UNDERSTANDING MOOC IMPACTS
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Mixed Experiences

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MOOC in context

- Online or distant education has a long history
- MOOC not necessarily an original innovation but rather as the continuation of educational development keeping pace with technological development.
- MOOC as proxy for the evolution of communication.
  - face to face communication
  - hand written copies of manuscripts
  - print book
  - electronic media
  - so education saw the development of the direct lecture or face to face delivery of knowledge overtaken by print and electronic media.

Three key Issues around MOOCs

- Completion rate
- Scalability
- Commercial viability

Completion rate

- Accurate data is hard to ascertain and most have completion rates of less than 10% (Kolowich 2013)
- As most the MOOC's are relatively short cycle courses then the completion rates of a student seeking to complete a full degree via this route would be commensurately even smaller.

Also the issue of when measure starts?

- MOOC's often have easy access and little formal enrolment requirements
- if the completion rate is measured from those who initiate access as opposed from those who actually significantly engage?
- Should the comparison between a MOOC and a classroom based course be based on those who 'inquire' about the latter rather than those who go through a complex enrolment process?

But the issue of very large numbers

- If just 1% of an initial cohort of 100,000 students complete that still represents 100 students.
- Assuming a completion rate of 50% for classroom based students that would be the equivalent of recruiting (and teaching) 200 students for a class based provision

Scalability

- A significant misconception about the reduced staff cost associated with online learning . A long standing monitoring exercise in the USA has strongly suggested this is not necessarily the case.
- Allen and Seaman found that over 6 years (from 2006-2102) the views of academic leader had strengthened (from 40.7% to 44.6%) that it required MORE faculty time to teach an online course than a face to face course(Allen& Seaman 2013)

US Findings..

"The theory was that faculty could teach far more students by taking advantage of the new technology. However before the advent of MOOCs the prototypical online course in the US higher education over the past decade has not been structured to provide large increases in efficiency. Most online courses are very similar in design to existing face to face courses." (Allen and Seaman 2013:22)

Maybe it is a matter of not changing habits?

- Many academics are creatures of habit and seek perhaps to simply reproduce the practices of face to face teaching in an online context.
- Possibly an academic equivalent of pushing a newly acquired bicycle instead of riding it as walking is the accustomed means of locomotion?

Commercial viability- the challenge

- If the material is made freely available (academic freeware) then the issue of most web based provision becomes relevant.
- How can you recover the set up and operational cost from something which is provided for free?
- Will charges simply cause the customer base to disappear overnight?
- How can charges be applied to students who are located in far flung parts of the world where there is no easy means to transfer cash?

The Various Models of MOOC

- Free and open to all but not for academic credit
- Free but additional support on a fee basis
- Free but pay for certification
- Free tuition but pay for exams
- Fee paying when part of a larger fee paying programme
- Not for credit but can be counted as accredited prior learning when leaner applies for fee paying course

(Brown 2013)

The freeware model

- A base level service is provided for free but if the user wants more then they have to pay for it.
- In effect the free offer pulls the customer through the door (metaphorically) and enables the institution to gain income through selling other aspects of the product.

The promotion model

- MOOCs and online open provision are in effect a form of advertising of the institution or the development of higher brand recognition.
- For internationally driven universities this could be a critical factor as online provision enables the university to reach students all over the world.
- Top ranked universities may regard MOOC's as a cost effective form of promoting their image and 'showcasing' their product.

MOOC Discussion at European Group on Public Administration conference

(Edinburgh Sept 2013)

- Consideration of the application of MOOC type courses in public and not for profit areas
- Not seen as especially viable for entire Masters programmes (though there is an example of SOAS which runs a distance leaning MPA)
- However seen as potentially applicable for aspects which are technical (finance/IT)
- Issues around culturally significant aspects of course s with MOOC's