

MOOC ends with mixed results

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Some faculty members and students recently embarked on their very first MOOC. It's a new concept to many but a MOOC, which stands for Massive Open Online Course, is a new way for universities to expand their reach and the type of student whom they serve.

While several big universities had launched MOOC courses, SUNY Fredonia has primarily stuck with traditional classroom learning approach. Of the 3,588 courses sections that are listed for the current Spring 2014 semester, only nine courses are designed to be completely online.

It's not a bad thing that SUNY Fredonia is sticking with a traditional approach but I decided to give it a try. As someone who may look into a completely online program in the future, I wanted to see what I was getting myself into.

MOOCs are a tough concept to digest for some people. Especially since the courses, in most cases, don't count for college credit and have no real penalty if you don't do your work.

So if the work isn't done, the progress in the course is halted and then it seems like suddenly the motivation is lost. That's when you fall into the enormous amount of people that don't finish the

MOOCs they originally started.

According to an article from Times Higher Education, typical MOOC completion rates are below seven percent. Additional research from the MIT-Harvard MOOC collaboration said that their completion rate is actually lower than previously mentioned at four percent.

While completion rates are incredibly low, the research did show that two-thirds of the students did take something away from the course, whether they finished or not.

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Terry Brown was one of the participants who did not complete the course due to an international trip abroad. However, she did complete a substantial amount of the coursework.

"I did like it. I had never been a part of a MOOC before and I always like a new learning experience. It was unusual to be in an online course with 10,000 other people," Brown said.

The course itself featured videos of Dr. Cathy Davidson from Duke University providing lectures on the materials for the course. In addition, there were weekly quizzes and several peer assessment tools to earn a certificate of completion through Coursera, a site that provides these open online courses. Brown had high regards for Davidson.

"I enjoyed her as a teacher and I loved her

enthusiasm. I found the material to be very interesting and I thought she was always original in the perspective she took," she said.

The impression was so favorable that Davidson will be a keynote at the teaching and learning conference in August on campus.

Interim Associate Provost for Curriculum, Assessment, and Academic Support Dr. Adrienne McCormick was also part of the population that did not complete the course as other responsibilities emerged.

"I am part of that notorious cohort of MOOC non-completers. But I do think I got a lot out of my experience, in terms of thinking creatively about the future of higher education — and how the learning needs of students now and in the future are changing," McCormick said.

Dr. Christine Givner, dean for the College of Education said this course was like candy and she couldn't get enough. She had no problem motivating herself to complete the course since she was such a fan of the material.

"I would get up in the morning and pop it open. To me, it was great for someone for who has a Ph.D. and has very little time to connect with others that are enthusiastically learning about something. This provided me an opportunity to engage in a way that I don't have a lot of time to do.

But I was able to find time [for this]," Givner said.

On the other hand, I was one of 900 plus students that earned a statement of accomplishment for the completion of the course. It certainly gave me a different view of how we can learn using such different methods. The MOOC definitely changed things up considering that I am taking eight traditional classes.

The loss of motivation is key for this type of online course. The material was interesting but the time it took to do the work was tough. Some people set aside time to do it by making it an event on their calendar and others enjoyed conversations with others taking the course.

This also can be traced back to how there was a lack of grading involved. We're in college and almost everything gets a letter grade or percentage and we're so used to that culture. Now for the shift, this class is not graded and you're working for a certificate. You can see where some people would lose the drive to finish the course since this course doesn't affect how you're doing currently at school.

However, this class really opened up my mind and gave me a deeper look at higher education and where it's headed. So maybe next time you're thinking of taking a class online, have the passion to do it and follow through.