

A Partnership with Potential: Coursera and MOOCs

May 29, 2013

Dear Colleagues and Students,

Tomorrow morning, one of the nation's leading online learning companies, Coursera, is announcing that UK is among a handful of public, flagship universities it is partnering with to further expand learning opportunities for more students across our country.

Specifically, as our [news release](#) about this initiative describes, the University of Kentucky is one of 10 flagship universities or state systems teaming with Coursera in the emerging, but dramatically growing, platform called Massive Open Online Courses.

UK's role in this partnership will be offering students the opportunities to take free, introductory Chemistry courses with some of our outstanding faculty -- faculty who already have been experimenting with technology in promising and innovative ways in their classrooms.

Our hope, in particular, is that our efforts will help more young Kentuckians prepare for the rigor of college instruction by taking courses online from our faculty at no cost to them.

As we move forward with this initiative, we will continue to work with the University Senate and other constituencies to ensure that University policies and our agreements with third parties are sensitive to the intellectual property concerns of faculty.

At the same time, the potential associated with this kind of instructional innovation is compelling in so many ways. The online coursework, among many benefits, will show students what university-level work at the highest level requires. I want to thank Chemistry Chair Mark Meier and his faculty for their vision and commitment to our mission of preparing young Kentuckians for lives of leadership, meaning and purpose.

Whether those students attend UK or go to college elsewhere, they will be better prepared for university life and, in some cases, may use this platform and experience as a way to further their academic careers as they prepare for advance placement or other opportunities.

At its retreat several months ago, the Board of Trustees articulated several goals for the institution as we continue to forge our path forward in the midst of challenging times for higher education. One of those goals was to continue to develop a strategic and intentional plan for online and alternative models of course delivery.

Whether in the form of MOOCs, hybrid approaches to instruction or flipped classrooms, UK is increasingly using technology and new delivery platforms as we seek to provide the highest quality educational experience possible for those students entrusted to our care.

As such, we are part of a nascent national movement, one in which we must move forward, but do so with care and planning.

To that end, our partnership with Coursera, a small but potentially significant step forward in this still emerging sphere of instruction, represents one more effort to create a comprehensive, thoughtful approach to online learning.

As we move forward, we will engage the entire campus – our students, faculty and staff – in an ongoing and robust dialogue about the future and how best to harness these powerful tools to complement the already exemplary educational experience we provide. Senior Vice Provost and CIO Vince Kellen has had fruitful, initial conversations with faculty leadership about this step we are taking. Such conversations must continue and, indeed, expand into a robust dialogue throughout the campus. MOOCs and other technologies offer tremendous opportunities, but they also raise many questions, the answers for which we must find together.

As a start to that dialogue, we have posted details about our partnership with Coursera at uky.edu/coursera. There, you can read more about this initiative but also provide feedback and ask questions. I hope you will take advantage of that opportunity to engage in further dialogue.

Thank you for your efforts and commitment as we move forward in the midst of exciting times full of change and opportunity.

Eli Capilouto
President