

Education Dive

BRIEF

Giant MOOCs succeeding in enrollment, ROI

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Published
June 26, 2018

Dive Brief:

- Big massive open online courses covering topics ranging from the basics of computer language to the English language to the secrets of happiness are among the most popular being offered, according to lists provided by the top companies providing them — and they appear to be generating substantial returns, including for some universities.
- An analysis by EdSurge of the most popular MOOCs from Coursera and edX shows that they create revenue — in one case, the company split with producers an estimated \$2.5 million for a course. Instructors are paid through various arrangements.
- Almost three quarters of the top courses in terms of enrollees are about computer science or coding, but some are about learning English and others cover self-help topics and even bitcoin investment. Several of the top 10 courses from Coursera and edX are offered by tech companies — four by DeepLearning.ai and two by Microsoft — and 12 of the 20 are produced by universities.

Dive Insight:

The University of Michigan has been among the most successful institutions creating MOOCs, and it splits the income from its courses evenly among central administration, the department offering the course and the professor who teaches it.

Meanwhile, a smaller institution in Michigan, Oakland University, has a MOOC with about 2 million students, according to the New York Times, and officials there note that smaller colleges should not shy away from the online courses because they may not require much expense and may be an opportunity to showcase teaching talent.

A recent study says online enrollment rose 9% among students registering in spring of 2016, but 60% of institutions with online programs report the market is “much

more competitive.” That data from the Changing Landscape of Online Education report last year also showed that most often the responsibility for the programs is distributed among various academic units, though some are centralized in one office and some are blended.

One study showed that online students would like to have career services and mobile device compatibility, but other research also indicates they are generally happy with the online classes. A 2017 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report showed that 74% of online students surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience, while only about 54% of students at four-year universities were.

Experts have found that the quality of instruction is important, as are the materials and the methods of assessing the students, according to the EdSurge report. The head of eCornell, which provides the online infrastructure and marketing for Cornell University, has developed a business plan for MOOCs. He said personal attention is important, including peer-to-peer interaction.

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