

OpenStudy to forge partnership with NPTEL



OpenStudy brings together those asking questions and those who know the answers

The founders of OpenStudy, the web-based platform that makes it possible for students across the world to find answers to the questions which arise in their minds during study, are forging a partnership with the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) in India.

NPTEL, implemented by the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institute of Science with the support of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, offers a range of web and video courses in engineering, science, humanities and social sciences.

OpenStudy (openstudy.com), which aims to become “a kind of Facebook for learning,” provides the setting for those who ask questions during study and those who know the answers to come together

for further learning. “Most of the answers come from the learners. We have both teachers and non-academics who are regular users who come only to help,” said one of the OpenStudy co-founders, Preetha Ram, in an email-interview to *The Hindu*. Along with Ms. Ram, who is Associate Dean for Pre-Health and Science Education in the Office of Undergraduate Education at Emory College, Atlanta, the other co-founders are Ashwin Ram, a Georgia Institute of Technology professor specialising in artificial intelligence and cognitive computing, and Chris Sprague, who is the CEO of OpenStudy.

OpenStudy has much to do with the environment of OpenCourseWare, which gives students across the world access to quality learning materials from top educational institutions. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been a major player in developing and promoting OpenCourseWare, but there are many other institutions that have digitally opened up their learning resources to the rest of the world, like the ones involved with NPTEL in India.

Anybody can access these materials, irrespective of whether the learner is trying to supplement regular study with OpenCourseWare or working outside the conventional academic system.

While OpenCourseWare does provide learners with easy access to different kinds of educational material, there is a missing link — the element of individual interaction that is vital to the learning process. It is to provide that missing link that OpenStudy was set up in 2007, say its co-founders.

Once learners sign in to OpenStudy — either directly, or through Facebook — students who are part of a formal educational system, or outside it, can join groups of their choice and pose questions and provide answers to the questions raised by others.

OpenStudy has linked up with institutions that offer OpenCourseWare. These include MIT, New York University and the University of California.

On the proposed partnership with the NPTEL, Ms. Ram says: “We are waiting to have a technical discussion to take the next step of integration.” Institutions that provide open learning options can include access to OpenStudy from their sites in different ways.

What about the quality of the answers? “We follow the Wiki principle, where the answers are crowd-sourced. If the answer is wrong, the next user comes by to correct it. The answers are rated by the users in the form of “Good Answer” rating. That there are different levels of users in the system helps to provide a range of experts. And learners from different parts of the world join hands to offer “cross global help,” enriched by different perspectives, contributing to the strength of the system. OpenStudy has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Georgia Research Alliance in the U.S.

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