in Information Technology. Today I am on the verge of launching my own IT start-up,” says Vikas Kumar Vivek, a Data Scientist with Raython Technologies.

Challenges in implementation of MOOCs

While nobody doubts the potential of MOOCs, there are several impediments in its implementation. “The first major challenge is the availability of funding to develop the course on MOOCs platform. Second, in case of implementing MOOCs, is availability of Internet with appropriate bandwidth speed. Another big impediment is the acceptance of the certificate by the employers as well as educational institutions,” says Dr Sonu Saini, Assistant Professor, Centre of Russian Studies, JNU.

Moreover, students feel that as of now MOOCs cannot replace the physical classroom. “MOOCs works as an extension of the physical world classroom rather than replacing it completely,” affirms Aastha Singh, student of M.Tech in Electrical and Electronics, Noida International University.

Potential in India

With the launch of innovative programs like GIAN, the government is trying to tap the global talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs to augment the country's academic resources. MOOCs is an important tool in implementation of GIAN.

“The long-term vision is to encourage the competitiveness of Indian industry in the global scenario by enhancing the reach and range of education. Also, the quality instruction and education will make the students enrolled in a distance learning programme more proficient in their field, boosting their employability. Thus, many such courses are need of the hour,” says Dr Sanjeeva Srivastava, Associate Professor, Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering, IIT Bombay. Prof. Saibal Chattopadhyay, Director of IIM Calcutta, puts it in a nutshell when he says, “MOOCs and online delivery is clearly the future.”

With inputs from Harshita Das and Amartya Sinha

*Srivastava, A (2016) Business. In the wire. in [online] Retrieved from <http://thewire.in> [26th April 2016]