

Breaking new ground with open online courses

To improve the employability skills of engineering students, Acharya Nagarjuna University (ANU) has introduced a new initiative called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) in its syllabus from this (2015-2016) academic year.

In the four-year B. Tech course, students will focus on subjects like mathematics, physics and chemistry in the first year to bridge the gap between intermediate and engineering education.

The second and third years focus on basic and core subjects. The advance subjects are introduced only in the first semester of final year which leaves little scope for students to have an insight into the factors that they need to master to keep pace with the changing needs of industry.

To match up to the industry needs, students need to learn additional subjects which are not in the curriculum.

“To cater to their needs, the University has introduced open electives and one discipline-centric elective course through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web.” says E. Srinivasa Reddy, Principal, ANU College of Engineering.

The new mode will be implemented in the second semester of third year for EEE, ECE and CSE & IT and EIE branches and in the first semester of fourth year for Civil, Mechanical and Chemical & Bio-Tech branches.

In addition to traditional course materials such as filmed lectures, readings and problem sets, many MOOCs provide interactive user forums to support community interactions between students, professors and teaching assistants.

First introduced in 2008, MOOCs emerged as a popular mode of learning in 2012 and is a widely researched development in distance education. This mode provides free non-degree online courses with open unlimited global enrolment to anyone who desires to learn, regardless of their current educational level,” said Mr. Reddy.

Many international universities like Stanford University, University of Michigan, Georgia Institute of Technology, Harvard University etc. provide MOOCs courses through web providers like EDX, Coursera, Alison etc.

The courses include basic subjects to advanced subjects in all disciplines. Students can register at any time for the course and can learn free of cost. For a certificate, they must appear for an online exam at nominal cost.

ANU is the first university to include these courses in its curriculum from the current academic year, said Mr. Reddy.

In the four-year B. Tech course, as part of the initiative, students will focus on mathematics, physics and chemistry in first year to bridge gap between Intermediate and engineering