

Time transcripts of Making Open Online Communities (MOOCs)

[00:00:00:01] [Music] [Newsreporter] We are back now as promised with what could be the key

[00:00:03:09] to higher education and perhaps even brilliance for a lot of folks who don't necessarily

[00:00:07:29] have the time or money for college, say nothing of an Ivy league school.

[00:00:12:14] [Multiple voices in multiple languages overlay saying "Massive Open Online Course" and "MOOC]

[00:00:17:22] [Multiple voices in multiple languages overlay saying "Massive Open Online Course" and "MOOC]

[00:00:21:09] [Narrator] We've been preoccupied with the MOOC.

[00:00:23:14] Massive Open Online Courses have dominated higher education in the past two years,

[00:00:28:03] and they've become a household term thanks to multiple articles in mainstream publications

[00:00:32:18] such as The New York Times, The New Yorker, and The Huffington Post.

[00:00:37:10] Higher education resources like The Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed

[00:00:41:24] feature frequent articles and blog posts on the MOOC phenomenon.

[00:00:46:06] Composition professionals have also found themselves drawn into the MOOC debate.

[00:00:50:20] When I first searched the Writing Program Administration listserv archive back in May 2013 for the term "MOOC,"

[00:00:56:18] it generated over 747 hits with the first use of the term dated back July 16, 2012.

[00:01:04:19] Now I receive an error page because the search produces too many hits.

[00:01:09:09] Heated debates across the listserv have addressed the problems writing instructors

[00:01:12:16] associate with massive courses, including

[00:01:15:11] :the large number of students enrolled in the course,  
[00:01:17:08] the large number of students dropping out of the course,  
[00:01:19:09] the larger number of students simply not participating in the course,  
[00:01:22:19] providing feedback for students by instructors,  
[00:01:24:29] providing feedback for students by other students,  
[00:01:27:09] how to train students to provide feedback for other students,  
[00:01:30:10] the impossibility of training students to provide feedback for other students,  
[00:01:33:25] the push by institutions to offer MOOCs for credit,  
[00:01:36:20] the assessment process for MOOCs,  
[00:01:38:11] the assessment process within specific MOOCs,  
[00:01:40:09] the limited opportunities for student and instructor interaction,  
[00:01:43:26] the failure of instructors to meaningfully interact with students,  
[00:01:46:21] the ethics of receiving funding from corporations and foundations,  
[00:01:50:22] the inflated egos and compensation of MOOC instructors,  
[00:01:53:19] how to teach a writing course for an international, multilingual audience,  
[00:01:57:08] the efficacy of online writing instruction,  
[00:01:59:10] the efficacy of writing instruction in a MOOC,  
[00:02:01:24] and the inevitable eradication of writing instruction because of the MOOC.  
[00:02:06:04] The coverage of and response to MOOCs has been marked by radical shifts.

[00:02:10:04] The popular media heralded MOOCs as a revolutionary form of education

[00:02:13:29] to provide global access to unreached populations.

[00:02:17:02] [Newsreporter] all kinds and all ages are signing on

[00:02:19:15] [TED Speaker] Anyone who has an Internet connection and the will to learn

[00:02:21:29] can access these great courses from excellent universities and get a credential at the end of it.

[00:02:28:00] [Female newsreporter] Some educators say the potential exists to revolutionize higher learning

[00:02:32:09] [Narrator] While instructors worried that such online courses would dehumanize education

[00:02:35:21] and continue the trend towards the business model of education.

[00:02:38:17] [Male speaker] if they're what the future of universities is than I pretty much want the past.

[00:02:41:22] The personal and intellectual side of the university is not something you can get by being online,

[00:02:47:26] even though online adds many other potential forms of discussion,

[00:02:50:20] it just doesn't lead to that level of activity.

[00:02:53:10] [Narrator] Recent studies suggest that MOOCs are not reaching this potential population,

[00:02:57:11] and instead low completion rates combined with rather homogenized demographic data

[00:03:02:00] suggests that MOOCs may just be the newest edutainment fad

[00:03:05:08] or better suited to workplace training.

[00:03:07:14] In the course of all the shouting and reactionary responses, one voice remains unheard.

[00:03:12:03] Or rather, 30,000 plus voices are unheard.

[00:03:15:23] These are the 30,000 participants who were enrolled

in the Ohio State University's Rhetorical Composing MOOC,

[00:03:21:27] not to mention those involved in Duke University's English Composition 1,

[00:03:26:04] Crafting an Effective Writer produced by Mt. San Jacinto College,

[00:03:30:06] or First Year Composition offered by Georgia Institute of Technology.

[00:03:34:02] One member of the WPA community asks, "a few questions that are likely so obvious

[00:03:38:19] that they might be ridiculous, such as, whose needs is a MOOC such as this one serving?

[00:03:43:12] What is the goal, and who-- really-- is the audience?"

[00:03:46:27] These questions are not ridiculous nor are the answers obvious.

[00:03:50:19] With over 30,000 writers across the globe enrolled in one single albeit massive course

[00:03:55:25] there's no simple answer about who the audience is,

[00:03:58:26] what their needs, goals, expectations, previous knowledge, or experiences are.

[00:04:03:22] There are over 30,000 individuals who decided for their own personal reasons

[00:04:07:27] to enroll in a free online course to improve their writing.

[00:04:10:29] Although their individual stories are compelling, in this presentation

[00:04:14:10] I want to focus on how these 30,000 plus individuals came together

[00:04:18:10] to form massive community and what this means for other forms of composition classes.

[00:04:23:01] Back in 2013, five faculty members from the Ohio State University, two graduate students,

[00:04:28:18] and a programmer worked together to create a MOOC

## Writing II: Rhetorical Composing.

[00:04:33:29] The course curriculum and learning objectives were based

[00:04:36:04] loosely off OSU's second-level writing course.

[00:04:39:08] [Susan Delagrang] Rhetorical Composing emphasizes critical reading, writing, and research strategies

[00:04:44:09] like learning how to craft an argument, learning how to speak to a specific audience.

[00:04:48:18] [Ben McCorkle] It involves combining images and audio and still images and

[00:04:53:02] moving images in various combinations.

[00:04:55:13] In this course, you'll get the opportunity to think about that in a little more detail.

[00:04:59:07] [Scott DeWitt] Rhetorical Composing is WEx, which is the Writer's Exchange.

[00:05:02:13] It's in WEx that we're going to provide you with training for providing feedback

[00:05:06:12] to the other writers in the class on the writing that they're producing.

[00:05:09:09] So we're going to spend a lot of time talking about that in the class,

[00:05:12:00] and we think that not only will the feedback you receive be really important to you producing good writing,

[00:05:19:10] but we think that this is going to provide you an opportunity to think differently about your own writing,

[00:05:23:28] and to, by providing feedback to other people, you're going to become a stronger writer.

[00:05:28:14] And WEx is really going to help you do that.

[00:05:30:02] [Narrator] 32,765 students enrolled in the course,

[00:05:33:20] and over 18,000 students engaged in the course at least once.

[00:05:37:15] Video content was watched over 280,000 times,

[00:05:41:03] and students submitted 6,000 assignments and 12,300 reviews through WEx.

[00:05:46:22] In terms of course demographics, 40% of the students identified as male and 58% as female.

[00:05:53:12] Approximately 80% of the students noted that they had a college degree,

[00:05:57:14] and only 37% listed English as their first language.

[00:06:01:22] Approximately one third of students identified their location as North America.

[00:06:06:01] Another third were located in Asia followed by 22% in Europe,

[00:06:10:16] 8% in South America, 5% in Africa, and 1% in Australia.

[00:06:16:29] The global nature of the student body was one of the most surprising and challenging revelations

[00:06:21:06] to the instructional staff before the course opened.

[00:06:24:03] How would this group come together?

[00:06:25:28] When the course first opened, students immediately began to flood the discussion forums

[00:06:30:01] as they introduced themselves and made connections based on location, mutual interest, and occupations.

[00:06:35:26] The first assignment asked students to share their literacy narrative.

[00:06:38:16] [Student voice] I will tell you a story, a story about love and inspiration.

[00:06:44:13] [Narrator] So many individual stories.

[00:06:46:12] Like the young bride whose husband was killed on their honeymoon,

[00:06:49:03] so she decided to be a writer in order to start a new life for herself.

[00:06:52:09] The many people who shared their love or loathing of writing

[00:06:54:29] and the hope that this class would help them achieve their personal objective.

[00:06:58:21] The sense of community was partially built into the course by the faculty,

[00:07:02:07] who imagined some of the ways students could interact with each other.

[00:07:05:27] The emphasis on peer review in the course, facilitated through the peer review engine WEx,

[00:07:10:10] set the expectation for collaborative work of students writing and responding to one another.

[00:07:15:16] Students who were initially fearful of peer review based on their previous experiences with sharing their work

[00:07:21:11] were required to trust their peers with their writing.

[00:07:24:10] This sense of trust and care with writing fostered a gifting ecosystem

[00:07:28:08] in which students gave feedback and resources and received the same from others.

[00:07:33:11] Some students began to post their assignments on open forums to receive

[00:07:36:14] more feedback that was no longer anonymous,

[00:07:39:06] and they also began to complete more than the required peer reviews.

[00:07:42:25] There was a sense of giving and receiving that was more than about individual progress

[00:07:47:09] but a reorientation towards the group success on assignments.

[00:07:50:25] Additionally the discussion forums were another site of community formation in the MOOC.

[00:07:55:15] Discussion forums were initially conceived as a way to engage students in the video content

[00:08:01:21] by offering an optional composing activity, but the forums quickly took on a life of their own.

[00:08:05:19] Students produced over 20,700 posts and 9,000 comments in the 10 week class.

[00:08:11:16] [Ben McCorkle] I occasionally pipe up, but they're sharing not just, not just their writing but their lives with one another.

[00:08:18:05] And that's what I see as the big promise of a MOOC,

[00:08:20:23] when you have people from all over the world, all sorts of different backgrounds,

[00:08:24:17] getting together and sharing their lives with one another.

[00:08:26:27] That's, that's a really special thing.

[00:08:30:00] [Narrator] After coding one set of the discussion forum threads on "Learning World Englishes,"

[00:08:34:17] three major themes emerged.

[00:08:36:14] Students consistently invoked their status as novice language learners and writers

[00:08:40:23] rather than relying on expert status.

[00:08:43:16] The rhetorical decision to adopt this identity,

[00:08:46:15] as opposed to the expert identity that Grabill and Pigg found in other online public forums,

[00:08:50:22] helped establish the learning-centric environment and expectations for interactions among students.

[00:08:56:22] In spite of their past experiences, which may have led them to adopt an expert status in other contexts,

[00:09:02:15] the students chose to adopt novice status in order to more readily connect

[00:09:06:02] with one another as global learners.

[00:09:09:29] Students engaged in a transactional exchange of information and learning resources.

[00:09:14:18] This was especially prevalent in the interactions among English Language Learners



[00:09:18:27] and English as First Language Speakers.

[00:09:21:24] ELL students often exist at the margins of the classroom because of their perceived language deficits.

[00:09:27:29] However, the writers in this course valued the knowledge and experiences of

[00:09:31:16] both ELL and EFL speakers as contributing equally to the learning environment,

[00:09:36:18] and they actively sought out one another's experiences and different perspectives.

[00:09:42:08] Students engaged in extensive community building work.

[00:09:46:06] They achieved this through the forum capabilities like threaded replies

[00:09:49:26] but also discursively by referencing each other by name and referring to previous ideas throughout many threads.

[00:09:56:25] They posed questions about composing processes, learning new languages, and writing strategies.

[00:10:02:18] Not only were students relying on one another in a gifting ecosystem exchange,

[00:10:06:21] but they were engaging in meta-level commentaries about language and composing.

[00:10:11:17] In addition to the WEx peer review system and the discussion forums,

[00:10:15:07] the instructors created spaces such as a Twitter hashtag and a Google+ community

[00:10:19:21] in order to facilitate more community building and interaction among students and faculty.

[00:10:24:28] However, it's the student-created communities that are particularly interesting

[00:10:28:29] and demonstrate the potential for MOOCs to initiate life-long learning opportunities.

[00:10:34:26] Even today, almost a year after the course has ended,

[00:10:37:28] the Facebook communities are still going strong.

[00:10:40:20] The writers are sharing their links to their blogs, to spaces where their work has been published,

[00:10:45:07] articles they have found interesting and relevant to the course, and so forth.

[00:10:49:17] The writers have continued the exchange of information, resources, and writing

[00:10:53:17] that was a central part of the Rhetorical Composing MOOC,

[00:10:56:17] and this circulation of knowledge has contributed to the formation of a learning community

[00:11:00:18] even after the course has officially ended.

[00:11:03:18] This leads me to believe that the value of MOOCs is not necessarily in the content,

[00:11:07:20] although the content of many MOOCs tends to be of high quality,

[00:11:11:11] but in the ability to connect individuals across the globe.

[00:11:15:11] As one student writes, "These hard-working advocates of innovation and design,

[00:11:19:21] coupled with the new friendships and connections with like-minded and very real

[00:11:23:12] people I have come to know through this course, are helping me to move forward in my life.

[00:11:29:05] To move forward in new directions... with renewed passion and vitality."

[00:11:33:02] The question becomes what can we take away from the MOOC experience,

[00:11:36:14] and how can we bring it back to non-massive classrooms,

[00:11:39:10] or even as we re-envision MOOCs and other forms of online education?

[00:11:43:20] How can educators facilitate the long-standing learning communities,

[00:11:47:04] such as the ones that emerged in the MOOC?

[00:11:49:25] I offer the following take-aways.

[00:11:51:25] Act as technological and pedagogical stewards.

[00:11:55:02] Offer space for students to fill and create on their own.

[00:11:58:25] All courses must come to an end, but the learning experience does not have to.

[00:12:03:03] Allowing students the opportunity to structure their own ways of interacting and learning

[00:12:07:02] during the class may help set the tone for students to continue

[00:12:09:29] their intellectual engagement beyond the class.

[00:12:12:28] In the MOOC, students came to value peer review, and through the use of online technologies,

[00:12:18:02] they continued their own exchange of writing and resources.

[00:12:24:26] Acknowledge and validate the backchannel.

[00:12:27:14] As Derek Mueller notes in "Digital Underlife in the Networked Writing Classroom,"

[00:12:31:22] the backchannel and digital underlife offer productive ways for students to engage

[00:12:35:08] in ways that the instructor could not anticipate.

[00:12:38:25] In the MOOC, students produced responses, such as a parody video of the WEx peer review system.

[00:12:45:06] Such as examples of underlife demonstrate the students' involvement

[00:12:47:26] in the course and help to foster a sense of community.

[00:12:51:03] By acknowledging and validating the backchannel, the underlife becomes

[00:12:54:05] an optional part of the course, not a subversive

current, in which students' experiences and voices are heard.

[00:13:00:23] [Music]

[00:13:04:27] In short, students in what some have characterized

[00:13:07:11] as a heartless, depersonalized content machine,

[00:13:10:18] created a robust, vibrant, global learning community surrounding rhetorical composing,

[00:13:15:20] a community that has extended far beyond the initial course offering.

[00:13:20:02] Through the spaces opened, created, and inhabited by instructional staff and other students,

[00:13:25:06] the participants in the Rhetorical Composing MOOC have learned more

[00:13:27:28] than just how to create rhetorically effective texts but how to create learning networks

[00:13:32:05] that support composing together.

[00:13:34:29] [Music ends]

[00:13:39:08]

[00:13:41:28]

[00:13:48:16]

[00:13:52:08]