



Online education may not teach all

By Simon Livingstone

There is excitement in the education world regarding the new phenomenon – Massive Open Online Courses. And they are free.

Universities around the world are scrambling to be at the forefront of this new direction in higher education course delivery.

Students can study MOOCs with leading academics from universities across the globe. Enrolment is voluntary and there is no penalty for dropping out of the program.

University administrators hope that once students start studying these free online courses, they will apply for entry into their institution's mainstream programs. It is likely in the future that university courses will recognise MOOCs as part of the credit towards degree. Currently, although a student may excel in a MOOC, they do not receive a recognised qualification.

The introduction of MOOCs raises the question of the value of learning. Is it the course content that is important in the development of learners? Or is it the

delivery and environment that they learn in that creates a rounded and balanced graduate?

There is a sense in some higher education circles that face-to-face teaching is old school and out of date. But nothing is further from the truth. College and university education is more than just learning facts and figures. A vibrant residential campus environment can offer much more to the enrichment, learning and development of young minds that learning over the internet.

Residential campuses allow for mentoring between lecturer and student to occur. This interaction provides an invaluable process where academics can shape student's learning.

Networking between students allows for lasting friendships to develop along with future business contacts.

Successful educational institutions around the world have developed a strong sense of purpose and mission congruent with their institutional and educational objectives. Camaraderie developed among staff, students and alumni are

powerful mechanisms that enhance the learning and personal development experience. A consultative culture, demonstrated in all aspects of college life, also adds to the student's positive learning experience.

Encouraging students to question orthodoxies, to express their views, and to use critical skills gained through their studies to solve workplace problems is the basis of a good and lasting education.

A combination of methods and techniques including case study analysis and study tours enriched by face-to-face teaching further enhances the learning experience of undergraduate students.

The integration of curriculum with practical placements is also a strong feature of successful education programs and produces work-ready graduates that are sought after by industry.

There will always be a place for external studies for mature age students. They already have real world experience. But for young undergraduate students, there are real benefits for them to discuss and debate

issues in a challenging and dynamic face-to-face learning environment.

Some employers are concerned that universities see online education as a cost-cutting exercise. Many employers are wary of MOOCs and the negative impact that may have on the skill set of graduates.

It is early days in the life cycle of MOOCs and the jury is out as to their success or not. Ultimately it will be the students who decide which institution they believe will provide them with the greatest opportunities and value for money. Their choice will be based on the college or university with the best reputation and the quality of the staff, but also the mode of course delivery and the closest links with the industry.

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