MOOCs: A Qualitative Study of Online Education and Student Motivation

Organizational Innovation and Entrepreneurship (OIE)

Master’s Thesis

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Abstract:

The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) phenomenon is trending towards greater openness in terms of access and scalability in higher education. MOOCs are operating in a wider context of open access, online learning and economies of scale, which has many possible implications for higher education institutions especially with the changes that are currently occurring within higher education during a time of constrained budgets and globalization of education. How innovative are MOOCs? Are MOOCs here to stay? Over the years, there has been a significant change in societal adoption of Internet technologies. Technology has always been an ally for students wanting to pursue education, allowing students to pursue certificates and even degrees without formally going to a physical classroom. This thesis will make use of motivational theories and experience economy theories in order to examine the MOOCs phenomenon from the perspective of actual students of Coursera (the largest MOOC platform) to study student motivation. Additionally, the current operating landscape of MOOCs will be described including major MOOC providers as well as controversy surrounding MOOCs. In conclusion, this qualitative study will discuss the relevance of MOOCs and possible directions for future research.

Keywords: MOOCs, online education, motivation, experience value.
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1.1 Introduction

Education can be delivered in many forms and it can be said that education is the very foundation and building blocks of society. As higher education expands, it becomes clear that the academic system must change. However, “higher education cannot change easily. Traditions, values, infrastructure all create the conditions for natural inertia” (Laurillard, 2013). But according to Laurillard, the pressures that are forcing academic systems to change have little to do with traditions or values. Instead the pressures are for reduced costs, greater scale and scope, and for innovation through technology (Laurillard, 2013). With that in mind, there has been a recent new phenomenon with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). As the name suggests, a MOOC is a *massive open online course* made available tuition-free and taught through the Internet to a large number of students. There are both supporters and critics of MOOCs within the academic system. According to a recent article, chair of Harvard Business School’s MBA program, Youngme Moon says, “You get huge numbers of people signing up for MOOCs, but not staying around.” However, there are still many business schools that have been experimenting with MOOCs, justifying their investments as a learning opportunity in search of a business model (Byrne, 2014).

This thesis will examine this new phenomenon of MOOCs in higher education, which allows for hundreds of thousands of students from all around the world to enroll in courses offered by well-respected universities for free. This new technologically driven form of delivering education online to the masses has many possible implications for changing the way institutions currently offer higher education to students. What do MOOCs offer that traditional education does not? Do MOOCs serve to supplement higher education systems rather than replace? Will MOOCs disruptively innovate the way higher education institutions currently operate? Only time can answer some of these questions, but the source of the answers is generated from the students themselves. The growing prevalence of MOOCs and the nascent research that is available is what sparked my interest in this area of study. As such, this thesis is an investigative study on the actual students of MOOCs and the primary research question is related to the perceived benefits that students receive from
participating in MOOCs. This information is useful in order to better understand how MOOCs can be improved. How do students understand and perceive value in the experience offered in MOOCs? In what ways does participation in MOOC courses benefit students, according to their perceptions? How might a better understanding of their perceptions help universities to meet their goals regarding MOOCs: more students, better experiences, and strategic growth? What factors attract students or draw them away from MOOCs? These are all questions that are linked to the primary research question below:

**RQ: What motivates students to participate in MOOCs?**

While the number of students taking MOOCs has exploded in the past few years, experts are divided on the actual impact of MOOCs concerning the opportunities that may or may not exist. According to a recent article, advocates of MOOCs still support the notion that MOOCs have plenty of benefits for people across the globe and one of the most important of those benefits is inspiration. Curtis Bonk, an education professor at Indiana University, said about MOOCs, "With such new learning opportunities, one’s sense of self or identity as a learner is enhanced" (Haynie, 2014). To better understand the direction that MOOCs are moving, it is important to understand the value that MOOCs provide to students. A study by the University of Sydney, which examines the emergence of MOOCs, argues how it would be hard to conceive the lasting impact that MOOCs might have on higher education without understanding how MOOCs are or are not being integrated into individual career planning and personal development of students, as well as a comprehensive certification framework that is being offered (Kay et al., 2013). This is aligned with why studying student motivations is important. Researchers suggest that students are motivated to participate in MOOCs for several reasons. A study by Duke on its first MOOC showed that fun and enjoyment were cited as important reasons for enrolling by a large majority of students (Belanger & Thornton, 2013). Understanding student motivations in the MOOC environment is a significant area of interest for researchers as well as higher education stakeholders. According to the study, Belanger and Thornton proposed that student motivations typically fell into four (4) categories, which will be described in detail later. These categories will be used to examine empirical data in the analysis section.
With consideration to the emergence of MOOCs, this thesis aims to answer or provide insight to the main research question of studying student motivations. This study will examine characteristics of a MOOC platform, in this particular case -- Coursera, to better understand what benefits (if any) that Coursera is able to provide to students. While online education has a long history, the current phenomenon of MOOCs really started to gain traction in the fall of 2011 when several hundred thousand students signed up for computer-science course(s) offered by Stanford University (Vardi, 2012). Since then, MOOCs have become one of the hottest discussion topics of higher education. Because MOOCs are part of a recent phenomenon, there are not many academic studies concluded yet that could offer insights into the innovational impact that MOOCs may have on higher education systems.

The current MOOCs phenomenon and its growing prevalence stir up some controversy among experts. A recent review of MOOCs published by the UK government cites, “[Universities] see opportunities for brand enhancement, pedagogic experimentation, recruitment and business model innovation [with MOOCs]” (MacGregor, 2013). However, many experts are divided on whether MOOCs will improve or hinder higher education, and to what extent MOOCs will or will not change existing pedagogies within higher education. For example, some experts “welcome the shake-up and energy MOOCs bring to learning, teaching and assessment. They report positively on learning experiences and innovative formats of pedagogy, and spotlight themes such as access, empowerment, relationship building and community” (MacGregor, 2013). These champions believe MOOCs to be one of the most interesting and challenging transformations that is occurring in higher education in decades” (Fonseca, 2014). MOOCs provide a way of free, high quality classes to students anywhere in the world; few other educational platforms can make that same claim. However, skeptics worry MOOCs could have a devastating effect on the current higher education institutional system. For example, According to a history professor at Colorado State University, from an administrative standpoint, MOOCs could provide an easy opportunity to drastically cut labor costs by firing existing faculty members or simply hiring poorly trained ones to help administer the class (Rees, 2013). Because there is not much conclusive evidence out there that provides a deep understanding of MOOCs, either on
theoretical level or an application level, I became interested in this developing area of research. With the increasing popularity of MOOCs, I felt it was important to understand the greatest perpetual force behind the popularity: the students themselves.

This study will activate motivational theories and experience economy theories in order to guide discussions that allow us to understand what motivates students to participate in MOOCs and the experience value that MOOCs offer. One might also ask the following questions concerning the application of motivational theories and experience economy theories regarding MOOCs: How can students benefit from participating in MOOCs? What is the role of students and professors in MOOCs? What factors might be influencing students to want to expend time and effort taking MOOCs? Can better understanding the experience value of MOOCs lead to greater innovations for higher education? Understanding these questions will help researchers better understand MOOCs and the students that take MOOCs. With the aim of providing a greater understanding of the perceived benefits of MOOCs, this thesis analyzes media and course content provided by Coursera (which is the most popular MOOC platform) and includes an analysis of blogs and voluntary in-depth student interviews. It is a qualitative exploratory study composed of information from specialized journals, blog posts, websites, newspapers, editorials, and magazine articles to support arguments and provide a critical overview of MOOCs, student motivations, and the potential innovational impact that MOOCs might have on higher education systems.

The general idea behind a growing need for change in the education system and the possible innovation factor that MOOCs represent will act as a cascading element throughout the following discussions that take place within this paper. In Laurillard’s book (2013), she mentions a study from the UK, which presents a comprehensive review of the purposes of higher education which include:

- To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities…
- To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake…
- To serve the needs of a knowledge based economy…
- To play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilized, inclusive society…

(Dearing Report, 1997)
This is congruent with the aims of MOOCs, and in some ways, these aims can either reinforce or discourage student motivations, which is why understanding student motivations is critical. As such, this thesis aims to offer an exploratory study of MOOCs, by examining and evaluating a series of case studies.

These case studies will further provide an empirical foundation to add to the development of relevant debates involving MOOCs. Such current debate involves topics such as (McGuire, 2013): How might MOOCs help universities pursue larger target market? How might MOOCs help universities better serve students and professors? How might MOOCs help universities leverage advantages? How might MOOCs weaken or strengthen universities strategic position? To examine the case studies, I selected two theories, which structure the conceptual framework and discussions. The following theory section will examine and utilize motivational theories to explain some possible reasons behind why students enroll in MOOCs and what factors might influence them to come back. Experience economy theories will also be utilized to try and explain the experience value of MOOCs and the possible perceived benefits that MOOCs offer.

The theoretical framework section will be followed by a background section, which will provide a general overview of MOOCs and the current operating environment. The background section will also contain an overview of the case studies and empirical data used in this thesis, which will set the foundation for further analysis. This will be followed by research methods, which provides an explanation for how the study was designed and why. This will be followed by the actual analysis, which analyzes the content and empirical data derived from the interviews and “library” data that was collected such as online information, articles, discussion posts, blogs, etc. The analysis will attempt to provide some answers or insight into the research question(s). Lastly, the analysis will be followed by implications of what was learned from the study and a conclusion. In addition, the research will discuss possible future directions of MOOCs for future studies. This will provide a thorough foundation for understanding what MOOCs are, why studying MOOCs is important, and what motivates students to participate in MOOCs, which could lead us to have a greater understanding of the innovational impact that MOOCs might have on higher education systems and perhaps what kinds of changes are in store.
2.1 Theoretical Framework: Motivation and Experience Economy

The use of motivational theories and experience economy theories guide the discussion of this thesis. Typically, theories attempt to explain, predict and understand phenomena and the use of theories in this thesis is no exception. In this theoretical analysis, the theories that are in use take on a two-pronged approach. First, I use motivational theories in order to attempt to explain why students might be enrolling to take MOOCs in the first place and what factors may drive them to complete the courses and/or influencing them to come back. Is the motivation intrinsic? Are there extrinsic factors involved? Secondly, I use experience economy theories in order to attempt to explain the experience value students may believe they are receiving from Coursera. What are the perceived benefits? Even though the courses are free, students are essentially still buying into a service because they are voluntarily spending their time and effort. Furthermore, experience economy theory provides a lens to examine MOOCs from a broader perspective and provides insight into the impact that MOOCs may have on higher education systems with its unique massive open online academic experience, which previously did not exist in the economy or marketplace.

Often times, theories also challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of the research. Theories are a great tool to connect academia research to empirical phenomena in order to help explain certain aspects of the phenomenon, but theories are limited in their applicability and ability to generalize. The strength of the theories that guide an argument is largely dependent on the quality of the concept analysis. Thus, a strong understanding of the theories in use is important. The following paragraphs will take a closer look at motivational theories and experience economy theories independently and also within the context of MOOCs. Setting the foundation for theories is important in developing an appreciation for understanding motivations and the value of experiences as understood by researchers. This foundational understanding of the two theories will be helpful later on in the analysis when I connect the empirical context of MOOCs and apply how the theories can help us better understand student motivations and the MOOC phenomenon.
2.2 Motivational Theory: Why Students Enroll in MOOCs

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Since part of my inquiry regards what might be motivating students to participate in MOOCs, when there appear to be fewer extrinsic rewards (i.e., a degree) involved. I turn to motivational theories, particularly discussions of the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in order to try to generate a tentative understanding of what might be happening in my field of research. Intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation have been widely studied, and the distinction between them has shed important light on educational practices (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivational theories are relevant with regards to MOOCs in order to examine and attempt to understand how motivation can affect MOOC enrollment and/or completion rates. Intrinsic motivation involves people engaging in an activity because they find the activity interesting in itself and derive some level of satisfaction from the activity. In contrast, extrinsic motivation requires an external relationship between the activity and separable results such as tangible or verbal rewards. In this case, satisfaction comes not from the activity itself but rather from the extrinsic results to which the activity leads (Deci & Gagne, 2005). Though this is a simplistic model of motivation, it can be useful to set the foundation for possibly understanding what motivates people to enroll, complete, and sign up for additional MOOCs.

More than three decades of research has shown that performance can be very different when one is behaving for intrinsic versus extrinsic reasons. In Deci and Ryan’s contemporary review of motivation (2000), they highlight various forms of motivation as well as how students can become more motivated to learn. In general, humans, at their healthiest states, are active, inquisitive and curious creatures with a readiness to learn and explore. They do not require extraneous incentives to do so. “This natural motivational tendency is a critical element in cognitive, social, and physical development because it is through acting on one’s inherent interests that one grows in knowledge and skills” (Deci & Ryan, 2000: 56). This is the essence of intrinsic motivation, which can be defined as doing an activity for its inherent satisfactions. Intrinsic motivation is widely known and accepted as not being the only form of motivation, but it is regarded as a pervasive and important
one. With regards to MOOCs, intrinsic motivation would stem from ones desire to learn for the sake of learning and not the pursuit of a degree or some other external factor.

To better understand intrinsic motivation, motivational theorists developed self-determination theory (SDT) which presents a category of intrinsic motivation that focuses on the degree to which an individual’s behavior is self-motivated and self-determined. SDT represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed three main intrinsic needs involved in self-determination. The three psychological needs motivate one’s self to initiate behavior and foster higher levels of intrinsic motivation. SDT is concerned with personality development and behavioral self-regulation to include the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In other words, people will naturally feel more moved to act or do something if it makes them feel accomplished or they find what they are doing fulfilling to some degree – a sense of competence. Furthermore, when people feel a sense of independence with what they are doing, in other words, the freedom to determine one’s next actions, they have a greater sense of control of their life (autonomy), which also increases a sense of motivation. Psychological relatedness can be linked to a sense of liking or how much one inherently enjoys an activity, which can increase intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) also describes relatedness as the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others. They suggest that relatedness is centrally important for internalization and enhances motivation. Since relatedness has to do with the social aspects or an experience of connectedness with others – this is an important link with experience economy to demonstrate that there are benefits to social participation or in the case of MOOCs, value in the community aspect that is fostered.

As mentioned, SDT propositions also focus on how social and cultural factors facilitate or forestall people’s sense of initiative, in addition to their wellbeing and the quality of their performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to motivational theorists, although intrinsic motivations are not externally rewarded or supported, they are still critical to sustain passions, creativity, and continued state of curiosity and exploration that is essential to cognitive and social development. Conditions that support an individual’s experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are argued to foster the highest forms of motivation and engagement. This heightened sense of motivation often leads to enhanced
performance, persistence, and creativity. In addition, SDT proposes that the degree to which any of these three psychological needs is diminished or unsupported within a social context will have a detrimental or undermining effect on one’s level of motivation (Ryan & Deci 2000). Teresa Amabile, at Harvard, has written extensively on the positive effects of intrinsic motivation on creativity. She shows that extrinsic motivations can crowd out intrinsic motivation, and therefore put creativity at risk. “In short, extrinsic motivators and extrinsic constraints in the social environment could alter motivational state from intrinsic to extrinsic, and thus undermine creative behavior.” (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012: 7)

To further develop a greater understanding of intrinsic motivation, cognitive evaluation theory (CET) was presented by Ryan and Deci (1985) as a sub theory of SDT. According to motivational theorists, CET seeks to explain variability in intrinsic motivation by framing it in terms of social and environmental factors. CET takes the assumption that intrinsic motivation is inherent and suggests that conditions or environmental factors can either facilitate or preclude intrinsic motivation by supporting versus thwarting people’s innate psychological needs (Ryan & Deci 2000). CET is primarily focused on the fundamental needs for competence and autonomy. For example, early studies showed that positive performance feedback enhanced intrinsic motivation, whereas negative performance feedback diminished it (Deci 1985). Further research revealed that these effects were mediated by perceived competence (Vallerand, 1985). Additional CET studies have shown that competence alone does not enhance intrinsic motivation without a sense of autonomy. In other words, people must not only experience competence but also an inner sense that their behavior is self-determined. However, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), it is critical to remember that people will typically only be intrinsically motivated for activities that hold inherent interest for them. The principles of CET do not apply for activities that do not hold inherent interest because SDT suggests those activities will not be experienced as intrinsically motivated to begin with (Ryan & Deci 2000). In this way, the framework of both SDT and CET have broad and behavior-specific implications for understanding practices and environmental structures that enhance or weakens one’s sense of motivation. This is also in line with Amabile’s (1998) Intrinsic Motivation Principle of
Creativity, which demonstrates empirical evidence from a variety of domains (much from organizational settings) that confirms the importance of intrinsic motivation to creativity.

The relationship of extrinsic forces along with intrinsic motives and psychological needs inherent to human nature (competence, autonomy and relatedness) are the foundation of SDT and CET. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), in order to better understand the motivation for activities that do not hold intrinsic interest, one should look more deeply into the nature and dynamics of extrinsic motivation. Researchers offer a more refined conceptualization of extrinsic motivation, which differentiates extrinsic motivations into types of regulations that vary in their degree of relative autonomy and self-determination. According to Vansteenkiste et al. (2006), with this extension, the primary focus is on autonomous motivation versus controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation involves the experience of willingness and choice or a continuum of relative autonomy (Ryan et al., 2010), whereas controlled motivation involves the experience of being pressured or coerced. Well-internalized forms of extrinsic motivation (and intrinsic motivation) are considered autonomous, whereas poorly internalized forms of extrinsic motivation are considered controlled (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006). This would make sense since in general, people are typically more inclined to be motivated towards tasks and behaviors of their own choice and self-determination than ones that are forced upon them.

Ryan and Deci (1985) propose four categories of extrinsic motivation. The least autonomous, or in other words, the least self-determined form of motivation is externally regulated. Such (externally regulated) behaviors are typically performed to satisfy an external demand or to obtain externally provided rewards. An example supplied by Deci et al., (1991) is a “student who does an assignment for teacher’s praise or to avoid parental confrontation.” Another example is student who studies for an exam to make a good grade in a class that he or she dislikes. External motivation is often used to encourage employees or students to take part in a behavior that they must complete but may not be genuinely interested in. As suggested by Ryan and Deci (1985), the next type of extrinsic motivation is introjected regulation, which involves external rules or demands that pressure one to behave. Put differently, this form of motivation “involves coercion or seduction and does not entail true choice” (Deci et al., 1991). Often the source of motivation for such behavior
is guilt, worry or shame. Introjected regulation inspires an individual to enact in certain behaviors not because he or she wants to, but because he or she fears not enacting in that behavior out of a sense of obligation. An example of introjected regulation is a person who goes to church every Sunday because he or she fears the negative reaction of their peers at church even though he or she does not necessarily find enjoyment in the service itself.

As identified by Ryan and Deci (1985), a more autonomous or self-determined form of extrinsic motivation is identification regulation. In this case a person has directly identified with the importance of a behavior and has accepted it as a regulation of his or her own determination because it benefits him or her in achieving a goal. With this form of motivation, the individual does not have to necessarily find enjoyment in the behavior, nor does there have to be an immediate reward. For instance, a person may recognize that his or her job is an important stepping-stone to a successful career. As provided by Deci et al., (1991), another example is a student who willingly does extra work in mathematics because the student believes it is important for continuing to succeed at mathematics. This subcategory of external motivation is more self-determined and personal than external regulation, which as previously described, is typically focused on a more immediate positive reward. Identified regulation is used to achieve an end that affects an individual's personal well-being and desires.

Lastly, the most developmentally advanced and the most self-determined or autonomous form of extrinsic motivation as suggested by Ryan and Deci (1985) is integrated regulation, which is a form of motivation that arises when a person has fully integrated a motivation within him or herself. Integrated regulation behavior is influenced when a person undergoes self-examination and then internalizes and assimilates the reasons behind certain actions with personal values or needs. According to Deci et al., (1991), integrated regulation bears some relation to intrinsic motivation because both are forms of autonomous self-regulation. However, integrated regulation is separate from intrinsic motivation because the behaviors are done in order to achieve some external outcome. For example, a person who works out for an hour a day because he or she feels that it aligns with a belief of staying healthy and active, even though that person does not enjoy exercising.
The model (Figure 1) below depicts SDT on a continuum with amotivation, the least self-determined and non-regulated motivation category on the left and the most autonomous or self-determined intrinsic motivation to right.

**Figure 1**  
*The Self-Determination Continuum Showing Types of Motivation With Their Regulatory Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Nonself-Determined</th>
<th>Self-Determined</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory Styles</td>
<td>Non-Regulation</td>
<td>External Regulation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Projected Regulation</td>
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<td>Integrated Regulation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic Regulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ryan & Deci 2000 p61*

Even though extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation are shown in a linear continuum, it does not mean the two are incompatible. Everywhere, parents, teachers, coaches, and managers struggle with how to motivate those that they mentor. Individuals struggle to find energy, mobilize effort and persist at the daily tasks of life and work. People are often moved by external factors such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, or the opinions they fear others might have of them. Yet just as frequently, people are motivated from within, by interests, curiosity, care or enduring values. An example of combined motivation is teachers who try to increase intrinsic motivation or lifelong learning, yet know it is unrealistic to think that they can persuade students that grades don't matter. The question then becomes whether there may be optimal joint levels of these two goals to facilitate learning. This is also aligned with Amabile’s work (2012), which suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic do not coexist in perfect harmony, but that increased extrinsic motivation can actually weaken intrinsic motivation.

Taking what is already known about motivation and applying it to Coursera and the MOOC phenomenon, one can expect to find that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays a role in the student’s determination to enroll and continuously participate in MOOCs. Based on what was discussed about motivation, I expect to find that one form of motivation might dominate over others. Since MOOCs offer no formal degree, I believe there could be
increased intrinsic motivation in students that participate in MOOCs but will look to the data to examine this further. One might expect to find that the lack of extrinsic rewards (no formal degree) correspond to an increase in intrinsic motivation, when students compare their MOOC experience with university courses. The use of motivational theories will further guide examination and discussion in the analysis section to try and explain why students enroll in MOOCs and what motivates them. A thorough understanding of motivational theories will provide a foundational framework for discerning certain behaviors and in this case, what factors keep students engaged in MOOCs and why. The use of theories attempts to explain individual student behavior and motivation factors with regard to MOOCs. The following paragraphs will attempt to examine experience economy theories with a broader scope of investigating the experience value that MOOCs offer.

2.3 Experience Economy Theory: What Students Are “Buying”

In order to gain a better understanding of what factors make Coursera the most widely adopted MOOC platform, I suggest we consider the service or product offering in its entirety. In other words, it’s important to examine the Coursera experience as a whole, and not look at just any single course. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), the basis of experience economy theories is that as goods and services become commoditized, the customer experiences that companies create will matter most. Economists have typically lumped experiences in with services, but it should be understood that experiences are a distinct economic offering. Figure 2 illustrates the progression of economic value in the marketplace, as described by Pine and Gilmore (1998). On the bottom left corner is undifferentiated commodities, which is of the lowest economic value. From that stage, the

![Figure 2: Economic Value Progression](source: Pine & Gilmore – HBR 1998:p98)
economic value of commodities increases as it moves into goods and then services. At the top of the economic value chain is differentiated experiences, which holds the highest premium value in the marketplace. As previously mentioned, experiences are as different from services as services are from goods. As suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1998), today’s marketplace allows for this fourth economic offering because consumers unquestionably desire experiences, and more and more businesses are responding by explicitly designing and promoting or staging experiences for consumers. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), three important characteristics of experiences are that they are intangible, sensational and memorable. The above (Figure 2) is a simple depiction of the advancement of experience economy as understood by theorists, which suggests that experiences are the next step of development and economic value offering of the marketplace.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) explain an experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. The primary aim of experiences is to give customers what can be defined as a mental journey that leaves them with a memory, and often times requires the customer or consumer to be a co-producer and become a part of the experience itself. Sundbo (2009) presents a distinction between primary and secondary experience sectors related to whether experience is the firm’s primary product or an add-on to goods or services. This study investigates and explores the innovation process in the experience economy sector similar to how researchers studied innovation in the manufacturing (goods) and services sector. According to researchers an important thing to note is that consumers may have different experiences of the same event or performance so experience firms are required to find some way to connect with consumers. From the experience, consumers might be left with a material outcome or some new knowledge, but the actual experience is often immaterial and intangible. That is why when experience delivery is made systematically available to consumers; experience firms must attempt to train the public to appreciate the experience (Sundbo 2009).

In this view, I suggest that staging a learning experience is Coursera’s primary product and not an add-on to existing goods or services. With that in mind, one can suggest
that students are not merely taking courses but rather experiencing the courses. With Coursera, students are expected to actively engage in discussion boards, and assignments in order to complete the course. This differentiation is important because simply observing courses, as an inactive participant is less engaging than being a part of the experience. This is aligned with what Sundbo (2009) suggests about experiences that users must be more engaged than in services because the experience takes place in their minds. In the case of Coursera, by being actively engaged, students become a part of the experience and the result or outcome is often new knowledge or learning.

Areas of exploration for the study will include examining how Coursera is or is not an example of an experience economy firm. I suggest we consider that Coursera is an example of an experience economy firm, and see how this might help us understand what special experiences or benefits the firm may be offering to students. The analysis section will attempt to evaluate the experience value that Coursera offers to students by examining empirical evidence. A comprehensive understanding of experience economy theories will provide a fundamental base allowing us to explore examples of different experiences and their associated values as understood by theorists. This will provide us with a better idea of what experience economy entails in order to have a broader understanding of this unique economic sector.

According to theorists, experience industries include occurrences that can be termed culture (du Gay & Pryke, 2002) or seen as creative industries (Caves, 2000). Examples of more common experiences include sports, art events, theater or film, music festivals, entertainment, museums, tourism, fine dining, computer games, and mobile phone applications. Experiences are, like goods and services, a very distinct category. Excellent design, marketing, and delivery will be every bit as crucial for experiences as they are for goods and services (Sundbo, 2009).

Further, according to Pine and Gilmore (1999), characteristics of experiences happen across two dimensions. The first corresponds to customer participation. On one end of the spectrum is passive participation such as attending a concert (entertainment). On the other end of the spectrum is active participation such as taking a dance class or ski lessons (educational). The second dimension of experience describes the connection, or relationship
that exists in order to unite consumers with the event or performance. On one end of the connection spectrum is absorption, which is less engaging than immersion. For example, visiting a museum or being a tourist at the Grand Canyon and taking in views from the rim (esthetic). The other end of the connection spectrum is immersion, which involves consumers to be more engaged with the experience, for example descending the Grand Canyon and camping (escapism). When these two dimensions are crossed, the result is Figure 3, which illustrates the four realms of experiences: entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist. Pine and Gilmore (1998) propose that generally consumers find that the richest experiences encompass aspects of all four realms, forming a "sweet spot" around the area where the spectra meet. But still, the universe of possible experiences is vast. The 4 realms of experiences as introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998) will be important later when analyzing empirical evidence to see whether or not Coursera could be considered an experience firm and what kind of experience value is offered.

With the growing trend of the experience economy sector, experience design will become as much a business practice as product design and process design are today. Pine and Gilmore identify 5 key design principles that apply to experiences. The first is to theme the experience. There are many successful businesses that have a strong fundamental theme, and customers know what to expect before walking through the doors. Think about Hard Rock Café or Rainforest Café as prime examples of businesses that have created an experience around a central theme. The second experience design principle involves harmonizing impressions with positive cues. While the theme may form the foundation of the experience, one must be rendered with lasting impressions. Think of impressions as the "takeaways" of the experience, they fulfill the theme and make the experience whole. To create the desired impressions, companies must introduce cues that affirm the nature of the
experience to the consumer. While the theme usually works as the setting of the experience, it's the cues that make the impressions, which create the experience in the customer's mind. An experience can be unpleasant merely because some feature has been overlooked, or uncoordinated. Unplanned or inconsistent visual cues can leave a customer confused or lost and draw away from the overall experience.

This leads into the third experience design principle of eliminating negative cues. Ensuring the integrity of the customer experience involves more than just the layering on of positive cues. Businesses, or rather experience firms, must also eliminate anything that contradicts or distracts from the central theme in order to leave a positive impression of the experience. The next principle involves the use of memorabilia. Certain goods have always been purchased primarily for the memories that the goods convey. Vacationers may buy postcards to evoke a treasured sight, or purchase T-shirts to remember a rock concert. Memorabilia serves as a physical reminder of an experience and there are entire businesses built on souvenirs. A good example of this is Disneyland memorabilia or museum gift shops, which are typically set up so that consumers must walk through the gift shop after viewing the exhibitions.

The last experience design principle is to engage all five senses. The sensory stimulants that accompany an experience should support and enhance its theme. The more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable the experience can be (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Using these five design principles, of course, is no guarantee of success. The laws of supply and demand still apply to any business seeking profits and success. Companies that fail to provide consistently engaging experiences, or overprice their experiences relative to the value perceived will of course realize negative impacts to the business.

The notion of experience and consumption are key elements in understanding consumer behavior. As more businesses are turning from delivering services to staging experiences for consumers, it is important to understand the relationship that exists between the experience and consumption of that experience. Imagine the consumption of experiences to be spread over a period of time that according to Arnould et al. (2002), can be divided into four major stages detailed below:
1. **The pre-consumption experience**: involves searching for, planning, daydreaming about, anticipating or imagining the experience.

2. **The purchase experience**: derives from choice, payment, and packaging the encounter with the service.

3. **The core consumption experience**: includes the sensation, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction, or the transformation of the experience.

4. **The remembered consumption experience** (nostalgia experience): involves the act of thinking back fondly on the experience, or reliving memories through conversations about the experience.

These stages are in line with Pine and Gilmore’s description of an experience being intangible, sensational and memorable. The way businesses interact with customers directly affects the way the business is perceived. When businesses are responsive, attentive, willing and able to provide the information or assistance that consumers’ need, the likelihood of providing a positive experience is increased. When businesses are unable or unwilling to satisfy consumers’ needs, difficult to do business with, or indifferent, inept or discourteous, chances are the consumer will have a bad experience. Suppose that in the services industry, services are customized to consumer needs. In the experience sector, the shaping of experiences goes beyond customization into personalization.

In Pine and Gilmore’s view (1998), a product has the highest economic value when it becomes an experience product. For example, when consumption of the product is focused on creating or staging a “memorable” experience. As previously mentioned, when compared with other economic offerings, the creation of experience consumption depends on the extent of a consumer’s participation and absorption during the consumption process. Therefore, while the key attribute of service product involves focusing on the extent of customization, the dominant element of experience offerings lies on the level of personalization. The idea is that the more personalization a business manages to create, the more the consumer will be prepared to spend. Take Disneyland as a leading example. Consumers are willing to pay a relatively high price to immerse themselves in a distinctive and memorable experience.
Let us take the experience economy one step further to experience in the E-commerce sector. In discussing the evolution of economies, Pine and Gilmore (1998) observed that the economic value of a given offering increases as its form changes from a commodity, product or service to an experience. In recent years, according to researchers, the Internet and intensified market competition have motivated organizations to pay more attention to the significance of experience offerings. The Internet infrastructure has reduced the cost of coordination, and thereby accelerated the commoditization of services. At the same time, competitive pressures continue to press the need for product differentiation and innovation in order to gain a competitive edge in today’s fast moving business environment. Therefore, the business value and potential profits generated by experience offerings are becoming increasingly attractive and vital to firms that endeavor to remain competitive in the global marketplace. The power and capability of the Internet allows the creation of experience-oriented consumption to happen on a global scale (Chang et al, 2010). This has direct relevance to Coursera, as it is an online platform and seeks to leverage the power of the Internet to operate globally.

Taking what is already known about experience economy theories and applying that to MOOCs, I suggest one can expect to find that Coursera seeks to do more than just offer a good or service but with the relatively vast and growing selection of courses, certificate program, and user interaction, Coursera seeks to create a learning experience. Based on what was discussed about experience economy theories, I expect to find that Coursera offers an experience value to consumers in the form of an educational experience but other experience values might also come into play. The use of experience economy theories will further guide discussion in the analysis section by examining empirical data for evidence of whether or not Coursera is proving any experience value to consumers. A thorough understanding of experience economy theories will provide a foundational framework for exploring how students might perceive Coursera is benefiting them in terms of memorable experiences and to what extent. For example, in what ways, if any, does Coursera provide students with educational experiences? What are some of the benefits that students perceive Coursera provides? Asking these questions can lead to a critique of how well Coursera is activating experience economy opportunities, and suggestions of how they might do more
by using this theory. The following section will provide background information for readers to understand the evolution of MOOCs and the context in which Coursera is operating.

3.1 Background: Technology Advancement and Adoption of MOOCs

For the context of this study, it’s important to understand that MOOCs have developed from the pervasiveness of technology in today’s society. The increasing importance and use of technology in distance education can be attributed to a couple simple factors. Technology is more readily available today than in the past making a much wider range of technology more accessible to potential distance education students. With the growth of accessibility to technology, competition among global brands (i.e., Sony, Samsung, Toshiba, Asus, Apple etc.) has dramatically driven prices down. In turn, the lower price of technology makes it even more affordable to the general public and potential distance education students. The availability of technology and lower prices perpetuates the prevalence of technology, which helps construct and facilitates the operating environment for MOOCs.

Additionally, it should be understood that MOOCs have essentially progressed from evolving generations of distance education. Distance education is not an entirely new concept. There is indication of distance education in the United States as early as 1728 when Caleb Phillips, a local teacher advertised shorthand correspondence lessons offered by mail in The Boston Gazette (Holmberg, 1995). From these humble beginnings, distance education operations have essentially evolved through four generations according to researchers. As previously mentioned, the first generation involved a correspondence model based on print technology. The second generation was comprised of a multi-media model based on print, audio and video technologies. The third generation embodied a learning model based on applications of telecommunication technologies to provide opportunities for synchronous communication. The fourth generation, and current model, which supports MOOCs encompasses a flexible learning model based on online delivery via the Internet. Although many universities are just beginning to implement fourth generation initiatives,
the fifth generation is already emerging based on the further exploitation of new technologies (Taylor 2001).

Education systems are no more immune than other social systems from the rapid technological changes of modern society. The current post-industrial era is increasingly dependent on knowledge-based industries, information technologies, and communications (Bates, 1993). In today’s classrooms, technology is being used in many forms and applied in various practices. This can take the shape of power-point decks to support lectures, multimedia use of videos and/or audio clips to demonstrate examples, to entire exams being conducted online. Further examples include websites dedicated to education, applications to increase productivity, and technology suites designed specifically for students (i.e., Microsoft Office Student). These are just a few of the many examples of how technology has infiltrated the environment of higher education. The evolving generations of distance education as suggested by Taylor (2001) are aligned with our increasing dependency on technology. After generations of technological innovations, which have been applied and adapted to facilitate distance education, current technologies and the Internet are now offering new possibilities for virtual, teaching and learning experiences. This is important to understand because distance education and technological advances support the foundation of MOOCs and as Laurillard suggests there is pressure on academic systems to innovate through technology (2013), which is part of the reason behind the growing trend of MOOCs.

MOOCs are free and available for anyone interested in learning. MOOCs are developed with the idea that the desire to learn should be met without demographic, economic, and geographical constraints, and online learning through use of the Internet and technology provides a medium for that. The growing interest in MOOCs not only comes from the students enrolling, but there is also a vested interest from various institutions of higher education as demonstrated by Coursera’s hundreds of partnerships with universities around the world (Coursera.com). Researchers are interested in studying the impact that MOOCs may have on higher education. This vested interest stems from the fact that MOOCs are attracting hundreds of thousands of enrollments worldwide, which represent a new and diverse audience for higher education. Professors and institutions see a two-fold
potential in MOOCs. First is the ability to reach a widespread and diverse audience worldwide. Secondly, MOOC platforms can be seen as a relevant database source about students’ behaviors within the learning platform (Simonite, 2013). In this sense, professors and academic advisors may also use MOOCs’ technologies and data to further evaluate teaching strategies and pedagogies of distance learning, not only in virtual classrooms but also traditional brick and mortar ones.

Distance learning online has important characteristics that are essential to the construction of MOOCs. Convenience, mass customization, low cost, and being part of a learning community (Rosenberg, 2000) are just a few of the benefits that MOOCs capitalize on in order to continue and share the massive open online course model. As stated in an article by The New York Times, “because of technological advances — among them, the greatly improved quality of online delivery platforms, the ability to personalize material and the capacity to analyze huge numbers of student experiences to see which approach works best — MOOCs are likely to be a game-changer, opening higher education to hundreds of millions of people” (Lewin, 2012). MOOCs leverage today’s technologies to create content and assignments that are integrated into an online format and with the ability to be mass dispersed to distance learning students located worldwide.

3.2 Background: Evolution of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

The first MOOC model emerged in 2008 from a Connectivism and Connective Knowledge course (CCK08) led by George Siemens and Stephen Downes. There were 2200 enrolled students over the course of fourteen weeks. Downes (2012) cites two major influences for this open massive model of learning. One was the beginning of open online courses, notably Alec Couros’s online graduate course and David Wiley’s wiki-based course. What was important about these courses was that in some way, they included outsiders into university courses and invoked the idea that courses could exist beyond institutional boundaries. The other major influence was the emergence of massive online conferences. George Siemens had run a major conference on Connectivism, which was met
with great success. The successful format of being online and open made it worth considering a longer and more involved enterprise (Downes, 2012).

The form of MOOCs was not thought out and designed by one person or implemented in a singular setting, but the ideas that spawned CCK08 were clearly rooted in an open online connected learning environment which is the basis of MOOCs. According to a recent article, The MOOC concept was one of the first courses based on the premise of distributed content, where course content is accessed on the Web for free rather than from textbooks (Morrison, 2013). Though CCK08 was the first sign of MOOCs, many would claim that the well admired Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun is the godfather of free online education or rather MOOCs, as it is known today. In 2011, Thrun offered an Artificial Intelligence (AI) course taught from his living room posted online for free which followed the same lectures, homework assignments, and exams to the public masses as he taught to Stanford students who pay over $50,000 a year for the privilege. A computer was programmed to handle the grading, and students were steered to web discussion forums if extra help was needed. This course offering attracted upwards of 160,000 students from more than 190 countries. Somewhat shockingly, when exam scores were ranked, the top 400 scores did not come from any of the Stanford students but all from his online course offering (Chafkin, 2013).

Shortly after AI finished, Thrun started Udacity, a platform offering MOOCs with a strong focus on science and technology. Coursera opened soon after, followed by edX, another well-known MOOC provider that is actually a joint effort between Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard. Experts in the field make a distinction here between connectivist MOOCs (cMOOCs) as introduced by Stephen Downes and xMOOCs, such as Coursera, Udacity, and edX (Morrison, 2013). Some major differences between cMOOCs and xMOOCs (just referred to as MOOCs in this paper) are that cMOOCs are not typically sponsored or funded by higher education institutions but are instead organized by individuals or groups with a passion for a specific content area. Organizers commit their time to create a framework for learning where participants from all over the world can connect, share, contribute, and collaborate to learn in order to expand their network professionally and personally. Though xMOOCs might have some of these same goals, they
are typically more university-based platforms that are modeled on traditional course materials, learning theories and higher education teaching methods (Morrison, 2013). For example, MOOCs provided by Coursera are usually organized around video lectures and quiz-type assessment methods.

By exploring and exploiting new technologies, MOOCs have emerged as a popular choice for learners. Coursera demonstrates that most MOOCs do not require a prerequisite and introduce students to various undergraduate disciplines from different fields of knowledge. MOOC options are plentiful and may vary for students on each platform. There are currently many leading U.S. universities that offer MOOCs, either on their own or in partnership with companies based on MOOC platforms such as Coursera. Researchers indicate that even though no official business model has emerged for MOOC-based education, there are many start-ups that have surfaced due to its economic potential (Gaebel, 2013).

Currently, MOOCs are mainly distributed by American start-ups, such as Coursera and Udacity or organized by the institutions themselves such as edX. Both Coursera and Udacity are set up as for profit companies and have received millions of dollars in funding from venture capitalists, which suggests that at some point in time revenue will need to be generated. EdX is set up as a not-for-profit organization, and is funded by the institution(s) (Morrison, 2013). Either way, to be successful, MOOCs organizations will have to find a way to be self-sustaining over the long term.

Figure 4 illustrates a simple timeline that depicts the progression of MOOCs from the beginning and some of the connections that exist among the current major MOOC platforms. The following background section will take a closer look at the major competing platforms in the MOOC marketplace.
3.3 Background: The Major Providers and Platforms of MOOCs

An article by The New York Times dubbed the year 2012 as the year of the MOOCs and rightfully so. EdX had over 370,000 students enrolled in their initial roll out courses. Udacity had over 150,000 students enrolled for a single course, adding onto the MOOC revolution. But these numbers were minor when compared with Coursera’s staggering 1.7 million enrolled user base reported November 2012 (Pappano, 2012). Since then the enrollment numbers for these MOOCs have only increased, sometimes trifold. As previously alluded to, I will discuss the three main MOOC providers: edX, Udacity, and Coursera along with a brief history to present readers with a landscape of the competitive environment that MOOCs currently operate in and some of the differences that exist.

First to be discussed is edX, which is a nonprofit start up based in Cambridge, Massachusetts and governed by MIT and Harvard. EdX was conceived as a platform to provide a high caliber education to any student who seeks it with the goals of expanding access to education for everyone, enhance teaching and learning on campus and online, and to advance teaching and learning through research (edx.com). As described by an industry expert, edX, unlike the other organizations, is a venture spearheaded by universities and not individual entrepreneurs. Harvard and MIT started on this collaborative joint platform, not to generate a profit, but to use the platform as a vehicle for research, and to explore alternative education models (Morrison, 2013). Since its inception, edX was branded as an open platform that other universities could join and leverage for their own residential education purposes. Each member institution labels edX courses under their own names, (e.g., HarvardX, BerkeleyX, and MITx). A recent article states that the platform is primarily financed by its member institutions (Harvard and MIT), which have both committed $30 million each so far. Courses and certifications are currently free, but edX has plans to begin charging for more robust types of certification in the future. In any case, edX officials have said the course content will be still be free to users who just want to browse. Like its competitors, edX may eventually seek revenue through partnerships with private employers, connecting high performing and certified students to suitable jobs (Faviero, 2012).
Second to be discussed is Udacity, which is a for profit MOOC platform, founded in 2011 by Stanford researchers David Stavens and Mike Sokolsky, and former Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun (as mentioned earlier). Udacity started with just these three guys in a living room shortly after Thrun’s online AI course, fast forward a year later, and the company has over 40 full time employees (Pappano, 2012). Similar to other MOOCs, instruction from Udacity is offered in the form of free courses consisting of short, close captioned video lectures by university professors, supplemented by quizzes and homework. With Udacity, students can enroll in a course any time after its launch, and all course content can be completed at the student’s pace which is different than edX and Coursera's more time structured course offerings which only stay open for a limited amount of weeks at a time (Faviero, 2012). Recent news reveals that Udacity has stopped offering free certificates for course completion, and will charge a small fee for credentials, although all courses remain free for viewing (Kolowich, 2014).

Udacity claims that through using their platform students can be fluent in new technology, modern mathematics, science, and critical thinking. The company is a growing team of educators and engineers on a mission to change the future of education by bridging the gap between real-world skills, relevant education, and employment (Udacity.com). In line with that mission, Udacity currently partners with over 20 technology companies, with the aim of introducing students to potential employers (Faviero 2012). According to a recent article, the most significant partnership that exists to date is one Udacity has with AT&T. This program sponsored by AT&T allows for computer science students from all around the world to take classes for an online master’s degree program being jointly offered by Udacity and Georgia Institute of Technology. Fees or total tuition for the program are roughly $7,000 USD but still that is only about one third the cost equivalent of what an in state student at Georgia Tech would pay. As far as MOOCs go, this is a bold program, partly because it is the first accredited degree to be offered by a MOOC provider. The way it is structured is that Georgia Tech professors will teach the courses and handle admissions and accreditation, and students will get a Georgia Tech diploma when they're done, but Udacity will host the course material. Thrun expects the partnership to generate $1.3 million by the end of its first year. The program won't ultimately cost either Udacity or
Georgia Tech anything. Expenses are being covered by AT&T, which put up $2 million in seed capital funds in the hopes of getting access to a new pool of well-trained engineers as well as sending a large group of its employees through the program for training purposes (Chafkin, 2013).

The last MOOC provider being presented and the main focus of this thesis is Coursera, which was launched shortly after Udacity. Coursera offers courses from partner universities all around the globe, including Copenhagen Business School as well as other prestigious universities including Stanford, Duke, Princeton, and Northwestern (Coursera.com). According to a recent article which compares MOOCs, like Udacity, Coursera was also founded by Stanford affiliates. This popular MOOC platform was created by computer science professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller and is committed to making the best education in the world freely available to any person who seeks it. In similar xMOOC fashion, Coursera courses contain video lectures by university professors, often weekly, and offer interactive exercises, quizzes and peer-graded essays to reinforce knowledge, helping students to master the material (Faviero, 2012).

A recent article states how the vast majority of Coursera students are simply taking advantage of the free courses being offered by the MOOC provider. However, the company has also introduced a “Signature Track” to try to put more weight behind course completion awards issued by universities that offer courses through the MOOC platform. This article indicates that last year the Silicon Valley based company brought in $220,000 USD in the first quarter after it started charging for verified Signature Track certificates (Rivard, 2013).

According to its website, the way Signature Track works is that students can earn a verified certificate that is securely linked to their coursework and identity. Students who pay for Signature Track have to submit a photo ID of themselves to Coursera and are then identified by each individual’s unique typing pattern and tracked based on keystrokes to ensure that people who take tests or turn in assignments are who they say they are. Prices are currently set anywhere between $30-90 USD (Coursera.com).

Rivard (2013) cites in a recent article that according to cofounder Koller, Coursera remains interested in keeping courses free as one of the top MOOC providers since promoting free education is paramount to the company’s identity. However, a free course
does not mean a free end product, so the company is looking at further commercializing its certificates. Coursera's Signature Track basically operates on the same business model as any other online course in which a certificate of completion is provided to students at the end of the course to signify completion and comprehension of course material. According to the article, while some might claim that MOOCs as a whole have shown rather low and unimpressive completion rates, Coursera cofounder Koller indicates that paid Signature Truck users with skin in the game or some type of investment are finishing courses on time at significantly higher completion rates (Rivard, 2013). Coursera currently promotes its Signature Track by claiming that users can put completion certificates on their resumes as professional development or additional coursework (Coursera.com).

According to its website, there are currently 326 courses offered by Coursera which feature the verified Signature Track certificate, and 45 courses with specialization certificates. Specialization certificates take the verified Signature Track one step further and group together related courses designed to help students deepen their expertise in a certain subject. In order to earn the Specialization Certificate, students must complete Signature Track for all 3 courses and a capstone project within that specialization. Scores on capstone projects are determined through peer assessments that occur under the facilitation and supervision of instructors. A Specialization Certificate is an electronic document issued by the participating school and Coursera that demonstrates students have successfully completed a group of related courses (plus a capstone project) in a specific subject (Coursera.com).

EdX, Udacity, and Coursera are not the only providers in the MOOC marketplace, but whether because of high-profile founders, sizable investments/funding or broad reach, they are the three biggest MOOC providers. Figure 5 illustrates a breakdown of recently
acquired (approximate) enrollment numbers from these three major MOOC platforms. Previously described was a brief overview of the current MOOC landscape, which presented the major platforms in the marketplace. This thesis primarily focuses on Coursera, as it is the most popular, largest in course offerings and/or partnerships, and fastest growing of the current MOOC providers. The following paragraphs will outline how Coursera works and provide some context or background knowledge about the controversy that exists with MOOCs.

3.4 Background: More About Coursera and How it Works

Information gathered on the platform reveals that Coursera is partners with over 100 universities or institutions worldwide, many of which are world renowned and/or well established. Most courses are offered in English, however Coursera offers courses in 14 different languages with 58 courses in Chinese, 26 courses in Spanish, and 22 courses in French. With such an expansive MOOCs base, how does Coursera work? Like many other online platforms, Coursera depends on its user base to be active members. First, members are able to choose from over 700 courses created by the world’s top educational institutions. After signing up, students are able to watch short video lectures, take interactive quizzes, complete peer graded assessments, and connect with classmates and teachers. Furthermore, students are able to learn on their own schedules. Upon course completion, students are recognized for their achievements and can earn certificates through Signature Track as previously described.

Coursera is based on four key ideas that were influential in shaping its vision:

1.) Effectiveness of online learning
2.) Mastery Learning
3.) Peer Assessments
4.) Blended Learning

According to the Coursera website, online learning plays a significant role in a lifelong education and this is a key message that Coursera tries to deliver since all of the learning that takes place on Coursera happens online. In fact, a recent report by the U.S. Department
of Education found that classes with online learning, whether taught completely online or blended, on average produce stronger student learning outcomes than do classes with solely face-to-face instruction (Means et al., 2009).

Mastery learning is another important element in the development of Coursera. Mastery Learning helps students fully understand a topic before moving onto more advanced topics. According to a Coursera blog written by Course Operations MOOC Pedagogy Specialist, Relly Brandman (2013), mastery learning is about how students navigate through exercises and assignments. On Coursera, many instructors allow students to have multiple attempts on a single quiz, which allows students to take quizzes several times to thoroughly evaluate understanding of the material. Instructors have the option to use randomized quiz questions so that students see a different set of questions with each attempt. Mastery learning is characterized by both the opportunity to practice the material, as well as a benchmark for knowing when the material has been mastered. With relation to Coursera, this is demonstrated through the structure of quizzes, which allows students to have multiple quiz attempts as well as the benchmark of a high score on the quiz. According to a study conducted about mastery learning, an educational psychologist who developed the approach found mastery learning to improve the distribution of student scores by a full standard deviation above the control class that used the same method of instruction but didn’t require that students master the material before moving on. Figure 6 illustrates the achievement distribution for students in traditional, mastery learning, and individual tutoring instruction. Mastery learning results in one standard deviation above the average of the control class. This illustration is a simple depiction of how mastery-
learning students fare better achievement or test scores than non-mastery learning students (Bloom 1984). With regards to Coursera, the platform typically offers immediate feedback on concepts a student did not understand promoting the applied practice of mastery learning. In many cases, Coursera provides randomized versions of the assignment so a student can re-study and re-attempt the homework to demonstrate thorough understanding.

The third influential element or idea that the development of Coursera was based on is peer assessments. According to its website, in many courses, the most meaningful assignments cannot be easily graded by a computer. As such, peer assessments are an important part of the Coursera learning experience. Peer assessments allow students to evaluate and provide feedback on each other’s work. This technique has been shown in many studies to result in accurate feedback for the student and a valuable learning experience for the grader (Coursera.com). A study conducted by Keith Topping (1998) indicate that peer assessments are of adequate reliability and valid in a wide variety of applications. Peer assessments of writing and peer assessment using marks, grades, and tests have shown positive developmental effects on student achievement and attitudes. According to the study, these effects are as good as or better than the effects of teacher assessment. However, there are mixed opinions regarding the value of peer assessments. For some, peer assessment is seen as a way of compensating for heavy lecturer workloads by offloading some of the burden of assessment to students (Evans 2013).

In order to obtain the greatest value from peer assessments, the planning and organization required to provide peer assessments has to be balanced against students’ perceived benefits. Because Coursera courses are hosted entirely online, the organization of peer assessments is a fundamental building block of developing Coursera courses. A recent New York Times article illustrates Mitchell Duneier (a Princeton professor) who along with his assistants painstakingly graded thousands of midterms and finals from his MOOC in order to conduct a study that compared peer grading of the final exam in his sociology MOOC on Coursera with the grades that he and his course assistants would have given the students. The results were not as consistent as he had hoped and he had to tweak the grading rubric to capture some of the discrepancies (Lewin, 2012). Though this might not present peer grading from the greatest perspective, it is important to note because it
emphasizes the importance of building a functional peer grading system. Coursera is developing software that flags those who assign very inaccurate grades and gives their assessment less weight (Pappano 2012). This demonstrates that Coursera is invested in the importance of peer grading being utilized on its platform. Coursera leverages peer assessments to engage students from all around the globe to use the online platform as well as reinforce learning for students.

The fourth instrumental idea that helped shaped the vision of Coursera is the concept of blended learning. Many of Coursera’s partner institutions are using the online platform to provide their on-campus students with an improved learning experience. This blended model of learning has shown in studies to increase student engagement, attendance and performance (Means et al., 2009). According to a study by Williams (2002), the transformation of learning environments in higher education is critical in the increasingly electronic world to ensure that the benefits are fully realized for both students and institutions. A source of this transformation stems from the ability of online learners to be connected to a community of learners anytime and anywhere, without being time, place, or situation bound (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). This is a foundational element of Coursera and what makes it both flexible and appealing to students.

Coursera’s Mission:

“Coursera is an education platform that partners with top universities and organizations worldwide, to offer courses online for anyone to take, for free. We envision a future where everyone has access to a world-class education. We aim to empower people with education that will improve their lives, the lives of their families, and the communities they live in.”

(Coursera.com: About Us)

Part of what makes blended learning particularly effective is its ability to facilitate a community of inquiry, which incorporates different overlapping elements including teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence to create an educational experience (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Further, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) note that a
connection with others is essential to realize a community of inquiry and a sense of community is also necessary to sustain the educational experience over time. The idea of building a community is aligned with the benefits of e-learning previously mentioned by Rosenberg (2002) and Coursera’s mission of empowering people and the communities they live in through education. Communities also provide the condition for free and open dialogue, critical debate, negotiation and agreement/disagreement, which is a cornerstone of higher education. Blended learning has the capabilities to facilitate these conditions and adds an important reflective element with multiple forms of communication to meet increasing learning expectations of students in a technological transformative educational environment. The conclusion is that blended learning is consistent with the values of traditional higher education institutions and has the proven potential to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of meaningful learning experiences (Garrison & Kanuka 2004). This idea of blended learning and building a community of inquiry is intricately interwoven into the Coursera platform and its vision. The following paragraphs will describe the leadership at Coursera, which helps us better understand the company and controversy surrounding MOOCs.

### 3.5 Background: Leadership at Coursera

As highlighted on Coursera’s website, Daphne Koller is one of the founders and the current President of Coursera. She leads the growth and nurturing of Coursera's partnerships with universities. Koller is a professor in the Computer Science Department at Stanford University. She is known to have pioneered in her classroom many of the ideas that are key to Stanford's massive online education effort (Coursera.com). Andrew Ng, the second Founder of Coursera currently serves as Chairman of the Board, and acts as Chief Evangelist. He previously served as an Associate Professor of Computer Science at Stanford University and was the Director of the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab. In 2008, Ng started SEE (Stanford Engineering Everywhere), Stanford's first major attempt at free, online distributed education, which made about a dozen Stanford engineering classes publicly available. Over a million people have viewed SEE's videos. This is an example of
Ng’s commitment to promoting free education, a vital component of Coursera’s mission (Coursera.com). It was recently announced in May of 2014, that Andrew Ng would be leaving his day to day role at Coursera but still remain on the Coursera’s Board. He is moving on to become a chief scientist for Baidu, a Chinese search engine company, similar in some ways to Google (Harris 2014).

Another influential figure at Coursera is Richard C. Levin, Coursera’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO). He recently completed a twenty-year term as Yale’s President, during which time he undertook a major set of initiatives to internationalize the University. This included extending need-based financial aid to international students in Yale College, making international experiences the norm for all undergraduates, and planning and opening Yale-NUS College in Singapore as a model of liberal arts education for Asia (Coursera.com). That is a brief description of the current leaders at Coursera and their qualifications. This is important to know, as it is indisputable that good leadership plays a major role in achieving success in any business venture. All that is Coursera today and all that it will be tomorrow is a result of the influence of its leadership. The following paragraphs will broadly present the current landscape of MOOCs and the controversy that exists surrounding MOOCs.

3.6 Background: Controversy Surrounding MOOCs

There is much debate and controversy behind MOOCs, which raises a question about the future trajectory of Coursera. According to a recent U.S. News article, it's been less than three years since MOOCs have entered the public discourse, but the free online classes are causing quite a stir in the higher education universe as elite universities decide whether or not to embrace MOOCs. For the most part, colleges and universities don't typically accept MOOCs for credit, unless they are associated with their own programs. However, experts predict that this will change in coming years as institutions feel pressure from their peers and students to recognize the classes. Advocates say MOOCs have a range of benefits, even if they don't count toward a degree. The classes can be used as free professional development tools or for help with remedial courses before college. MOOCs can also help
students explore personal interests or transition into a new career (Haynie, 2013). Many of these benefits will be further expounded upon in the case study and analysis.

As more research studies are being performed to investigate MOOCs, it's impossible to ignore the low completion rates. Critics have claimed that although MOOCs often enroll many students at the start, only a small percentage of students actually finish the classes. According to a research study performed at Penn's Graduate School of Education, roughly only half of students who enroll even watch a single video lecture, and the average completion rate was about 4%. The Penn research tracked around 1 million students from 16 MOOCs offered by Penn professors through the Coursera platform (Perna & Ruby, 2013).

According to a recent US News article, despite the hype, many question the quality of the courses, arguing that the best way to educate students is through face-to-face interaction. Critics have also expressed concern over how MOOCs will affect the U.S. higher education system. As students turn to MOOCs taught by Ivy League instructors, some wonder whether regional colleges and less selective schools will lose some of their student base (Haynie 2013).

Another Penn study shows that a majority of MOOC users, roughly 80%, already have an advanced degree. This study surveyed roughly 35,000 students in over 200 countries. The students surveyed were from 32 different MOOCs offered by Penn professors (Christensen et al., 2013). Across the globe, the study found that it is the economic elite who are signing up to take MOOCs. Further the study shows there are significantly more males than females taking MOOCs, especially in BRIC and other developing countries. In Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa, 80% of MOOC students came from the wealthiest 6% of the population. This should not be surprising, as MOOC students need to have access to computers with fast Internet connections, which automatically creates a barrier for the very poor. There is a disconnect here from some of the core ideals that stemmed from the original intent of MOOCs, which sought to democratize education in a way that could reach all corners of the world. In 2012, Thrun (Udacity’s founder) was quoted at a digital conference in Germany saying, “Having done this, I can’t teach at Stanford again, I feel like there’s a red pill and a blue pill, and you can
take the blue pill and go back to your classroom and lecture your 20 students. But I’ve taken the red pill, and I’ve seen Wonderland” (Lewin, 2012). Some critics claim that far from realizing the high ideals of this message, in some ways MOOCs seem to be reinforcing the advantages of the ‘haves’ rather than educating the ‘have nots’ (Dodd, 2013).

However we should not ignore what MOOCs can offer to learners around the world and to higher education institutions. Our true return on investment for MOOCs may be difficult to quantify but that does not mean it is not there. Thrun is quoted in his blog saying, “To all those who declared our experiment a failure, you have to understand how innovation works. Few ideas work on the first try. Iteration is key to innovation” (Thrun, 2013). Some educators have claimed that the MOOC phenomenon and movement has raised more awareness and enthusiasm for higher learning than anything they can recall in recent history. MOOCs have allowed people to quickly and easily access learning in fields that they otherwise would have never pursued. Champions of MOOCs believe that they are the best development in higher education in decades, a way of providing free, high quality classes to students anywhere in the world (Haynie 2013). The following paragraphs will outline the case study design presented in this thesis, and take a closer look at Coursera, and what motivates students to participate in Coursera.

4.0 Case Study: A Look at Coursera Content and Students

The following paragraphs will outline and describe the case studies of this research including the empirical setting or field of study and boundaries of my research. I carefully selected Course A and Course B as described below as a frame for my case studies. I then performed in-depth interviews with students from the selected courses, which were ultimately utilized as my primary units of analysis. In addition, I followed several Coursera courses as a regular student and performed participant observation: I watched some of the lectures, participated in the discussion forum, and completed quizzes. Due to time constrains, it was not possible for me to follow all the MOOC platforms in the same way, nor did I complete any of the courses. However, I enrolled in several courses to allow me to investigate navigating Coursera’s platform and to become familiar with how MOOCs
function. Doing so allowed me to gather more empirical evidence, which was used to support the interview data, as well as expand on extra information, which was relevant to the research. The following is an outline of presented information used to structure the case studies:

- Course description – basic characteristics, such as length, types of content available, and format.
- Interface and design – description of main characteristics, multimedia and navigability.
- Participant overview – description of demographics, and brief student descriptions.

**Course Description:**

“Course A” and “Course B” as outlined below were the primary courses of focus that were under investigation for this study. The courses were chosen due to their close alignment with the Organizational Innovation and Entrepreneurship (OIE) program at Copenhagen Business School and its body of study, which aims to enable students to act as innovator(s) and entrepreneur(s) primarily in contexts of formal organizations, as well as analyze the conditions for innovation and entrepreneurship in such contexts.

Course A.) Developing Innovative Ideas for New Companies: The First Step in Entrepreneurship – University of Maryland, College Park

Course B.) Content Strategy for Professionals: Engaging Audiences for Your Organization, Northwestern University

Neither Course A nor Course B were a part of the specialization certificate but both courses offered Coursera’s *Signature Track*, which verifies completion and links coursework to the student with such benefits as a personal certificate URL, shareable course records, an "Add to LinkedIn" feature and dedicated technical support (Coursera.com).

**Course A Description:**

According to CourseTalk's Top Rated MOOCs (May, 2014), Course A is ranked as the #1 Entrepreneurship Course on Coursera and #5 Overall Business Course on Coursera. Course A allows students to explore how to identify and develop great ideas into great companies through learning how to identify opportunities based on real customer needs and developing solid business models. With this course, students experience a sampling of the
ideas and techniques explored in the University of Maryland's Online Master of Technology Entrepreneurship. Course A is taught by Dr. James V. Green who is responsible for designing and teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in entrepreneurship and technology commercialization, leading seed funding programs, and managing residential entrepreneurship programs for students at the University of Maryland. He leads the education activities of the Maryland Technology Enterprise Institute as the Director of Entrepreneurship Education. Dr. Green's research interests include entrepreneurship education and the psychology of entrepreneurship. Dr. Green earned a Doctor of Management and an MS in Technology Management from the University of Maryland University College, an MBA from the University of Michigan, and a BS in Industrial Engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology (Coursera.com).

Coursera offers three sessions of Course A throughout the year (January 2014, May 2014, and June 2014). The course length is the duration of 6 weeks, which consists of a series of video lectures each week and an end of week assignment to apply/reinforce learnings from the week. The full course syllabus, which includes a breakout of topics, recommended readings, and grading can be viewed in the appendix. Course A is offered in English, but the video lectures support both English and Spanish subtitles. Coursera estimates that Course A is expected to take approximately 5-7 hours work/week. Course A offered students an opening and closing survey to provide Coursera with feedback and comments about the course. Course A seeks to assist aspiring entrepreneurs in developing great ideas into great companies. Course A uses proven content, methods, and models for new venture opportunity assessment and analysis allowing students to learn how to identify and analyze entrepreneurial opportunities. Core elements taught in the course include value propositions, customer segments, strategic alliances, business modeling, initial steps to creating a business plan, and raising financial capital to launch a firm (Coursera.com).

Course B Description:

Course B enables students to significantly improve their abilities to understand audiences and develop strategic messages using words and multimedia such as pictures, graphics, and videos to convey their organization’s most important goals. With today’s complex information age, forward-thinking employees know that if they and their
organizations are to thrive, they need to go beyond the typical job descriptions. They must
master the most demanding communications frontier by creating engaging, strategic, honest
stories and information that is valued by their most important audiences (customers and
stakeholders alike) which will make their enterprise stand out. With this course, students
experience a sampling of the ideas and teachings explored in the Northwestern University’s
Content Strategy Curriculum. Course B is taught by John Lavine, a professor of media
management and strategy at Northwestern’s Medill School of Journalism and at the Kellogg
School of Management. Lavine was dean of Medill from 2005-2012. Before coming to
Northwestern, Lavine was the publisher/editor of a group of daily newspapers. He was also
an executive of an international film company in London and the United States and was
president and publisher of an international medical journal publishing company
(Coursera.com).

Coursera offers three sessions of Course B throughout the year (January 2014, June
2014, and October 2014). The June session is reserved exclusively for Northwestern
Alumni and select invited guests. The course length is the duration of 6 weeks, which
consists of a series of video lectures each week, learning questions, and a case study
assignment or project to apply/reinforce learnings from the course. Learning question(s)
were embedded in the video(s) to help students understand course concepts, though they
were not graded. In addition, every week, a faculty member posed an important question
related to the course in order to elicit responses to those questions from the diverse and
large pool of students to spark insightful conversations through discussion posts. The full
course syllabus can be viewed in the appendix. Course B is offered in English, with video
lectures supporting English subtitles. Coursera estimates that Course B is expected to take
approximately 3-6 hours work/week. Content Strategy helps those in organizations focus on
how for profit, nonprofit and government enterprises around the world use stories and data
to diffuse important information to specific internal and external audiences. Information
shared through content strategy must be credible, trustworthy and transparent in order to
enhance people’s ability to make important decisions in their work and personal lives.
Content Strategy is primarily crafted to help a target audience be better informed while at
the same time advancing the organizations’ strategic goals. Content strategy experts claim
that success in every for profit, nonprofit, or government organization or enterprise requires understanding and mastering of Content Strategy concepts (Coursera.com).

**Interface and Design:**

Course A and B featured 4 to 10 video lectures per week designed to engage students and share content through an interactive media. The general pattern established in the first week was repeated throughout the duration of the course. Figure 7 below depicts the design and layout of Course A. The left side of the screen features a navigation bar, which provides access to all course content including: syllabus, lectures, surveys, weekly assignments, discussion forums, and additional information as needed. The right side of the screen features a calendar of upcoming assignments or quizzes and recent discussion threads posted by students. The center of the screen is reserved for announcements, where the professor can quickly communicate messages to students, albeit the communication is only one directional and information is pushed from the professor to students. Browsing through several various courses, this seems to be a typical standard design template used by Coursera for course layouts. Having a standard design allows students to quickly navigate through the Coursera platform regardless of which course they are taking.

With regards to the multimedia, the video lectures can be downloaded and saved for viewing. This feature creates convenience and flexibility for students so they are able to listen and watch video lectures on their own time. The video lectures range from short introductory videos that are less than a minute to lectures that are more than 30 minutes.
- Course A features 49 video lectures. The average length of the video lectures for course A is roughly 20 minutes and 33 seconds.
- Course B features 38 video lectures. The average length of the video lectures for course B is roughly 5 minutes and 58 seconds.

With Coursera, students are not bound to be at a certain place during a certain time in order to learn. For the most part, the navigability of Coursera is simple, straightforward and intuitive. Some minor drawbacks with the navigation that I observed included adjusted settings such as volume not being automatically saved from watching one video to the next, the progress tracking of the videos watched might not be accurate since not all students view the videos from the Coursera player and navigating the discussion forums can be difficult at times. Overall the Coursera design seems to be slick and the interface is well organized, professional and easy to navigate. These features should only enhance as Coursera develops and improves.

As previously described Course A and B were selected and framed as a larger case study due to the nature of the course content that was provided. From the selected case study (Course A and B), I solicited interview participants, which were used as further individual case studies embedded within the context of the larger case study. Employing this strategy of examining the courses on a broad level as well as individual participants selected from the courses on a more detailed level allowed for a more thorough understanding of Coursera from the perspective of students who displayed some basic interest in business and entrepreneurship. This was an inadvertently significant characteristic of the individual participant cases because of the importance of studying Coursera within the context of innovation. In other words, by selecting students from courses that were related to entrepreneurship, there was a higher likelihood that the individual participant cases would have some opinion to share on the innovativeness of Coursera, which could generate data related to the Coursera experience. The purpose of designating Course A and Course B as larger cases was to partially draw the boundaries of my research. Moreover, the individual cases, in this case the student and respective interviews further contribute to knowledge generation. Below is a brief synopsis of the individual participant cases involved in the research.
Participant Overview:

- **Anne**: Participant from Course A. Anne is a 29-year-old female from Berlin, Germany and currently works with fashion/costumes for Blue Man Group Theater. This is her first Coursera course and she has already enrolled for her next course.

- **Dmitry**: Participant from Course A. Dmitry is a 40-year-old male from Israel and works as a systems engineering team manager in the semiconductor industry. He signed up for Coursera course in order to open his horizons.

- **James**: Participant from Course A. James is a 20-year-old male from the United States. He is currently attending Rice University in Texas studying chemical engineering. He enjoys learning for the sake of learning and took Coursera to gain more knowledge about entrepreneurship.

- **Louise**: Participant from Course B. Louise is a 36-year-old female from Denmark. She recently became a mom is currently unemployed. She seeks to improve her resume by leveraging Coursera courses.

- **Pablo**: Participant from Course B. Pablo is a 45-year-old male from Argentina and works as a systems engineer. Pablo was selected to be a Coursera teaching assistant for ‘foundations of business strategy’ course. He seeks to be a freelance consultant and aspires to leverage knowledge and theories learned from Coursera for this purpose.

- **Robert**: Participant from Course B. Robert is a 42-year-old male from Spain and works as an airport director or managing director in Ibiza. He enjoys the exposure to people from different countries and cultures through taking Coursera courses.

- **Stelios**: Participant from Course B. Stelios is a 23-year-old male from Greece and is a bachelor’s student at the University of Macedonia. He recently finished his final exams and has some free time while awaiting his results/graduation. He has been using this free time to explore MOOCs and take Coursera courses.

- **Stephen**: Participant from Course A. Stephen is a 24-year-old male from the United States. He is currently working in Supply Chain. He has used what he has learned on Coursera to help make his job easier.
• **Storer (Bob):** Participant from Course B. Storer, who goes by Bob is a 60-year-old male from the United States. Bob is the director of media relations at Northwestern. He is in charge of the website for the university and E-newsletter that gets released about two to three times a week to the entire university community. He’s written stories about Northwestern’s first MOOCs.

• **Sylvia:** Participant from Course B. Sylvia is a 27-year-old female from Germany. She currently works at a small hotel due to special circumstances but her field of study is in media production. She takes Coursera courses to gain exposure to topics outside of her formal discipline of studies.

The primary units of analysis derived from my data were essentially the individual participants that were interviewed and their stories or experiences. Each interview was separately analyzed using motivational theories and experience economy theories to guide the research. Furthermore, the analysis section structures a comparison among the numerous interviews to draw upon differences and similarities to further explore what motivation factors influenced students to participate in MOOCs. The following paragraphs will provide further details on the research methodology and attempt to explain some of the rationale behind the research.

### 4.1 A Qualitative MOOC Study: Methodology and Research

Qualitative research can often yield results that can be helpful in pioneering new ways of understanding trends and phenomena such as MOOCs. This study entailed a qualitative case study research design and the methods chapter describes some of the important decisions that were made while designing the study (i.e., qualitative study, case study, interviews, etc.). It also provides some insights as to why those were the best choices that could be made given my research question and the state of current research that was available. According to Anderson (2010), some advantages of employing qualitative methods are that it generates rich, detailed data that leave the participants' perspectives intact and provides multiple contexts for understanding the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, among the various strengths of using qualitative methods to study social
science research problems was the ability to obtain a more realistic view of the lived world that cannot be understood or experienced in quantitative analysis of numerical data and statistics.

I chose two Coursera courses to examine as larger case studies and then selected interview participants within the courses to investigate as individual embedded case studies. According to Eisenhardt (1989), case studies can involve numerous levels of analysis and typically combine various data collection methods such as interviews, archives, questionnaires and observations. My primary data was derived from ten (10) in-depth recorded interviews, which have been transcribed with permission and are provided in the appendix. The objective of the interviews was to collect empirical data from the responses that yielded detailed, thick descriptions and captured direct accounts of the student’s personal perspectives and experiences in order to carefully examine each case study. A small sample size was selected to investigate the research problem(s) in a comprehensive and detailed manner. The interview participants were selected based on their own voluntary efforts responding to a discussion thread I had posted in Course A and Course B requesting for volunteers to share their Coursera experience. The interviews were all conducted on a virtual video conferencing platform known as Skype, and lasted anywhere from 28-45 minutes in length, with an average of 36.75 minutes. I interviewed 7 males and 3 females with an age span of anywhere between 20 to 60 years of age. The interviews occurred across a span of several weeks due to challenges of scheduling constraints and time change differences seeing as how most of the participants were internationally located. The following paragraph is a brief description about the interview procedure.

An interview guide was used to structure the interviews but there was an open channel of communication to allow for participants to expound upon elements or factors that were important to them. Interview questions included but were not limited to: previous experience with MOOCs, familiarity with other MOOC platforms besides Coursera, participation level or interaction with other MOOC students, strengths/weaknesses of MOOCs, and personal benefits of MOOCs etc. Although all the interviews followed a similar flow of questions, each was unique in its own way due to the commentary of each participant who may have focused more on one element than another. In order to have rich
dialogue, it was important to have flexibility during the interview process to allow for participants to have the freedom to describe experiences in a deeper context.

I analyzed the resulting data from the interviews using pre-defined categories of student motivation based on theories. I examined the data with respect to common reported categories of student motivations based on previous research about MOOCs (Belanger & Thornton, 2013). I coded the participant interviews according to established categories of motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and applied an approach of content analysis to identify and classify responses. In an attempt to develop a broader picture of student experiences related to Coursera I also examined the data for any common emergent themes that arose from the interview responses connected to student motivations and/or experience values. The interviews were viewed as information rich and illuminative. That is, they offered useful manifestations of the phenomenon under study, in this case MOOCs or more specifically Coursera.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, I enrolled and followed several courses including Course A and B listed above to gain a deeper understanding of course content, and the dynamics of Coursera. As a student in the OIE program, I wanted to enroll in courses that were relevant to the program, and enlist students or engage with participants who were interested in a similar field of study. Following the courses included activities such as participant observation of video lectures, participation in the discussion forums, and completing various assignments and course quizzes. The objective of this personal experience and engagement was to have direct contact with the Coursera platform and interaction with other MOOC students. This level of engagement was important to understanding the phenomenon under study and allowed for more thorough insights as part of my critical inquiry. As suggested by DeWalt (2010), participant-observation is often used to gain greater understanding of phenomena from the point of view of participants. By following the courses, I managed to gather more data, examined pedagogies and had access the opportunity to interface with the Coursera platform. Participating in the courses gave me access to other kinds of data/insights as a participant-observer than I would have had if I only focused purely on student interviews.
Empirical evidence was also collected from five (5) blog posts, as well as participant-observation utilizing the Coursera platform and the participant interviews. I examined blog posts to extend my research in terms of supplementing the interview responses. I wanted to investigate whether the blog posts had similar or dissimilar perceptions to the participant interviews. I performed a search for “Coursera Experience” in the Google search engine and did a manual inspection to narrow down the sample of blog posts to 5 that were all selected from Coursera’s blog. This selection strategy made sense since all of the interviews were with Coursera participants. Blogger demographic characteristics such as gender and age were not collected, as they were not always available. A content analysis approach was used to analyze the sample of blog posts similar to the approach that was applied to analyzing the participant interviews. I examined the blog posts to evaluate whether it supported or unsubstantiated the data collected from the participant interviews. Additionally, the blog posts usually provided one very distinct story or experience that the blogger was writing about which allowed investigation of examples that complemented the use of experience economy theories. I considered student blogs to be valuable sources of information for both researchers and MOOC providers since they can offer rich insights into behavior and experiences.

I analyzed the units of analysis, in this case, each individual student and their responses as well as other empirical evidence collected to create a rich, detailed pool of experiences and/or stories to draw from. I turned to the data that resulted from the individual embedded cases in order to attempt to gather empirical evidence that could either support or not support the presented theories. I examined and studied the data for factors of motivation, user interactions and/or student participation, teaching pedagogies and strategies, MOOC content organization/presentation in order to test the application of both motivational theories and experience economy theories on MOOCs.

In this research study I used two theories to support and guide my research in order to build a strong conceptual framework (Maxwell, 2012). Two theories, rather than one, were chosen to broaden the paradigm of research used to investigate the MOOCs phenomenon. Due to the current relevance and popularity of MOOCs and the fact that extensive research has not been done, I was interested in better understanding the MOOCs
phenomenon. One of the major criticisms of MOOCs is the low completion rate so in order to further investigate this issue I wanted to go to the core and study the students. With that in mind, one of the recurring questions that kept arising with the low completion rate of MOOCs is, what could MOOCs be doing differently to attract and retain students? What might be some of the strengths of MOOCs that can be leveraged to boost completion rates? To address these concerns from a research perspective, a deeper knowledge of motivational theories was imperative to better understanding what types of factors motivated students to complete MOOCs. What kinds of factors compelled students to sign up for MOOCs in the first place? What types of factors inspired students to sign up for more? Motivational theories provided a fitting lens to investigate these questions by taking a look at both intrinsic and extrinsic forces of motivation.

Motivational theories are primarily focused on the individual student whereas Experience Economy theories provide a wider lens of examining MOOCs as a whole. Experience Economy theories take a step back from the individual student and explain how MOOCs, or more specifically Coursera, can provide a unique experience for users. A thorough understanding of what Coursera provides to students or what makes Coursera special is important to its overall success. Motivational theories coupled with Experience Economy Theories create a solid foundation as a conceptual framework to study MOOCs by taking both a micro (student motivation) and macro (Coursera experience) level view of the growing phenomenon.

The conceptual framework was essentially a structure that housed the research question, which is another fundamental qualitative research design component (Maxwell, 2012). I selected case study research as the best approach for my research question because qualitative studies often calls for an iterative process of developing a well-defined research question that can be studied in a dynamic way. In this context, more specific research questions are generally the result of an interactive design process rather than the starting point for that process. When developing the research question, I examined what I wanted to learn or understand by doing the study. In this particular case, I was interested in studying the growing trend of MOOCs and more specifically using Coursera as an example due to it being the most popular platform and most developed as far as course offerings. I
then tried to look at what questions my research attempted to answer, and how those questions were related to one another. As Maxwell (2012) suggests, the research question was not a starting point for the exploratory study but rather a molded result stemming from the student responses and the empirically collected data. Eisenhardt (1989) argues the process of building theory from case study research is iterative and is intimately tied with empirical evidence.

As such, case study research design was a useful tool for investigating the MOOCs phenomenon since applying a case studies approach allowed for a more flexible analysis of examining a group of students in the Coursera setting. “The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989). Basically, a case study is an in depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey. It is a method used to narrow down broad fields of research into more easily researchable topics. Some advantages of employing a case studies approach is that it is a rich source of information about behavior, and a suitable method to study different phenomena. As Eisenhardt (1989) notes, case studies can generate novel theories that might help us to understand the phenomenon better. Additionally, case studies are ideal for challenging theoretical assumptions and provide an in-depth perspective that can complement other research. Case study research and recognition is on the rise and evidence shows that this type of research design is becoming increasingly prominent (Yin, 2014).

Furthermore, as Maxwell (2012) describes validity is important to any study to explain why the research is relevant and credible. Qualitative researchers often must attempt to rule out most threats to validity after the research has begun by relying on evidence collected during the research process itself. To address the issue of validity, I remained flexible and mindful of that fact that during the interviews I was acting as a human instrument collecting data. When conducting the interviews, I aimed for empathic neutrality to show a nonjudgmental stance by trying to display openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness and responsiveness (Hoepfl, 1997). In addition, to minimize interviewer biases, the research questions for this study were vetted and scrutinized to frame questions openly in order to allow for participants to answer freely and I was cognizant not to influence the interview responses in any one direction. Awareness of these issues or
concerns brought a higher level of fidelity to the research because I was more attentive to possible concerns and had the ability to minimize potential problems. This understanding allowed me to garner a greater likelihood of obtaining the targeted information from respondents as related to the study. Further, as described by DeWalt (2010), I engaged in interview techniques such as active listening, sensitive silence, repetition and summary feedback to increase rapport with participants, which was important. As described, I tried to maximize the validity of the data that was collected by presenting a fair and objective analysis and interpretation.

**Methodology Limitations:**

Although ten interviews might not be considered a sizeable number, the interviews were in-depth and the responses were rich in stories and experiences. When compared with other qualitative studies, the number of interviews conducted for this study should be considered fair. Additionally, as mentioned, another thing to keep in mind is that most of the interviews were with international students residing outside of the US so significant time change was also a factor limiting the number of interviews I was able to perform. Though a small sample size was a limitation of the study, it was the most fitting approach for an in-depth analysis. Another limitation of the study was that the participants were selected from volunteers solicited only from 2 courses so the sampling was not representative of the Coursera population but rather just a thin slice of it. Participant-observation also had some of its own limitations such as the time consuming nature (DeWalt, 2010). Further, utilizing a case studies approach made it difficult to generalize the data, but this is not an inherent disadvantage since the purpose of the research was not to generalize the findings but to get a better understanding of Coursera students for future research as further discussed in the conclusion.

**Epistemology:**

When I reflected on the methodologies that were deployed for this research, the question of epistemology arose. Research often extends beyond simply connecting practices to theories but the even greater perspective of how the research is positioned in a body of existing knowledge. Untangling the complexities of practice and research into structured
epistemologies was not an easy task. Though to put it simply, according to Feast & Melles (2010), there are three main positions: Objectivism, Constructionism, and Subjectivism, which in turn build on theories of reflection, creation, and perception respectively. In other words, the tactical methods used to collect data became an overarching methodology which when applied extended into a theoretical perspective, which was borrowed from a *study of knowledge* (Conee, 2005) or rather an epistemology. As suggested by Deetz (1996) epistemology discourse is primarily concerned with how research is produced, shared, and used. Figure 8 is a simple depiction of how organizational research has widened its boundaries (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009) and is reflective of a blending of paradigms. It was recognized that epistemology can drive the research process, and I chose to take the approach of constructionism in my knowledge generation with this study. Because Coursera is new and the research surrounding MOOCs is still developing, I took a constructionism approach because the research and study of knowledge was being co-created as more information was learned. As suggested by Krauss (2005), from a constructivist view, knowledge is established through the meanings attached to the phenomena studied; researchers interact with the subjects of study to obtain data; inquiry changes both researcher and subject; and knowledge is context and time dependent.

However, as Deetz (1996) argues, it is possible to combine or designate various viewpoints and bodies of knowledge for different purposes. Through my participation in the courses, and conducting the interview with students I was able to embrace multiple perspectives and generate meaningful data as a participant-observer. Though I took on mostly a constructivist approach, I understood that some other elements of objectivism and subjectivism were in play. For example, my research attempts to better understand the phenomenon of MOOCs, or interpret this phenomenon in a way that invites multiple perspectives, which is indicative of subjectivism. Additionally, I used established theories
to help guide the analysis, which is suggestive of objectivism. By having a flexible and emergent methodology of blending the various approaches at different times of the research process, I was able to present a more comprehensive study.

5.1 Analysis: A Look at Student Motivation and Experience Value

The previous paragraphs outlined the case studies or empirical field of study along with the methodologies applied to this particular research study. The following section will dive into an inductive analysis of the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and relationships that exist by exploring analytical principles and analyzing participant responses guided by the use of theories. Capturing the details of the individual cases being studied allows for a cross-case analysis by grouping similar responses together and scrutinizing the dissimilarities. When conducting a qualitative study, unexpected or irregular responses are just as important to analyze as responses that confirm previous findings or expected outcomes. The analysis section shall provide readers with a holistic perspective of the phenomenon under study. The environment that MOOCs operate in is understood as a complex system that is comprised of more than just the sum of its parts. The focus is on complex interdependencies and system dynamics that are in effect. Motivational theories and experience economy theories are used to guide the overall discussion and analysis.

5.2 Analysis: Understanding Student Motivation

Student motivation to participate in MOOCs is a significant area of interest to many higher education constituents and researchers who are interested in improving online learning processes. Understanding MOOCs and motivations for both MOOC students and MOOC providers have many implications for higher education institutions. A study by Yuan and Powell (2013), state that “the scale and open nature of MOOCs provides opportunities for expanding access to higher education and creates a space for experimentation with online teaching and learning. Understanding student motivation is
critical to exploring and developing this area of research. Thus, the primary research question of this thesis was shaped to examine what motivates MOOC learners. Surveys conducted by researchers at Duke University about Duke’s first MOOC course show that student motivations typically fell into one of four categories (Belanger and Thornton, 2013):

1) To support lifelong learning or gain an understanding of the subject matter, with no particular expectations for completion or achievement
2) For fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation
3) Convenience, often in conjunction with barriers to traditional education options
4) To experience or explore online education

The previous findings and 4 categories as discovered by Belanger and Thornton (2013) was used as a baseline for this research. For the purposes of this analysis I took the four established categories and placed them on the self-determination continuum as previously introduced and illustrated by Figure 1 in the theory section, which was adapted from Ryan & Deci (2000). Ryan & Deci present intrinsic motivation as the most self-determined form of motivation and amotivation as the most non-self-determined form of motivation (or lack thereof). Ryan & Deci (2000) also present extrinsic motivation which falls in the middle of the self-determination continuum and list four regulatory styles of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation.

Category 1 is easily classified as being self-determined and highly intrinsically motivated. Lifelong learning with no particular expectation for achievement or completion (both of which are extrinsic factors) means that students who are compelled to enroll in Coursera because they are motivated to learn simply for the satisfaction of learning have a high level of intrinsic motivation. As previously stated in the theory section, SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2000) helps researchers to better understand intrinsic motivation by introducing three psychological needs (competence, autonomy, relatedness) which motivate oneself to initiate and engage in certain behaviors by fostering high levels of intrinsic motivation. This implies that students are motivated to enroll in Coursera for their own interests, and Category 1 is aligned with this idea that students are interested in learning for the sake of learning and are intrinsically motivated to do so. As discussed later, the participant interviews revealed elements of competence, autonomy, and/or relatedness, which help to drive their intrinsic motivation.
Category 2, for fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation is somewhat related to Category 1 in the sense that intellectual stimulation can be linked with motivation to learn. The important distinction here is the entertainment and fun factor. On the self-determination continuum (Ryan & Deci 2000), Category 2 would also primarily be intrinsically motivated since students find that spending time on Coursera is entertaining or fun, and the activity itself is enjoyable. This is also aligned with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and the idea that part of intrinsic motivation is associated to psychological relatedness, which is linked to a sense of liking, or how much one inherently enjoys an activity. This category of entertainment value and social, fun factor will be further explored and examined in the following analysis of understanding the Coursera Experience through the use of experience economy theories.

Category 3, convenience (often in conjunction with barriers to traditional education options) is not as clear as Category 1 and 2 when being placed on the self-determination continuum. There is some uncertainty as to where ‘convenience’ would fall on the spectrum. Is convenience considered an intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factor? Upon further examination of the participant interviews, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs, the data shows that on the self-determination continuum (Ryan & Deci 2000), Category 3 could be classified as identification regulation stemming from extrinsic motivation. According to the responses, the students have identified with the convenience of spending some of their time on Coursera and recognize that this behavior benefits him or her in achieving a goal, whatever that might be. Identification regulation is typically viewed as a sub-category of external motivation that is more self-determined than other forms of extrinsic motivations, which are less self-determined. In other words, the students see some (extrinsic) value from participating in Coursera and it is their own self-determined choice, which motivates them to participate. Part of that evaluation and a factor that attracts students to Coursera and keeps them coming back is the convenience of it, and the fact that they can view/listen to the lectures at a time of their choosing. Category 3 will be further explored and discussed in the following paragraphs with data analysis from the participant interviews, which demonstrate the convenience factor of Coursera and how that helps motivate students (or at least makes it easier for them) to continue to use Coursera.
Category 4, to experience or explore online education can be attributed to curiosity and like Category 3, has some ambiguity as to where it falls on the self-determination continuum. The idea of experiencing online education can be linked to the Coursera experience, which will be further explored in the following analysis with the use of experience economy theories. As for where Category 4 falls on the self-determination continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2000), content analysis from the blogs shows that students have a sense of integrated regulation, which is a form of extrinsic motivation that is the most self-determined on the spectrum. Integrated regulation occurs when a person has integrated a motivation within him or herself and engages in certain behaviors because they have internalized and assimilated that behavior with personal values or needs. Integrated regulation is different than intrinsic motivation because the behaviors are done in order to achieve some external outcome. In this example, students want to experience or explore online education and use Coursera as a platform for doing so. In other words, the experience the students gain from using the Coursera platform can be viewed as an external outcome whereas the knowledge that is gained from the courses themselves just for the sake of learning (Category 1) is more intrinsically motivated.

The following are excerpts from the participant interviews and blogs, which help illustrate the analysis above and are examples of how this research is aligned with what was previously discovered (Belanger and Thornton, 2013) about student motivations regarding MOOCs. Intrinsic motivation to support lifelong learning (Category 1) was a common cited theme or motivation from my research. Dmitry, who is a 40-year-old systems engineer from Israel said it best, “I decided to attend the course to open some horizons for myself. I use it to learn. At all times, I’m learning something.” Dmitry isn’t at all interested in earning certificates from Coursera or any sort of external recognition; he enrolls in the courses for his own personal growth and knowledge. He often enrolls in several courses at once, but doesn’t necessarily complete them. He enrolls in courses that interest him so that the content can be archived in his Coursera profile and he can go back and attend to the lectures on his own time. Another example is Pablo, a 45-year-old systems engineer from Argentina. Pablo is also not interested in earning Coursera certificates, instead he said, “I’m really interested in what the courses will allow me to learn and what the courses will
teach me.” Stephen, a 24-year-old young professional working in Seattle states, “I love learning and constantly making myself better.” Anne, a 29-year-old fashion artist from Berlin, also expresses similar sentiments of intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning. She wasn’t ready to start working after studying. She said, “I have the basics now but I don’t really know the specifics of what I want to do and I wanted to keep studying.” Coursera is a great option for those in Anne’s position. She took the entrepreneurship course and was very satisfied with the material, she said, “with this opportunity of Coursera’s entrepreneurship class it’s like having a checklist to go through step by step and it really helps you think.” This was her first Coursera course, and prior to its completion, she is already enrolled for more courses. She admits that she is probably going to be a Coursera junkie for life. Those are some good examples which depict that Coursera students are indeed intrinsically motivated to learn for the sake of learning which is aligned with previous studies (Belanger & Thornton, 2013).

Next, (Category 2) fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation was also a student motivation that was mentioned during my research. Category 2 is associated with relatedness, which has to do with a sense of liking and can also include social aspects or an experience of connectedness with others. Robert, a 42-year-old airport director from Spain, spoke a lot about the social experience of Coursera. He started a group in a previous Coursera entrepreneurship course titled “Skype International Group”, which consisted of about 6-7 people from all over the world (US, Spain, Brazil, Ireland, Germany, and Hungary) who committed to a one and a half hour group Skype discussion every week. During the Skype session, the group would discuss everything related to the course for that week and tried to resolve the weekly cases from the course together. Additionally, Pablo described another example of a Coursera social experience that is worth mentioning. He was selected to be a teaching assistant (TA) from one of his previous Coursera courses because of his high level of participation, good grades and work experience. He said, “We are 8 students from around the world (US, India, Romania, Ireland, Argentina) and we are all brand new TAs. There is a kind of special community that we can all share our experiences as intermediate level students…And we have direct access to the professor for any questions or any opinions.” Considering that MOOCs have tens of thousands of enrolled students at once, having a channel of direct access to the professor is quite a privilege for the TAs and something
Pablo described as a really good experience. Entertainment value, social experience and intellectual stimulation are fairly broad categories that can be understood in a variety of contexts. Therefore the experience aspect and entertainment value of Coursera will be further examined and explored using experience economy theories to gain a greater understanding in the following analysis.

According to the data, convenience (Category 3) was classified as identification regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is a form of extrinsic motivation. According to the responses, the students have identified with the convenience of spending some of their time on Coursera and recognize that this behavior benefits him or her in achieving some (extrinsic) goal. The idea of convenience that Coursera provided was consistently mentioned as a factor in the interview responses. In fact, convenience and the flexibility of Coursera was one of the most frequently mentioned benefits that resulted from my research. Student accounts of convenience are exemplified below:

- “The access is very convenient. Very convenient. I have nothing bad to say. It’s just good. Probably you know what, all the internet projects running for the last 25 years was invented for Coursera.” – Dmitry
- “I really like that it’s flexible. I would have had a real big problem if I had to sign in at certain times. And I like that you can download all the lectures.” - Anne
- “It’s easy cause I can take [Coursera] from home. I don’t have to turn up at a specific place or time. And with my kid, it’s easier. I can take half and do it later.” – Louise (a new mom)
- “[Coursera] is more easy than going to the campus at the university...it’s very different but something that I like about Coursera is the flexibility compared to in person classes.” – Stelios (a bachelor’s student from Greece)
- “With my crunch for time, I actually watched [the video lectures] on 1.5 or 2 times the normal speed...typically I watched them on the weekends.” - James
- “The strengths are simply that you can get there from anywhere. You can kind of manage your own timeframe. You can watch the lectures at 2’oclock at night if you can’t sleep or whatever. You can watch them at 6 in the morning before you go to work for a few minutes. That’s great, that’s beautiful.” – Sylvia
- “It was very convenient. I was able to study whenever I wanted.” - Stephen

The examples provided reaffirm Belanger and Thornton’s findings that Category 3 certainly is
a student motivational factor as related to MOOCs due to the flexibility of scheduling and pure convenience factor that Coursera provides to students.

Although, the notion of (Category 4) to experience or explore online education was not explicitly mentioned as a motivational factor from my research, it was indirectly alluded to in several instances. For example, Bob, the director of media relations at Northwestern, stated that the university views Coursera as an opportunity to explore online education. He said, “[Northwestern’s] attitude is we’re going to try different kinds of online education and we’re going to do it both for our students who may want to learn that way and our faculty who may want to learn different techniques of teaching.” Further, Bob goes on to say that, “Right now, [content strategy] is an open MOOC to the world but [Northwestern] is learning from this. They’re figuring out how to apply that [knowledge] and offer it to Medill alumni or maybe a wider group so that we’re giving something of value to our alums. Many of whom did not grow up in the content strategy world of journalism but grew up in a day before the Internet.” This was a unique interview that provided more of a university angle and how MOOCs can also benefit universities as well as students. Bob had some fascinating insights into the benefits of exploring online education from the perspective of Northwestern. This is aligned with extrinsic motivation and identification regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) since Northwestern identifies with the value of using Coursera to explore the online education space and learn from that experience. Similarly, John Lavine, the MOOC professor from Course B posted in his closing announcement to students, “You created an extraordinary learning community on a global scale. Even as you said you learned from us, we want you to know that we also learned from you. (Coursera.com)” John makes a good point and valid statement that learning is a two way street. To further this point, the notion of exploring or experiencing an online education from a student’s viewpoint was mentioned in several of the participant interviews. Three participants (Anne, Louise, and James) mentioned how this was their first Coursera course and James went so far as saying how this was actually his first ever online class. To provide a more thorough understanding, Category 4 will also be further examined in the following analysis section using experience economy theories.

Furthermore, related to student motivations, there was another research study by Yuan & Powell (2013) that examined the implications that MOOCs have on higher education institutions. Part of that research study provided an extension of Belanger &
Thornton’s (2013) 4 categories, where Yuan & Powell (2013) listed the following additional factors that influence student motivation to learn including: enjoyment and fun, challenge and achievement, future economic benefit, and development of personal and professional identity. This is consistent with the earlier message from the theory section and current analysis that motivation factors can be both intrinsic and extrinsic in form. Let’s take a closer look at these extended motivations presented by Yuan & Powell (2013) and how it supports or does not support what has already been discussed with relation to the current analysis and motivational theories. The first two (enjoyment and fun & challenge and achievement) are very similar to what was already discussed with Category 2 (For fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation) from Belanger & Thornton’s study. As such, I will focus more on the additional two categories listed by Yuan & Powell (2013) to extend my analysis.

Future economic benefit is primarily an extrinsic motivational factor. For the purpose of consistency, let’s examine these two categories using Deci & Ryan’s (2000) self-determination continuum. Future economic benefit could be classified under identification regulation. For example, the student would be motivated to participate in Coursera because he or she has personally identified with the importance of taking MOOCs and views the behavior of doing so as a stepping-stone to a better career and with that also future economic benefit. In my research, future economic benefit was not an explicitly mentioned theme, however the idea of professional development was mentioned during several interviews, which is aligned with Yuan & Powell’s study. With that in mind, according to my research, I would like to extend two additional categories of motivation for MOOC students that emerged from my collected data.

The previous paragraphs presented an analysis using Deci & Ryan’s (2000) theories about motivation and the following 4 categories of MOOC student motivations as a baseline (Belanger and Thornton, 2013).

1) To support lifelong learning or gain an understanding of the subject matter, with no particular expectations for completion or achievement
2) For fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation
3) Convenience, often in conjunction with barriers to traditional education options
4) To experience or explore online education
From my own research, I have illustrated through this analysis how participant responses are congruent to what Belanger and Thornton have proposed. Upon further analysis, I would like to extend two additional categories (or perhaps one might be viewed as sub-category of student motivations) as related to MOOCs.

5) Development of personal and professional identity
6) To practice English with others in a professional learning environment
I propose that Category 5 is a standalone category of student motivation established both from my research analysis and since it already had some merit as it was also listed as a student motivation factor from Yuan & Powell’s (2013) research. Moreover, I propose that Category 6 is either a standalone category that could be used in future research studies concerning MOOCs/student motivations or viewed as a sub-category of Category 2. The reason for the flexible and indeterminate categorization of Category 6 results from the fact that this motivation factor was an interesting emerging theme in a couple of the interviews but more research would have to be done before any generalizations could occur. Therefore, I find it worth noting that using Coursera as a channel or tool of practicing English is interesting to this thesis but future research could determine that it is not widespread and thus it could be viewed as a sub-category of Category 2 (social experience & intellectual stimulation) for the purposes of this thesis. However, if future research finds that many students are motivated to use MOOCs as a method of practicing English, then it might make sense for Category 6 to be a standalone category for future research pertaining to MOOCs and student motivations.

Let’s examine these two additional categories in a similar manner as the previous categories by using Deci & Ryan’s (2000) self-determination continuum. Category 5 could be classified as identification regulation, which is a form of extrinsic motivation. According to the responses, the students have identified with the idea that taking MOOCs on Coursera could lead to professional development or assist with switching career paths, which are extrinsic goals. Thus, the students are motivated to continue to take Coursera courses because they identify with the idea that doing so will result in positive professional development.
Louise, who is currently unemployed, said, “That’s why I’m taking Coursera, to improve my resume.” When asked about how she chose which Coursera courses to take, she continues on to say, “I actually chose [project management courses] because there was a position that I wanted to apply to and it said something about project management or organizational structure, and then I just searched for something [on Coursera] and I thought hey, this is interesting so I took it.” Further, Stelios, a bachelor’s student who just graduated said, “I take courses based on what I would like to do myself professionally, and what my job experience is about and [related] to my studies also.” Pablo, a systems engineer who is interested in starting his own consulting business expressed thoughts about how in 2-3 years and after finishing maybe 15-20 more Coursera courses, he would be equipped with the combined theoretical knowledge and industry experience from his 25 years of working to start his own freelance consulting business. Another example is James, who is currently studying at Rice University for his bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering but utilized Coursera to learn more about entrepreneurship, which is something he said he has been interested in since he was a little kid. James said, “By taking the course I figured I would learn something that would be useful in my future [with entrepreneurship]… It’s just a shame I couldn’t be more involved but I would love to talk to more people and even Dr. Green himself. The course definitely supplemented my entrepreneurial drive. I’ve seen more examples, more information, more things to think about.” These examples and quotes from my research illustrate that Category 5 should be viewed as an extended and independent category of student motivations regarding MOOCs.

According to the data, category 6 was also classified as identification regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) on the self-determination continuum. In this example, (which is applicable for students who are not native English speakers) the students identify with and find value in utilizing Coursera as a channel or method of practicing English. And because the students have personally identified with the (extrinsic) value of practicing English, they feel more autonomy and are motivated to continue to use Coursera as a means of doing so. The idea of using Coursera to practice English was a somewhat unexpected finding from my research. It was not an answer that I had anticipated, but upon reflection it makes a lot of sense for non-native English speakers to view Coursera as an opportunity to practice.
English in a professional learning environment. Robert, a 42-year-old male from Spain said it best, “I recommend [Coursera] to everyone. Everyone that wants to talk in or learn English. I recommend this as a way of leaning. Not only the subject related to the course but also the language. For Spanish people, who we normally know a minimum of English, what we need is practice, practice, practice. [Coursera] is a good way of practicing.” He continues on to say, “I see a lot of Spanish people getting into Coursera. I see it in this course. There are a lot of Spanish people and I think that what they want is to practice English. I see a lot of people in the forums from Asia as well.” Similarly, Pablo, a 45-year-old male from Argentina expressed how he was very interested in Coursera wasn’t sure about his English level and cautiously only signed up for one Coursera course to test it out. However, upon completion Pablo quickly signed up for three more courses. Not only did Pablo discover that his English level was sufficient, with his high level of participation, he was selected to be a TA for one of the courses. These are just a couple of examples from the participant interviews.

There is more evidence of Category 6 found in the forums. Upon examining the forums, English as a second language was mentioned in several discussion threads. Some students expressed dissatisfaction in Coursera’s peer review process and how they were having trouble grading or having their papers properly graded. There are several posts by students encouraging fellow students not to be too concerned with mixed translations or spelling and just to practice their English. The related discussion posts can be viewed in the appendix. The possibility of indirectly leveraging Coursera as an open space to practice English in a professional learning environment could be a very useful strategy to enhance Coursera’s image as a global learning platform and attract more students. Considering that a large percentage of Coursera students reside in countries where English is a second language, this would be a fascinating point to explore for future research. The global identity of Coursera is a unique aspect of MOOCs and an integral part of the Coursera experience. The following paragraphs will further analyze the collected data along with the idea of what the Coursera experience value might be with the use of experience economy theories.
5.3 Analysis: Understanding the “Coursera Experience”

Understanding student motivations is important because it has broader implications as to what sorts of factors make MOOCs successful or unsuccessful. Understanding these factors will enable MOOCs to improve the product/service, or what I argue to be the experience value that MOOCs are providing to consumers. Particular interest should be paid to understanding the student experience or in this case, the Coursera experience in order to improve the experience value as well as online learning and e-learning pedagogies.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), experiences are more differentiated than commodities, goods or services and hold the highest value in the marketplace. As such it is vital for Coursera to understand exactly what kind of experience value that they are offering to consumers in order to enhance their business model and capture more market share. For the purposes of this thesis, it should be understood that Coursera is being consumed as an experience rather than a good or service. Although Coursera contains elements that could be considered as a good or service, the overall experience of using the platform, exploring and choosing classes, reading assigned texts, watching video lectures, participating in the discussion forums, interacting with other students online, peer reviewing assignments and exams, earning certificates are all part of the Coursera experience.

The theories that Pine and Gilmore have developed related to experience economy will guide the direction of this analysis and the following discussions. With that in mind, the following paragraphs will analyze empirical data collected from the participant interviews, blog posts, and observations to present a clear distinction of what students are saying about the Coursera experience. Pine and Gilmore (1999) describe the idea of experiences broken out on a quadrant that make up the 4 realms of experience, (entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist) as illustrated by Figure 3 from the theory section. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), these experiences occur across two dimensions. The first dimension of experience corresponds to customer participation within the experience. The second dimension is related to the level of connection or relationship that exists between the consumer and the experience.

According to the model that was presented by Pine and Gilmore present (Figure 3), Educational experience (Quadrant 2) is the realm that the Coursera experience would most typically occur. Quadrant 2 correlates with a high level of (active)
participation and a relatively low level of connection (absorption rather than immersion in the experience). Coursera is promoted and functions as an educational platform so it makes sense that the Coursera experience would usually be consumed as an educational experience falling under Quadrant 2. Intuitively, it makes sense that Coursera is classified as an educational experience. However, there are instances, according to the data, which illustrate that the Coursera experience can occur in the other quadrants as well. The other quadrants indicate a higher or lower level of participation and/or connection with the experience. Entertainment experience (Quadrant 1) has less active participation than educational experiences (Quadrant 2). Escapist experience (Quadrant 3) involves a high level of (active) participation as well as a high level of connection with the experience or immersion in the experience rather than just absorption of the experience.

For example watching a movie would be an entertainment experience and involves less active participation for consumers than taking an acting class, which would be an educational experience and involves more active participation. For both entertainment and educational experiences, consumers are absorbing (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) the experience as opposed to being immersed (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) in the experience. Continuing with the previous example, acting in a major production movie would be considered an escapist experience that involves active participation and immersion in the experience as opposed to taking an acting class, which was considered to be an educational experience. That should provide some distinctions as to how experiences can occur within the 4 realms of experience as presented by Pine and Gilmore (1999). The following paragraphs will demonstrate through the use of empirical data how Coursera can be experienced in the entertainment, educational, and escapist realms. Although, as suggested by Pine & Gilmore (1998), the best experience value for consumers is typically found in the center point of the experience realms integrating elements of all 4 quadrants.

According to the data, for most consumers, Coursera is considered to be an educational experience (Quadrant 2). Several blog posts illustrated this point of demonstrating how Coursera was an educational experience. For example, Feynman Liang is one of Coursera’s ‘top 50’ students by number of courses he has completed. In his blog post, he writes, “At first, I was skeptical about taking classes online. Since I was already enrolled in a 5-year bachelor’s
program between Amherst College and Dartmouth College, what reason was there for sacrificing my already scarce time to take classes online? With hesitation and the intention of dropping out when the class got hard, roughly a year and a half ago I enrolled in my first course on Coursera” To date, Feynman has now completed over 34 Coursera courses. Feynman claims that Coursera has been a life-changer. The Coursera educational experience has supplemented his own formal education. His blog states, “As I worked through the course, I noticed overlap between Coursera’s lectures and my actual college classes. Pretty soon, I was walking into class only to find myself reviewing material already covered on Coursera. Likewise, often the quizzes and programming assignments on Coursera were a great place to actually apply the theory covered in my college lectures. Rather than competing for my time, I discovered a pleasant symbiotic relationship where the two classrooms reinforced each other”.

Another Coursera blog post by Laura Cushing uncovers a similar response, she states, “When I started my first course at Coursera, I was so excited. I had no idea what it would be like! Would I be able to keep up? Would I be able to interact with my professor and my fellow students? I was a bundle of nerves waiting for the course to begin. And when that course opened - there was so much to do. So many things to discover, and keep straight. Now that I’m on my seventh or so class, I still feel that excitement of beginning a new learning experience - but a lot less anxiety. Now I know where everything is located, and how to use the Coursera system effectively.” These are primary examples of how Coursera is being consumed as an educational experience. Consider now that there is also a tie in here with motivational theories, as previously discussed. One of the main motivations that students reported for using MOOCs was to explore or experience online education (Category 4) and Coursera is a stage¹ for them to do so.

However, Coursera is not strictly an educational experience. For some consumers, Coursera is experienced as a form of entertainment (Quadrant 2). Several of the participant interviews (Anne, Robert, Dmitry, and Stelios) watched and/or listened to the Coursera video lecture materials as they were exercising, commuting or other daily activities. Anne

¹ Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) Progression of Economic Value (Figure 1) illustrate that businesses should aim to stage experiences.
said she usually watched the video lectures on the train in the mornings on her way to work. Robert is active with sports, and said he would listen to the videos as he went on runs. Similarly, Dmitry would go jogging for an hour each day and would listen to Coursera lectures during this hour. Stelios would view Coursera content on the train during his commute from university to work or home. This type of passive participation along with an absorption connection level is indicative of entertainment experience (Quadrant 1). There are many entertainment experience options for consumers. For example, the students could have chosen to watch movies, or TV shows, or other multimedia, or listening to music, or e-books during their daily activities of exercising or commuting but instead chose to spend that time buying into the Coursera experience. Notice that although Coursera is free, it does take time (which is a valuable resource) to view the course content and study the materials in order to appropriately apply it to completing the course. In some cases such as Dmitry, he was not at all concerned about completing the course. He enrolled in courses that interested him, up to 5 at a time, in order to have the course content archived so he would be able to continue to view the material during his daily jogs.

There is further support that MOOCs are being consumed as a form of entertainment which comes from Belanger and Thornton’s (2013) Duke study about MOOCs. This study revealed that (among those who completed the survey) half of non-certificate earners reported watching all of the video lectures despite no formal recognition for completion. Course web site analytics also confirm that the numbers of students watching lectures always far exceeded the number of students completing the weekly exercises (Belanger & Thornton, 2013). This is an interesting point for Coursera because it demonstrates that part of their capture market share is interested in the entertainment experience value that Coursera offers. Although not all students may have completed the course, the study reveals that high levels of students are watching the videos. This was also true for Sylvia. In her interview, she said, “But I’ve got a few [Coursera courses] where I’m not completing them which means I won’t get any recognition for the course but I watched the videos and such because it’s interesting but it wouldn’t have any value to get a certificate.” This knowledge could help shape the way Coursera markets some of the video content and materials to consumers as a form of entertainment. There is also a tie in here with

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motivational theories, as previously discussed. One of the main motivations that students reported for using MOOCs was for fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation (Category 2). This is aligned with the idea that students are motivated to participate in MOOCs as a form of entertainment. Coursera could attempt to make their multimedia content more appealing to on the go consumers and easy to access on mobile devices and such.

Further, although probably not as prevalent, some empirical data suggests that for some consumers Coursera is experienced as a form of escapism (Quadrant 3). Sylvia moved back to a small town in Bavaria to take care of her sick mother. In her interview, she said, “I’ve been taking MOOCs because I’m going crazy. If you’re home a lot and if you’re taking care of someone, you do have time but you need to be flexible about it. There’s an hour here and hour there where you literally have nothing to do so you can sit around, or you can read but after a month or so I couldn’t do that anymore so I started out doing MOOCs.” There have been weekends where Sylvia has compressed 2-4 weeks worth of material into a single day. She mentioned a time when she spent three full days on Coursera during which she pretty much started at 9 in the morning and finished sometime in the evening. The following example is from a blog post by Ines Cifuentes. She writes, “I am 58 and living with Stage 4 breast cancer. One of the tough things about advanced cancer is how much it takes away. My days are long as I can no longer work.” She fills some of that time with Coursera by taking a course on Modern and Contemporary American Poetry, something she has always been interested in. Both of these cases suggest a situation where the student was spending a significant amount of time on Coursera and in a way experienced a form of escapism through their participation and connection to the experience.

Another example is Dipendra, a college student from Kathmandu, Nepal. He writes, “I became hooked on the discussion forums. I looked forward to hearing back from my fellow classmates. The discussion forums were very lively and never sleeping. The topics we discussed would go on and on for hours, which was never the case in an in-person classroom that I had experienced. It was exhilarating.” This is aligned with a study by Meyer (2003) about blended learning which shows that discussion threads can provide a
permanent record and expand time, discussions are often more thoughtful, reasoned and supported by evidential sources when expressed online. Dipendra continues, “This type of *immersive and organic learning experience* helped me see hundreds of diverse perspectives on the topic of sociology. I also had a unique sense of ownership of the class.” A few weeks after the course ended, Dipendra was invited by the professor of the course to visit with him in person at Princeton University due to his active presence in the course discussion forums and weekly Google+ hangouts, which is an instant messaging and video conferencing platform that connects multiple users at once with the ability to video chat. This is an interesting example because it shows that Coursera has already taken some measures to reward students who have immersed themselves in the learning experience that Coursera offers.

The last example is from China’s MOOC superstar himself, Wang Zhen. He writes, “MOOCs have definitely changed my life. First, MOOCs have pretty much taken over my non-work life. Through MOOCs, I’ve also met a ton of students who are as passionate about MOOCs as I am. Third, for the first time in my life I’ve attracted attention from the media!” Wang Zhen has earned 40 credentials of which over 30 are from Coursera. These cases demonstrate some examples of active participation coupled with a high level of connection (or immersion) that the students felt with the Coursera experience. Although, these cases are probably not the typical Coursera experience, special attention should be paid to such non-standard cases because there could be potentially untapped opportunities there. In turn, those students who have immersed themselves in Coursera are able to experience an intangible side of Coursera that is more memorable and sensational than purely an educational experience. As suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), experiences are intangible, sensational, and memorable, which is what I suggest that Coursera students are experiencing when they are actively participating and connecting with the learning experience that Coursera offers. As an experience firm, Coursera should recognize that they are providing more than just a product/service but rather that they are spreading and sharing the Coursera experience with the world. In conclusion, MOOCs should aim to provide consumers with an experience that integrates elements of multiple experience realms in order to provide consumers with the best experience value.
6.1 Conclusion & Discussion: Why Studying MOOCs Matter

The seemingly simple concept of providing higher education at a low cost or free to many participants simultaneously is experiencing rapid growth within the constraints of higher education institutions which typically have more of a traditional learning scheme. MOOCs are currently one of the hottest topics of discussion in higher education, which makes it important to have a thorough understanding of MOOCs from a student perspective. This understanding offers a bottom-up approach to understanding MOOCs from the viewpoint of actual users or in this case, from Coursera students. As previously stated, since MOOCs are part of a recent phenomenon, there are not many academic studies concluded yet that could offer models of new learning practices or measure the innovational impact that MOOCs may have on higher education. This makes understanding student motivations even more important given that the research can be a looking glass into what makes MOOCs successful or unsuccessful.

In order to explore the primary research question: What motivates students to participate in MOOCs; this thesis aimed to offer an exploratory study of MOOCs by utilizing a case study approach to examine and evaluate a series of in-depth student interviews, blogs and other empirical evidence. Considering the emergence of MOOCs within the context of new emerging technologies, this thesis also included an investigative study of the Coursera platform to examine its user interface and features. This research and analysis provided an empirical foundation of which could add pertinent findings to the development of relevant debates involving MOOCs. MOOCs can be seen as an extension of existing online learning approaches, in terms of open access to courses and scalability, they also offer an opportunity to think afresh about new business models. MOOCs have been generating a considerable amount of media attention and significant interest from higher education institutions and venture capitalists that see MOOCs as a business opportunity to be exploited. The Internet introduces interactivity to distance learning and integrated curriculum developed according to a new digital infrastructure. The development of MOOCs is rooted within the ideals of openness in education, and that knowledge should be shared freely in an open platform made available to all.

Technology is progressing and becoming more prevalent in our everyday lives. With that in mind, the higher education system is not exempt from the technological overflow.
With the inundation and use of technology in today’s classrooms, it’s hard to imagine that less than 35 years ago the majority of distance education delivered throughout the world was still entirely print based (Bates, 1993). As previously mentioned, since that time, distance education has evolved through evolved several generations with MOOCs pioneering the current fourth generation of distance education which involves a flexible learning model based on the Internet and online delivery. Although many universities are just beginning to implement this fourth generation of distance education initiatives, the fifth generation is already emerging based on the further exploitation of new technologies (Taylor 2001). This fast pace and the pervasive growth of technology are consistent with Society’s increasing dependency on technology. The broad universally adopting attitude that Society has towards embracing new technologies creates a competitive environment for higher education institutions to operate in. With this increasing dependency on technology, only the higher education institutions that are able to quickly and systematically adapt to apply these technology trends will be able to succeed and thrive. No longer do localities, or brick and mortar classes bind higher education institutions. MOOCs are permanently breaking down these boundaries brick by brick, and it is this systematic adaptation and evolution of online distance learning that propels MOOCs to become more popular and a force that Universities can no longer just ignore.

As MOOCs are pervading higher education, this force is compelling educators to confront existing assumptions of teaching and learning in higher education especially as it relates to online pedagogies. Indeed, leaders of higher education are challenged to position their institutions to meet the increasing demands of prospective students who are collectively expecting more for less. From many perspectives, MOOCs can be seen as a solution or method of meeting these growing expectations and/or demands for higher quality learning experiences and outcomes. As numerous articles in both the academic and popular press have pointed out, MOOCs are a rich source of information and can generate a tremendous amount of data that opens up considerable opportunities for educational research. Both edX and Coursera have developed platforms which track students’ every click as they use platform resources, complete assessments, conduct peer reviews, and engage in social interactions. These types of data have the potential to help researchers identify, at greater depth than ever before, what contributes to students’ learning and what hampers their success (Breslow et al, 2013). With its large user base, MOOCs offer a vast
resource for data mining, which could potentially provide valuable insights into online teaching and student learning preferences. The digital footprint of learners using the technology is captured in large data sets that can, potentially, provide useful insights into online teaching and learning with very large numbers of students at low or minimal cost.

The primary research question of this thesis (“What motivates students to participate in MOOCs?”) is an extension of this type of analysis, which examines potential success factors. The research presented in this paper offers a qualitative contribution to answering the question Davidson (2012) has proposed is central to the success of online learning: “What modes of learning work in what situations and for whom?” This is important because studying and analyzing what governs student behavior is the most important source of information for higher education institutions and MOOCs. Knowing this information is essential to the success of MOOCs and higher education institutions seeking to systematically adapt with the advancement of technology. Information is power! And useful, relevant information is a strong guide in making strategic business decisions, uncovering unmet customer needs, pinpointing obstacles or problems, benchmarking and evaluating successes, identifying and understanding opportunities, and in many cases, discovering new ideas for products or services. Research and revealing information on student behaviors and/or motivation factors is just as important to understanding MOOCs as market research is fundamental to the success of any business.

Although this research paper is qualitative in nature and cannot be generalized to the greater population, it was designed to generate useful and powerful in-depth information regarding MOOCs and student motivation. As the analysis described which is also aligned with previous research (Belanger & Thornton, 2013), student motivation with MOOCs primarily occurred within 4 categories:

1) To support lifelong learning or gain an understanding of the subject matter, with no particular expectations for completion or achievement
2) For fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation
3) Convenience, often in conjunction with barriers to traditional education options
4) To experience or explore online education

My research findings proposed that two additional categories of student motivation should be explored in future studies to include:

5) Development of personal and professional identity
6) To practice English with others in a professional learning environment

Further, my research attempted to explain the perceived benefits of Coursera by examining the experience value that MOOCs offered to students. In this way, I suggest that MOOC providers are providing students with an educational experience more so than a good or service. More extensive research will need to be conducted in order to further examine the true value that MOOCs provide to students.

As one entrepreneur and former venture capitalist notes, “MOOCs have been both the darlings of the media and the targets of massive backlash over the last two years. Many have claimed that they are thrashing and cannot find a business model, but I believe they hold massive potential and are just starting to find their stride in the complicated world of ed-tech” (O’Shaughnessy, 2014). MOOCs offer an opportunity for both profit and nonprofit organizations to gain a share of the large market that exists for higher education. Due to the immature status of MOOCs and its capacity to attract attention through a massive user base, a thorough understanding of MOOCs and what works and what doesn’t work is imperative to sustaining future success. As previously described, without the ability to systematically adapt, these higher education institutions will fall further and further behind leaving a larger gap for new entrants to take over in this technological space. Already, more providers are appearing in the MOOC marketplace. This trend, which is starting to expand rapidly, heightens the competition both amongst existing MOOC providers and with traditional bricks and mortar higher education institutions.

The American Council on Education, an influential association of university presidents, is considering for credit status for some Coursera courses. Additionally, some schools are designing their own for credit offerings, creating potential competition for Coursera and its peers (Korn & Levitz, 2013). The current value propositions for institutions to engage with MOOCs are identified as “education access, experimentation and brand extension”. Larger corporations such as Pearson and Google are also planning to move into the higher education sector as global players and are likely to adopt a MOOC based approach as a part of their plans (Yuan & Powell, 2013). The business model and the benefits for universities and organizations that offer free online education with MOOCs are still unclear. Some MOOCs have started generating income from exam registration, certificates, or job placements, whereas others, such as nonprofit edX, remain still totally
free. MOOCs have the ability to expand access to education, for those who are interested and extend institutions’ reach and reputation internationally. A study by Duke offered similar broad implications for the university’s MOOCs initiatives, which aim to promote teaching and learning experimentation, innovation, support strategic goals of global outreach, extending knowledge in service to society and enhancing their brand reputation (Belanger & Thornton, 2013).

As suggested, the importance of studying MOOCs is relevant because of the growing technology trends and demand for change in the higher education system. MOOCs provide a new way of thinking about how education is offered and dispersed. This study delivered additional research about MOOCs that provided an in-depth perspective into one of the most important constituents: the students. The primary goal of my research was to understand MOOCs through the personal evaluation of actual students or voluntary users of the Coursera experience. This information is important because much of the research data that exists with MOOCs is more quantitative and statistical in form comparing enrollment rates versus completion percentages. I wanted to take a richer approach of studying how students are benefiting from MOOCs by examining and evaluating how Coursera was impacting their lives and what motivates them to participate.

A study by Milligan, Margaryan, and Littlejohn (2013) identified motivation as an important contributor to student engagement in MOOCs. However, why individuals participate in MOOCs has yet to be explored, which is what this study aims to do by presenting an analysis of student motivation. As researchers have suggested regarding MOOCs, it would be valuable to learn about the actual motivations in place, the percentage of participants taking up MOOCs for those reasons, and to know how those motivations might vary from one course or discipline or even provider to another (Liyanagunawardena, 2013). The findings from my research are a good starting point for future research regarding MOOCs and student motivation. It should be noted that the nature of my research question and the data that was studied (student motivation) primarily had an optimistic perspective on MOOCs because in most cases, students wanted to share about their positive experiences with Coursera and how it has benefited them. Although many of the interviews also described areas of improvement or things they would like to see happen with Coursera in the future. This study is important in regards of adding additional empirical evidence to a nascent area of research. Studying MOOCs will become increasingly important, as
researchers desire to learn more about this recent phenomenon in higher education. The following section will examine some limitations of the study that were experienced.

6.2 Conclusion: Limitations of Research

As previously discussed, a key limitation of the study was the relatively small sample size. A consequence of the small sample size is that it is not methodologically sound to draw generalizations from the findings. This can be addressed in future work by capturing a greater data set and performing more detailed analysis. Another limitation was due to the nature of my research question, I likely did not interview those students whose motivation was very low, the kind of students that are likely to drop out and/or not volunteer to speak about their MOOC experience. This is a population we will want to understand better in the future and will be an important area of research for future studies. Going beyond just this study and looking at limitations of MOOCs from a greater perspective, researchers indicate that there are a number of concerns regarding MOOCs, which remain. Three common limitations surrounding MOOCs regard the business model, the pedagogical approach(es) employed, and the low completion rates (Yuan & Powell, 2013). How can MOOCs become profitable in order to be sustainable? Can MOOCs innovate higher education? How can MOOCs boost completion rates? These are all important areas of research for future studies and the following paragraphs will describe some potential future directions regarding MOOCs.

6.3 Conclusion: Future Directions

As previously mentioned throughout the study, distance learning and online education are not new concepts and were built on evolving generations of traditional learning models. MOOCs attempt to open up these traditional higher education models by providing widely accessible, low cost (free), and flexible university level courses for learners across the globe from a wide array of topics and course offerings. Researchers suggest that the popularity of MOOCs has attracted a great deal of attention from higher education institutions and private investors around the world that are seeking to build their brands and/or to enter the education market (Yuan & Powell, 2013). A more open education
model brings new opportunities for innovation in higher education that will allow institutions and investors to explore new online learning models and innovative practices in teaching and learning. With that, institutions will need to look more closely at and learn from the different initiatives, such as MOOCs, that have developed outside of traditional higher education models and are creating new business models to meet the different needs of new groups of learners in the globalized marketplace.

Future directions of research include expanded studies on student behaviors regarding MOOCs in order to try and understand what does or does not work. Further, future studies can evaluate the impact of devoting fewer resources on development (e.g., video production) and more resources on learner support. For example, how can MOOCs actively engage students to create a more real-time interactive learning environment? There should be a strong focus on increasing learner activity and engagement because these elements are vital to the strategy and success of MOOCs. Many would agree that there is a hardline between MOOCs and the full campus experience that higher education institutions provide. The ‘magic’ that happens on campus goes beyond just the classrooms, but in labs, during group meetings, during conversations with professors and interactions with peers. Students want to feel that the teacher is ‘there’, which is an element that is currently lacking with MOOCs (Morrison, 2013). Future studies can evaluate how this function or support might effectively be fulfilled or possibly outsourced. Regardless of what changes are in store for MOOCs, quality is critical to its growth and expansion. Future studies can take what is currently known about MOOCs and apply more quantitative research approaches for generalization purposes. An example could be to develop a questionnaire based on the findings of this study to test for student motivation on a large scale and see how it is or is not applicable. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are important to gaining a wider perspective and understanding of MOOCs, especially in the current quick changing environment that is facilitated by new technologies.

Based on my research, I don’t believe MOOCs should be viewed as a threat to how higher education institutions operate, but as an opportunity for advancing and enhancing education models moving forward. A recent Forbes article describes one potential path for MOOCs that I believe is promising: as a supplement to classroom learning (Adams, 2013). Though MOOCs may fall short of some initial projections, there is no doubt that MOOCs are a catalyst for highlighting the potential of online education. Skeptics may question the
true impact value of MOOCs, but the CEO of MOOC platform EdX said it best in a recent Forbes article, “We hope to democratize and reimagine education so that anyone, anywhere, regardless of his or her social status or income, can access education” (Kanani, 2014). Irrespective of media opinion or what the latest research findings may reveal about MOOCs and low completion rates, this is an admirable and worthy goal that all MOOCs platforms strive towards. Innovation with education models and learning is vital to the progress of any society, and MOOCs are paving new paths, though only time will tell where those paths are going.
7.0 References


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[End of References]
## 8.0 Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix A – Syllabus for Course A

Course A: Syllabus, Schedule and Grading

Developing Innovative Ideas for New Companies: The First Step in Entrepreneurship – University of Maryland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Topics and recommended readings</th>
<th>Deliverables due at the end of the week</th>
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</table>
| **Week One:** Introduction to Innovation and Entrepreneurship  
Starts: May 19 | Welcome Course overview  
What is entrepreneurship?  
Who is an entrepreneur?  
Entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation  
The world's most innovative companies  
Types of innovation  
Enterpreneurs and strategic decisions  
The Opportunity Analysis Canvas  
*Recommended Readings for Week One: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapter 1* | Assignment 1A: Opening Survey (2%)  
Assignment 1B: Entrepreneurial Perspective (10%)  
Due: May 25 |
| **Week Two:** Entrepreneurial Mindset, Motivations, and Behaviors | Introduction to entrepreneurial mindset, motivations, and behaviors  
Entrepreneurial mindset  
Enterpreneurial motivations  
Enterprising behaviors | Assignment 2: Entrepreneurial Mindset, Motivations, and Behaviors (12%)  
Due: June 1 |
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<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Recommended Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>Risk taking in entrepreneurial decision-making</td>
<td><em>Recommended Readings for Week Two: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapters 2, 3, and 4</em></td>
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<td>Risk, uncertainty, and stakeholder involvement</td>
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<td><em>Recommended Readings for Week Two: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapters 2, 3, and 4</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Three:</td>
<td>Introduction to industry understanding</td>
<td>Assignment 3: Industry Analysis (18%)</td>
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<td>June 2</td>
<td>Knowledge conditions</td>
<td>Due: June 8</td>
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<td>Demand conditions</td>
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<td>Industry lifecycle</td>
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<td>Industry structure</td>
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<td>Competitive advantage</td>
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<td>Complementary assets</td>
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<td>Reputation effects</td>
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<td><em>Recommended Readings for Week Three: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapters 5, 6, and 8</em></td>
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<td>Week Four:</td>
<td>Introduction to customer understanding</td>
<td>Assignment 4: Customer Analysis (18%)</td>
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<td>June 9</td>
<td>Macro changes that increase new venture opportunities</td>
<td>Due: June 15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring real market needs</td>
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| Satisfying real market needs  
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<th>Strategic positioning Strategic planning</th>
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*Recommended Readings for Week Four: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapter 7*

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<th>Week Five: Business Modeling</th>
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<tr>
<td>Starts: June 16</td>
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| Introduction to business models  
| Value innovation |
| Opportunity identification |
| Business models |
| The business model canvas: Part 1 |
| The business model canvas: Part 2 |
| Partnerships |
| Outsourcing |

*Recommended Readings for Week Five: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapters 9 and 10*

*Further recommended readings: Business Model Generation (Overview) - Available here.*  
For more information on the business model canvas, we suggest "Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers" by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur.

| Assignment 5: Business Model Canvas (18%)  
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<td>Due: June 22</td>
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Week Six: Business Planning
Starts: June 23

<table>
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<th>Introduction to business plans</th>
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<tr>
<td>Defining the business plan</td>
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<td>Authoring the business plan</td>
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<td>Sales forecasting</td>
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<td>Managing the sales pipeline</td>
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<td>Developing the marketing mix: Part 1</td>
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<td>Developing the marketing mix: Part 2 Pricing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building financial statements</td>
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<td>Sources of financial capital</td>
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<td>Final thoughts</td>
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Recommended Readings for Week Six: The Opportunity Analysis Canvas - Chapter 11

Software for authoring business plans is available here.

Assignment 6A: Business Plan Evaluation (20%)
Assignment 6B: Closing Survey (2%)
Due: June 29

8.2 Appendix B – Syllabus for Course B

Course B: Syllabus, Schedule and Grading

Content Strategy for Professionals: Engaging Audiences for Your Organization – Northwestern University

SCHEDULE AND PACING

Each week, the MOOC will address at least one major theme of Content Strategy. The first three weeks of the MOOC are about how to understand and create content in the digital age:
• **Week 1** sets the stage by defining Content Strategy and setting up the three truths that limit, in a profound way, every person you want to reach with your content.

• **Week 2** emphasizes why understanding your audience and being able to effectively segment them is crucial to getting your message across. It also addresses how to craft a core creative concept for a content brand.

• **Week 3** is all about using content “experiences” to engage the people you want to reach and the fundamentals of creating an editorial voice.

Weeks four through six focus on what to do with content once it has been created:

• **Week 4** looks at media platforms and how best to tell an organization’s “content story” across those platforms using a human-centered design.

• **Week 5** is dedicated to utilizing social and mobile media.

• **Week 6** brings together the prior weeks by focusing on managing content across your organization, the issues around insourcing/outourcing content, as well as the some legal issues associated with Content Strategy.

Since this MOOC is for professionals who are in different time zones around the globe and who work on different schedules, we've constructed the course to fit into your life. You don’t have to “show up” at any specific time. You can come and go in whatever way works for you.

The MOOC is set up to run for six weeks. We know that some people like that structure but others do not want to be confined to a six week framework where some material is provided each week, so we have provided all of the material to let you make your own choice about how you want to participate. There are videos and examples each “week” which build on each other. So if you decide to do the weekly watching of videos and participating in discussion boards or want to take a weekend and go through the whole course, that is up to you. But we recommend moving through the course in order to understand how segments build on each other.

If you have only a few minutes, you might spend them listening to a lecture or engaging in a discussion about something that has been covered that week. (The “lectures” are broken into thoughtful segments. You can listen to them in pieces or all at once.) While many people do them in pieces, some participants do a week or more in one sitting. Both approaches work.
GRADES
While there are no grades in this MOOC, to "pass" or successfully complete the Content Strategy MOOC - whether you are in the Signature Track or not - you need to complete 70% of the work presented. The completion percentages are as follows:
• complete and submit the Shenshi Case Study assignment and three peer reviews (70%) - REQUIRED
• watch the videos (10%)
• answer the learning questions (10%)
• participate in the discussion boards (10%)
The Statement of Accomplishment will be awarded to participants who successfully complete the MOOC but do not enroll in the Signature Track for a Verified Certificate.

DISCUSSION BOARDS
One of the most important aspects of any learning environment is the interaction you have with other participants and the faculty. To help facilitate this, there are discussion boards. Every week, one of us on the faculty will pose an important question, but it will be your response that will bring those topics to life.

On the left-hand navigation bar there is also a link to a board called "For future MOOCs, what do you want to know more about?" This board is an opportunity for you to tell us what subjects particularly interest you. We will respond to some of them in this MOOC. And those that we cannot cover in our short six weeks together we will include in future Content Strategy MOOCs.

Please take the time to read through all the discussions. Through your unique background and work, you may see a place where you can contribute insights that no one else has and we all want to know.

In other instances, you will find that your ideas have already been posted by someone else. You can still be very helpful. How? There is an arrow up and arrow down function in the comments section. If you don’t have anything new to add but really like what someone else has said, click the up arrow to give the comment a boost and make it more visible for others. Or, if a comment is off topic or not helpful, mark it with the down arrow.

Using this system will allow all of the MOOC participants to more quickly grasp the important topics being discussed.

CASE STUDY
As important as each topic, the learnings throughout the six weeks will be applied to a case study we have created to put your knowledge into action. The case study is centered on the fictional company of Shenshi, a popular Chinese men’s clothing retailer that is looking to expand their “fast fashion” brand to a global market.
To help Shenshi accomplish this, you will complete a final project where you will develop a “persona” for a potential Shenshi customer from your country/market, create a core creative idea for the brand, create/design a short piece of content using tone and voice, and form a plan to roll out a specific content story using all of the elements covered in the MOOC.

You may think that the case we use has no applicability to your large, small, government, non-profit or for-profit organization. Actually, it is a terrific metaphor for your situation. After you have completed the case study, you will have the rudiments for thinking about content in your organization. The only "homework" in the course is the case study which allows you to use your understandings gained in the weeks.

BEST PRACTICE PROFESSIONAL EXAMPLES
Throughout the MOOC, we will use a number of real-world examples from various organizations that are using Content Strategy in new and intelligent ways to tell their important stories. They are from companies as diverse as the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., Philips in Asia, and SunLife Financial in Canada, AkzoNobel, and AT&T. From the weekly lecture videos and case study leading up to the interview, you will have a firm grasp on what organizations are doing to create effective Content Strategy in 2013-2014. With the IBM interview, you will see the future played out today with your employees and across all of the countries where you work. You will also better understand how Content Strategy will shape the next five years, 10 years, and beyond.

IBM INTERVIEW
In Week 6, Professor Lavine interviews IBM senior vice presidents Jon Iwata and Mike Rhodin as a powerful summation of all that was covered as well as a fascinating picture of what will happen to Content Strategy around the world from now to 2020. Because of IBM’s unique position in the global content frontier, this interview is a “window into the future” for you and your organization.

8.3 Appendix C – Student Interviews (Transcribed)

10 Student Interviews Transcribed: Anne, Dmitry, James, Louise, Pablo, Robert, Stelios, Stephen, Storer (Bob), Sylvia.
Anne Beyerlein – Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

Okay, well now I’m 29 I was born and raised in Berlin, Germany. I studied fashion design in Berlin and I did my bachelors in 2010. Then I wasn’t ready to start working yet it was like okay I have the basics now but I don’t really know the specifics of what I want to do and I wanted to keep studying. Because well on one hand I was good at it and on the other hand I felt I wasn’t ready yet. So I did the masters program at the same school. We had the German study system before that. So I was the first round of bachelors and masters. So it was really quite chaotic at some times. But also really interesting because you had a lot to contribute. You could kind of be a part of the process of how the course should be let out and what should be in them content wise, which was really interesting. Then I did my masters thesis in 2011 about the sustainability and recycling and reuse of clothing. Well then I started working which is a work in process actually. I decided to stay in Berlin or other words I didn’t want to go to any other German city because they were just not that interesting to me. And I have all my family here and a couple of grandparents that I’m happy are still alive and I just didn’t want to go abroad right away. And my spouse is doing his PhD in Berlin so it was the logical conclusion to try and stay in Berlin. Berlin is really hyped with being the new fashion capital. But there are not that many companies that can employ you or employ you and pay you. There are a lot internship stuff going on here where companies rely on interns to be profitable. It’s another story, it’s not really beautiful but I managed to get a job as a seamstress at a fashion label and then after some months I’m now working with costumes for the blue man group theater. And this is where I am now.

Which university did you go to?

University of Applied Science. The abbreviation is HTW and I have a masters of arts in fashion design.

So is this your first Coursera course?

It’s actually my first. My boyfriend had a course a couple of months ago and I know another friend of ours did a couple of courses classes.

And can you tell me a little about your experience, what do you like most? What do you like least?

I really like that it’s flexible. I would have had real big problem if I had to sign in at certain times. And I like that you can download all the lectures because I usually watch them on my way to work on the train or something I like this specific course itself because at our university we had basic classes in economy
and marketing and stuff like that but it was all very abstract and I couldn’t really put that to use. With this opportunity of Coursera entrepreneurship class it’s like having a checklist to go through step-by-step and it really helps I think. And its great that it’s suitable for everyone even for people that don’t have an economy degree or something like that.

**And how many hours do you spend each week on Coursera or doing Coursera related activities?**

That differs from week to week. The first week I spent 6 or 7 hours watching the lectures, reading the book and doing the assignments. Last week I spent 7 hours watching the lectures and material then another hour for the reading and I had a high time doing the assignments. I was hard pressed with time last week so it was probably like 10 to 12 hours total but that was the most time that I’ve spent on that. Usually it’s between 5 and 8 hours. I’ve read the book not really according to the weekly lectures but I just read it through and I’m a little ahead of the lectures that I’ve watched so far.

**What is your participation level or interaction with other students?**

I mostly just watch the videos. I’m not really in those forum discussions. I tried once with the “where are you from?” to see if anyone was around here and we could just get together and something like that but I simply do not have the time to pursue that any further.

**Do you plan on taking another Coursera course after this?**

I’ve actually already done that. I’ve enrolled in a finance markets class. Because well for me the creative part is not the problem or the coming up with innovative ideas. For me it’s more like, is it profitable? Is it useful? How does the market work? How does the finance system work? It’s something that I don’t know. It’s something that I was never interested in but realized I might need a slight grasp of in order to start a successful business. Actually the class starts next week on Monday. So I have one week with two classes overlapping a bit.

**Is Coursera the only platform you are using?**

Coursera is the first one I’ve used so far. I have other, well not online but I have workshops here in Germany where I went and got a little extra education but online it’s just Coursera.
Do you see any major areas of improvement?

Yes, but I’m not quite sure if it’s possible for the Coursera development team. I tend to download the lectures and I really like to watch them at 1.25 or even 1.5 speed. So I cannot do that once I got a download. Because I have to use the player on my phone and I just can’t do that. But its probably a hardware or software issue on my phone and not something that Coursera can influence but this would be something that I would really love. But other than that, I don’t think so. It’s my first class and I haven’t finished it yet but maybe I can come up with something else. Well I don’t know about the forum. I really feel like I’m missing out on talking to people there but I’m a little…I’m not quite sure how much I can tell people about my ideas, especially in fashion or something like that, you don’t have many tools to protect yourself.

Do you use social media sites in relation to Coursera, such as Facebook, Linked in, or Twitter?

Yes, a little but I’m not really a big fan of posting on Facebook or anything because I know that once it goes on there it’s saved forever somehow on the internet and really difficult to take off. I do like the concept of linked in but it’s not so big here in Germany.

Is there something important about related to your Coursera experience that I haven’t asked about that you would like to share?

Well just that I’m probably going to be a Coursera junkie for life. Everyone I know has really good things to say about it as well. The quality of what you get is really amazing considering it’s all available for free. The quality that you get for paying nothing is incredible.

[End of Anne Beyerlein Interview]
Dmitry Volovich  - Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself:

So what you are seeing around is Israel and I am 40 years old. Working is systems engineering team manager in KLA Tencor. KLA Tencor is a global company dealing with semiconductor industry. I’ve been working there for two years, before I worked in the defense industry.

My position is core engineering. Let’s drop the details here. I decided to attend the course to open some horizons for myself. I use it to learn all times, all times I’m learning something. So before this I took nanotechnology course on Coursera and now I decided to take entrepreneurship. Actually I’m doing entrepreneurship and innovation all times in my daily activities. It’s a kind of initiation of new projects, new technologies implementation, new solutions I am leading the systems engineering group so it’s daily activities but it was a good experience. It is a very good experience to hear what is a world accepted approach in entrepreneurship from the University of Maryland.

And where did you go to school? What is your highest level of education?

I graduated from Technion. The news about Technion is in the past 4 years, there were 3 noble laureates from this academy.

And what city is it in?

It’s in Israel, all my education was in Israel. It’s a decent education.

And what was your degree in?

My degree was in physics. So from physics it was a kind of transition to algorithms, image processing and then I took management position as a team manager etc etc etc. Now I’m managing systems engineering team.

And is English your native language?

My native language is, you’ll be surprised my native language is Russian.

That’s very interesting.

I talk in Russian, Hebrew, English a little bit of Arabic.

Okay, so how many Cousera courses have you taken?

I’ve taken three courses. This is my third one. It’s very great. Coursera is a great project.
Do you take one at a time or do you often enroll in several at one time?

I’m a bad student. I’m enrolled in about five. But then I only take one. Follow one course. It’s very interesting. It’s great.

And do you finish all of the courses?

No…I don’t finish it. Look, it’s not a kind of graduation for me. So I’m not taking it for graduation. No certificate in the end or something like that. I’m doing it at home time. I’m not good at schedules because it’s parallel with my daily activities. Work and family. You know what, basically the practice is I’m jogging one hour a day so during this hour, I’m hearing lectures from Coursera. And it’s going good once I’m on business trips and I’m traveling a lot and it’s not so good when I’m here in Israel. I’m losing myself here and always have this explanation about jetlag or something but I’m just lazy. But I’m trying to participate because there is this option of archive courses. I’m going to archive and hearing lectures and it’s very good. I just heard some course in modeling and then it was nanotechnology and now it’s entrepreneurship. So I enrolled in another three courses but yeah you know it’s going to archive so once I finish the entrepreneurship I will have access to archive courses and I will have access to additional two.

How many hours per week do you find yourself spending on the course?
An hour per day when you run?

Yeah more or less, that is the frame.

Is Coursera the only platform you’re using or are you also using other online courses?

There is a MIT site with a bunch of engineering courses. Very useful. I’m doing some preparation for my team. My guys are actually taking this modeling course because there is no space for some basic study and I tried it for myself before and I recommend it to take for example I have two guys dealing with algorithms and it was very useful for them.

Okay great, and what do you like most about Coursera and what do you like least?

You know what, the access is very convenient. Very convenient. I am trying to think about something that I like less but I have nothing to think about. It’s just good. It’s just good. Probably you know what all these internet projects running for the last 25 years was invented for this Coursera I think.
And what is your level of participation in the courses? Do you also participate in the discussion boards?

For example, this last course of entrepreneurship I have looked on the discussion. The way I answered to your request for interview. But in engineering courses it’s less needed or something like that. If I have a question for example for some engineering issue there is a bunch of resources to ask or to dig in. So basically, I took non-engineering course and this is the first time I take something non-technical.

And how do you like it?

It’s cool. Really, it’s cool. I’ve taken something like that when I was in my first degree. It was in Israel and it was 15 years ago. Or 16 years ago. From that course for sure was different but it’s opening your head opening your mind. That’s a big deal. You’re going out from your daily activities and I don’t know, some initiative on daily basis. It’s taking you out of things and giving you some different angles or views. Pretty remarkable.

And so this course is non-engineering, do you think you’ll try to take more of these non-technical classes?

The good news about Coursera is that I can actually try. That’s remarkable. You can enroll in anything you want and you can decide if you want to proceed or you want to stop and move on something else. I will try. I tried something about marketing but it wasn’t good for me. I’m sure that the lectures were on the best level could be provided but not for me.

In your opinion what are some key differences with Coursera and classroom learning?

What is the difference? There is no constraint of schedule, first of all. You can learn in time which is actually convenient for you. I don’t know how it’s going in academic institutes all over the world but all those limits of homework as far as I remember were much much tougher than Coursera. The deadline is the deadline. No postpone. If it’s not submitted in 12AM it’s not acceptable and you’ll have zero. But again, I really wouldn’t like to go there. Back to academics. It was not an ideal activity so I decided to go to Coursera because it’s convenient. Its just convenient. When I did my degree these video lectures just started. I’m supposing now it’s widely spread. So probably you can even take it from home. For example, In my days there was a video library. Do you remember the cassettes? I’m feeling like a dinosaur. There was the cassettes and video cassette machine like Blockbuster. For video cassette rent and the student could rent the cassette for 24 hours and they had to bring it back and insert it inside into the machine. That was the period of time. Now I’m guessing it’s like Coursera, something like this. Video net and accessible and convenient to watch it. For me, its some experience to go back to technology.
New technologies. So it’s good to know that this technology exists so I can recommend it to my workers to go and to take courses. I believe that probably that it will lead to some strategic approach in my company. Probably. I’m not sure, but I recommend it to do it like that.

So it sounds like you just take these courses for your own benefit and personal knowledge and growth. How do you measure your success with the course?

Okay, this is a very philosophical question, actually. We are talking about lifestyle. Success and failure, it’s very depends on your lifestyle. I have no failures in my life. All my life is one big success. I’m too positive to think about failures.

Do you use social media sites such as linked in, twitter, or facebook in regards to Coursera?

I’m using facebook. Social media, I actually, you know what I can’t remember that I heard something about Coursera on Facebook. But you know what, that’s a good question. Nope, no I didn’t hear anything about Coursera. Actually, I started with MIT courses and by googling and looking for additional sources for education, I found Cousera. I can’t say I knew exactly what I was looking for but I was somewhere in the neighborhood.

Do you think MOOCs will ever replace universities courses?

Look, the university is needed to have the diploma and once this issue will be solved. Solved, I mean in proper way. Not losing requirements and all those things you need to find about homework and etc etc and this will be solved, I’m sure that Cousera or some distant branches of universities will replace at least the first degree education. The upper degrees, masters, and doctorates and post docs are demanding some lab and research work so it’s impossible to replace this but on the other hand common courses, like calculus, and algebra, and physics, and biology I mean the basic courses and some engineering courses like modeling etc will be successfully replaced with Coursera. Yeah, it’s the right question. I’m sure that that’s the future.

How has your exposure through Coursera to people from different cultures added or detracted from your learning experience?

I have no experience with other cultures or students. The second difference between the universities and Coursera is that there are no students around you and you can actually very carefully pick your partners out from somewhere the forums or something like this. There is no faces. There are no faces. Something I think about, it is probably a disadvantage. But I’m not sure. I’m not quite sure if it’s a disadvantage. My opinion is that people, students, engineers and
whatever have to develop their creativity so the universities should have this opportunity to provide courses for creativity development not basic courses, it’s waste of energy, waste of budget, waste of room, just waste. But the disadvantage of Coursera, that you know what I’m not sure you remember the story about coffee breaks, at Intel or somewhere. You know, the manager, they just paid attention that too much engineers they going to coffee breaks together and take too much time to go back so for some reason they took the coffee machine and all these lunch corners from cubicles, they took it out. Half year later they paid attention instead of good engineering, now 50% less problems were solved okay so this collaboration around the coffee machine actually provides a piece of creativity. So all solutions, a big part of solutions actually were found there around the coffee machine okay so that is probably a disadvantage of Coursera, you aren’t looking on faces you can’t communicate directly to the person. You know I’m not sure it’s a big disadvantage but this part is covered by universities.

**In what ways do you think Coursera is preparing you for your future?**

You know, that’s also very philosophical. All my activities, even this small talk for this interview is preparing me for my future. All minute in your life is preparing you for your future.

**Is there anything else about your Coursera experience that I haven’t asked about or something you would like to share?**

Okay I just have to remind you, it is my weekend. So if we are going back to this entrepreneurship course, right, all this process starts with innovation. Innovation doesn’t have to be technical but also maybe mental or process. I’m dealing with start up business in my daily basis at all times thinking about something new. Not just thinking. Thinking is good spend of time, I did start ups from anything I know so I played guitar in a pub and I broadcasted in radio and tried all over. I’d say all in parallel of my work for a living, earning money. All times, I’m thinking about something. So that’s the reason I found Coursera, and the reason I’m taking courses and learning something new. The best approach to verify the academic knowledge is useful for you is just to use it.

[End of Dmitry Volovych Interview]
James McCreary – Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

I just finished my first year at Rice University in Texas. I’m 20 years old and I am actually an engineering student studying chemical engineering but I don’t really want to go into oil and gas. I’m pretty indecisive I’m not too sure what I want to do for a career which is kind of interesting since entrepreneurship kind of opened up an alternative. I guess I’ve been interested in entrepreneurship since I was a little kid but I was just recently given an opportunity to intern where I am not for the summer for a program called AllSpark. It’s a start-up accelerator at Rice University. This is it’s second year. I’m just an intern helping with the teams but I get to see the other teams go through the process. We are in collaboration with University of Houston and their start-up accelerator, which is also in it’s second year. It’s really interesting, it’s really kind of reignited my interest in entrepreneurship. I’m kind of like a dual-person. I’m really kind of an anxiety prone person so entrepreneurship should not be the place for me to go but I can’t help it. I’m just trying to go with it, either to start something, join a team or become more knowledgeable or what have you.

Is this your first MOOC? Can you tell me a little bit more about your previous experience with MOOCs or in particular Coursera?

My first year of college at the University of Irvine, I learned more about online courses a little bit. I’ve never taken one before. I’m actually taking two other courses not through Coursera. It’s through the interdisciplinary health network. Public health stuff. I’m doing that just for fun. But this is really my first time taking a course on Coursera. It’s kind of interesting just to see how the format is compared to a more traditional setting I guess.

What was your impression about Coursera from the course?

For me personally, I’m kind of an anti-futurist. I’m like technology adverse in a way or at least the overpowering of it. But I’ve always really really valued kind of a student teacher relationship. In my high school, I was really very close to all my teachers. Rice is also a relatively small school, which is right for me since I value relationships. But compared to an online course I thought it was a little bit difficult in that regard cause I didn’t say a word to Dr. Green, the instructor and it was honestly just hard to find time to interact with people. I may be more of an outlier in the fact that I really do value in class, in person time. I don’t want to live in a world where everyone is living in front of a computer and nobody talks face to face or anything.

Okay, so were you able to finish the course?

Yes, I did.
And roughly how many hours per week did you spend on completing the course?

I mean I really wanted to take advantage of the community like the forums and stuff which I was not able to because I’m just so busy with the internship and I’m also doing research at Rice so I’m really extremely busy. But I would say 3-5 hours roughly.

Can you tell me a little bit more about your participation in the course and on the forums?

I believe in the very beginning sometime, someone started a Facebook group and I’m sure there were more people but she just invited everybody to join which I thought it would be really cool to meet others and share ideas but I just did not have the time to be more involved. But I hope that those people will still want to have discussions and interact in the future. With the discussion boards, I was not completely uninvolved but it was very very minimal. I read more than I posted but I did do both.

Do you have plans to enroll in more Coursera courses?

Given the extreme luxury of time to do so, definitely. I’m one to always learn just as much as possible. I love learning just for the sake of it. If I could, I would take every course under the sun but it’s just the actual reality of time but yeah I would enroll in more courses. I did gain at least one tidbit of information from the course, actually I gained more than that but given the choice of not taking it or to take it, I would take it.

What are some strengths or weaknesses of Coursera that you may have experienced?

I’m sure it’s different for every course and how it’s set up with the instructors and stuff but I thought it was very structured. I think it did a good job of trying to simulate a traditional classroom so I would give it credit for trying to do that but again my overall theme is that I don’t think there’s any replacement for in person to person teaching and learning. So that’s a drawback. Oh and the certificates, there’s a whole controversy about how much is it really worth? Is it valuable? Like I said, I like learning for the sake of it so if I gained something from the course then I would feel like I accomplished something from the course. I’ve learned something. I’ve taken away the objective of the course itself. So it was successful in that way and it had a lot of information about where to start. How do you do a start up etc? So it at least added one more piece to the puzzle for me. It helped at least in some regard.

Can you tell me a little bit more about what made you want to take the course in the first place?
I think I was just browsing random courses and I kind of forgot how I came across it but it said entrepreneurship and then I looked more into it of course before enrolling. Really just the fact that I wanted to gain knowledge from multiple sources. Just the sake of learning and learning new things. By taking the course I figured I would learn something that would be useful in my future.

**What did you think about Coursera? Have you had experience with other platforms besides Coursera?**

Yeah, I’m sure there are other platforms other than Coursera. I believe I kind of saw one called EdX. I’m really curious as to how those work and how they all started. But yeah, Coursera seemed pretty professional I would say. I wouldn’t discount it as some phony thing or anything. It was easy to navigate. This is my first online course. First and only major online course that I’ve taken.

**Can you tell me a little bit more about how you’ve benefited from Coursera?**

The different viewpoints. Dr. Green is a very seasoned entrepreneur or at least teacher in this space so just learning from his perspective. I mean learning from a different person, it’s kind of a given that you’re going to learn something new. So I just value a different source than AllSpark. I don’t have my own start-up right now so I just want to learn what I can. It’s just a new source of information.

**Do you have anything more you would like to add related to Coursera?**

Like I said, I wasn’t really involved too much. Or as much as I would have liked. I hate to be that person that doesn’t take full advantage of something. I’m always trying to take the initiative. If I’m given any opportunity I want to make the most of it. It’s just a shame I couldn’t be more involved but I would love to talk to more people and even Dr. Green himself. The course definitely supplemented my entrepreneurial drive. I’ve seen more examples, more information, more things to think about. Many things that Dr. Green covered I did not learn at AllSpark and again that just goes back to him being a seasoned professional in the field.

**Were you pretty satisfied with the video lectures?**

Yes, they were good. With my crunch for time, I actually watched them on 1.5 or 2 times the normal speed. So when I went back to 1, I was like wow he is talking really slow. But yeah I thought they were good. Sound quality pretty good, video quality good. Typically I watched them on the weekends.

[End of James McCreary Interview]
Louise Hansen – Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself:

My name is Louise, I have an education as a sociologist. But I’m unemployed at the moment. That’s why I’m taking the courses to improve my resume. I’m 36 years old. I used to live in Copenhagen but we moved out because we have a kid now. He is almost 1 years old so I just got back from maternity leave. I only had a temporary position before but then I went on maternity leave so now I’m unemployed.

Can you tell me a little bit about your educational history?

I started in 2000 actually, started sociology in Aalborg. At the university there. The first four years went great, and then I needed to do the thesis, the last part. And I went here first for a period of 6 months for my practice, and I did that in healthcare specialization. And my resume was great at that time then it took me some years. And I had a stroke, and I broke my leg and fell into depression and stuff like that. So in 2010, I finished it, my thesis. Then I was unemployed, and then I was working for one and a half years and then went on maternity leave.

So is this your first Coursera course?

Yes, it’s one of the first. I enrolled in Project Management but I just didn’t have time because my son wasn’t yet in childcare. Then I started another one in statistics and that was just way too difficult so I dropped that one too. And then I did this content strategy course. And it’s not yet finished but I did the exam. I just haven’t turned it in yet. It’s still Sunday, the deadline. You know, It’s different when you don’t have to. But I have done the exam, I just maybe haven’t done my best. And then you have those peer reviews, where you have to read the other students answers to the same questions. And I’m very much looking forward to doing that. I want to know what they got out of this course. I think it’s hard and the textbook is just extremely boring. I think it’s very funny this engagement theme they have going on. But then there’s no graphs, there’s no pictures, just text. There’s just endless text. But the videos are very good.

And what is your interaction level with the other students?
None. I watch the videos mostly. Sometimes the text but it’s just so boring. I thought what’s the point. I read some of it but then I saw there’s just more than you need. And the main points are covered in the video. And to answer the questions in the exams, you can do that without reading the textbook. Yeah, I actually finished another one. A course in entrepreneurship and it didn’t take that long. That was easily done. And I took another one in statistics also but I haven’t finished it, it’s still going.

**So how many courses are you enrolled in right now?**

Three. No, two. One finished. This one and the statistical one.

**In your experience with Coursera so far, what do you like most and what do you like least?**

I really like it actually. Big variety in the courses. You can get almost anything you want, you can find it in there. And the dislikes. I think maybe the statistics. Maybe they don’t explain it that well. You have to have some level of education. Maybe some of it is boring. It takes too long. I guess if you get one of the best textbooks on the same subject, you can learn it faster. Yeah, and I’m not enrolled in the certificates. You have to pay something to get certified but I’m not sure. I don’t know. I think I will just continue to take topics.

**And how much time do you find yourself spending on Coursera each week?**

That depends. This one, I spend quite a lot because of the exams. Maybe 4 hours a week. But this week way more. Maybe 6 hours or 8 hours. I don’t know, I don’t time it.

**Is Coursera the only platform you are using?**

I choose classes from the MOOC list. The entrepreneurship course was from Australia. I only found out about this in December.

**How did you hear about it?**

You know, I saw it in my union for academics. They had a small article there.
And how do you go about choosing which courses you want to take?

The first two was Project management and this one. And I actually chose those because there was a position that I wanted to apply to and it said something about project management or organizational structure. And then I just searched for something organizational analysis and I saw this and I thought hey this is interesting too. So I took it, that’s why. But now with the statistical part of it, I’m a sociologist so I should be able to do statistics but I’m not good at it anymore. So they are refresher classes.

Have you chosen your next MOOC Course?

Yes, I think I will take something on management and it starts next month.

And can you tell me about some areas of improvement or things you would like to see happen with Coursera?

It’s new to me so I’m really impressed.

And how have you benefitted from Coursera? Or what do you feel that you’ve gained?

I think I’ve gained insights to some topics that I wanted to. And it’s not that important with the certificate because I could buy it if I want. But I have a feeling that because I’ve been gone for a year, and I took so long for my education to finish I think I need some stuff for my brain and I need to get smarter. And I want to. Yeah that’s probably the main reason. And also because it’s free. And you can choose classes. You don’t have to finish it even if you enroll in it. And it’s easy.

Do you see yourself continuing with Coursera courses or would you also want to go back to school?

I’m going to continue but also take courses in real life. When you’re unemployed, and you get money from your union, no not union…I don’t know what it’s called but I will take some communication courses.

And can you tell me about some key differences you see between Coursera and in person classes?
Yea, it’s easy cause I can take it from home. I don’t really use the forums. Actually, you know I used the forums more in statistics because I saw that no one else knew how to do the test so everybody was asking questions and so was I. We were a lot of people that didn’t know how to do it. So I do go there to check. And also on content strategy, I have to go there to check it out. I don’t spend too much time on that. Compared with real life classes, I don’t have to turn up at some specific place or time. And with my kid, it’s easier. Also it’s free. And I can take half and do it later. Almost the same reasons.

And is there anything else about your Coursera experience you would like to share that I haven’t asked you about?

 Anything else I want to add…no I don’t know. I’m surprised that they don’t try to make money on it. More money I think. I mean maybe they are trying to sell the textbook or certificates. But it costs way more to make the program. I think it’s good.

[End of Louise Hansen Interview]
Pablo Musso - Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

So I’m Pablo, I’m from Argentina. I’m a systems engineer. I have been working since I don’t know maybe when I was 22, now I’m 45. I have a lot of experience working and sometimes I need some theories and some concepts from books and other experts and that’s why I’m trying to learn on Coursera. My background is in IT. After 3 or 4 years after I got my degree, I switched completely my focus and I started with industries, and production control, supply chain, quality and sales. So I have a lot of technical background in computer sciences and I have a masters in computer sciences. On the other side, I have a lot of experience in all those areas production, supply chain but I don’t have the let’s say the theories about them. So I decided one year ago, to start to just to learn a little bit about some areas I am a little weak as for example human relationships, human resources, maybe economics, strategy and all the areas that maybe I need at this moment that maybe I’m accustomed to use it everyday because of the practice but not because of strong theories or backgrounds. So I started with those MOOCs and Coursera courses.

So is this your first MOOC course?

In fact this is my 7th course, I finished some of them in the strategic area, competitive strategy from Berlin University. Some other courses about modern thinking in different universities. One in organizational analysis from Stanford. So all of them are kind of complements for my background. I need all of them, not only strategy or maybe marketing or sales but all of them will help me with a strong background.

So with the 7 courses that you’ve taken, did you finish all of them? Yes, I already finished 5 of them. And I’m attending 2 at this moment. One is what’s your big idea, it’s about entrepreneurship and all the steps that you need to consider at the moment when you are planning a freelance activity. And the other one is this one that we are talking about. So I’m sorry also in the middle, I started on learning all the material, but of course not with the idea of finishing, one about nanotechnology but I’m a little crazy about this. So my spectrum is pretty wide as you can see.

Are you using other MOOC platforms?

So I was just checking, visiting another site instead of Coursera but I think the most popular and the best universities and courses are on Coursera. So I decided to only pay attention to Coursera in this moment. If in the future I run out of courses because I already finished all the courses I am interested in I will start thinking about another platform or site but for the moment Coursera is enough for me.
So with the courses that you’ve taken what do you think has been most beneficial to you?

Okay, the best one until this moment was the modern thinking course. It was about how can I say all the different situations of real life and how to associate the model for different situations. For example, if the economy of China will be growing forever or will reach a plateau in any moment. How the I don’t know if some illness is spread around the world. Different situations are modeled with different models. The person in charge of the course knows a lot about the different models. We were studying maybe 25 different models with different situations. How the line in the super market is stopping or going. How the demand and the offer is working and how the economics are involved around the world. Okay, different cases and different models. One was about the war and how you can win a war with less soldiers and how to attack a stronger enemy. It was really interesting. For me it was really really good. And of course all the courses for strategy. Cause I need a lot for my current position. I mean, sales and mainly in the part of programs and how to plan. How is the planning for the future according to different conditions and national situations and competence and all those things.

And with these courses, what is your level of participation?

Most of them need, in fact force you to participate in forums or presenting or preparing essays and different papers. In fact, if you want to get the cert you have to finish and to present and to prepare all of those things. Let’s say I’m a fan of forums. I spend some time on forums if not participating actively, just writing but at least reading. Reading a lot, opinions, if I consider it very important or very a positive opinion, I rate it and I give my opinion at this moment. Sometimes you can see in the forums that one person asks for the deadline of one test and 25 people answer this with different opinions. This is not important for me. I want to participate in issues regarding the topics that are discussed in the course of course. On the other side its quite difficult for me to have a face to face group in Argentina. Not in Argentina, but in the town I’m living. We are near 10,000 citizens so it’s very small. I think I’m the only guy interested in MOOCs in my city, let’s say. Maybe in a bigger city with near 1 million inhabitants, it’s possible but not here with 10,000 persons. I tried even to convince some co-workers to take a course but they are paying attention to something completely different. Maybe sports, or drinking a beer or spending time with their families and completely different interests.

Are you currently utilizing Coursera certificates?

So not in my current position. I’m really interested in what the courses will allow me to learn and what the courses will teach me. Maybe not in the near but medium future, I’m trying to start a freelance. Because I am really full of
being an employee after 25 years. Let’s say in a good sense receiving orders, I am really tired of this. And I think I have the knowledge and background and experience for starting my own business. Maybe as a consulting or a consultant, this is the word. With all my experiences and the theory of Coursera and my background and all this stuff could be useful for me. Maybe in 3 or 4 years and finish maybe 15 – 20 courses more.

**And with that, what do you like most and least about Coursera?**

Actually, I don’t know if it’s a lack of choosing really good courses. So I’m not complaining about any of the courses I took. The only thing, I really didn’t like ..it was very difficult to handle was the course from Stanford because it was very long. It was more than 10 weeks, and all the weeks were pretty similar. The same. You are discussing different aspects of organization and week 1 and week 3 and 7 are almost the same so it’s a little confusing. And the course, in fact, is very long. 10 weeks and after that all the essays are very long. So I’m more comfortable with maybe short courses from 4 – 6 weeks. You can put all the, let’s say, quizzes or tests or essays during this time. But not so long time, I think its not for me. Let’s say at the 8th week I was really tired and very bored about all the pretty similar concepts and okay I finished the course but it was not the best. I think it depends on each one. I am pretty happy with all the courses and I want to keep on taking courses for a long time, hopefully. I just take special attention not to take a course for example with 10 – 12 weeks, maybe these courses are not for me.

**In your opinion, what areas or are there any aspects that can be improved?**

I saw a couple courses of statistics so they start really soft and really easy but after the 3rd or 4th week, they start to be very complicated. And they force you to use a software that is not very easy. Maybe the topic is a little complicated. It’s not because of the teacher or the subject, it’s maybe because of the way the course is organized. In march I’m planning to take a course about quality, six sigma. I’m really happy to be able to take this course. It will be very useful for me. It was the only course I saw about this issue, this topic, (sorry) in all the Coursera environment. I saw 300 courses but there’s only one about quality, production, six sigma, lean manufacturing. I think this is a weak point about Coursera. There’s a lot about maybe writing, teaching, psychology.. but about production, all this stuff I saw only one course.

**Okay, and how many hours per week do you find yourself spending on Coursera?**

In general I used to spend 1-2 hours per day just for checking the video and of course the forums and maybe one extra hour per day if I have to prepare an
essay or midterm exam or any homework or something like that. But in fact, I am happy with 1-2 hours per day. Its enough and it’s okay for me.

**Do you also use any social media sites like linked in or Facebook or twitter in relation to Coursera?**

Yes, but not so frequently. Most of the discussion and all of the material is well explained and discussed inside the environment of Coursera. I had the chance of participating in some video exchange with the professor and in some cases they were really interesting. They have some grade for those extra activities too. So I don’t remember the platform. One was from Gmail, I think it’s hangout or something like that. So professor accepts per hour or in some specific times, 8 or 10 students. And you can ask and you can participate face to face with him and some teaching assistants too. So this is something not strictly related to the online course. It’s maybe an additional activity but its really good.

**Was this something you did regularly for the course or just one time?**

No, for organizational analysis, in fact I decided to participate 3 or 4 times. And for inspiring leadership, it’s another course I took, I participated 4 times out of 5. One of the dates I missed the day for the event. 4 out of 5 was my participation.

**So this was interaction with the professor, have you had this type of interaction with other students as well?**

Yes, of course. This mainly happens when the teaching assistants leads the conversations. If not, all the questions are directed to the professor, of course. And nobody will ask me, as I appear at the same level with all the other students. If the professor is present almost all the questions are directed to him. When the teaching assistants are guiding the discussion, they use to have 3 or 4 questions prepared for discussion in group and maybe my opinion is asked because of those kind of participation.

**Okay and how has this exposure to students from different cultures added or detracted from your learning experience?**

Okay so, it was very positive. I had the chance to interact with some people in India, some people in Thailand, in Indonesia. And after all those video chats, some of them, with me.. we are still in touch. Even with the hurricane in Philippines happened maybe 3 months ago. There was a student from there and we were in touch. We were exchanging mail and just trying to find out what happened with this big disaster in the Philippines. So I won’t tell you we are close friends, but we are closer than if we were not in touch because of this event. So this kind of video chat and this kind of events allows us to be closer
and to meet other participants and other students face to face and to be interested in another’s reality. It was really interesting.

That is very interesting. Okay so can you describe some key differences between Coursera and regular university courses taken in person?

Yes, regarding the material, the methods, they are close to the same. Really the same for me. The only difference with the normal course for me is in Argentina if you are planning to study, for example, economics and you have 40 different subjects to study, maybe 25 will be related to economics and the other 15 are complementary information and topics. Let’s say, if you are studying economics you will also receive psychology or natural sciences or theology. When I studied computer sciences I had to study three years of theology, psychology, I don’t know all the philosophical background that I was not interested in at this moment. And I think that were not useful at that moment and not even at this moment for me. Maybe theology is really good, I am catholic, I really appreciate this information but maybe this 40 subjects should be focused on my interests. In this way with Coursera I can choose what I really want to learn. I’m not forced to take courses about cooking if I’m not interested in cooking, if you can understand. So it’s more direct to the goals you are having in certain moments. If I want to learn about statistics I can take 5 different courses. Maybe some courses complimentary with statistics from the point of view of economics or human resources. But I’m responsible and I’m the person who makes the decision about which courses I want to take. This is a benefit. Maybe the something not so good is the long time that the final grades take. In general because of how crowded the courses are. For example, inspiring leadership, we were 100,000 students.. more than 100,000 students. So the final grades took a month and we were unsure about the score and certificates. This is maybe something normal with those kind of crowded courses. The course we are taking, there are maybe it’s about 85,000 students at least and maybe we are more than 100,000 students. It’s very normal those numbers. People online. In general, 100,000 students start but maybe, I don’t know, 20,000 finish. It’s not the same number, but anyway, all the scoring process should be run for all the students. And if you don’t reach the minimal threshold you are not qualified but the process should be run for 100,000 students.

With that, how do you measure your own success with these courses? Are you concerned at all with the grades or what are your goals when you enroll in these courses?

As I told you, my final goal is to start my freelance career in a couple of years. So the certificate is not the main objective for me but the knowledge. I want to learn a lot and some courses, because of all the information that was shared look very short and I know there are second parts about those courses and I think those courses were really good. Something that used to happen too, was
that when you take a course in Coursera and you need to go deeper in one aspect or in one theory or one topic maybe you need to do it alone. With reading a book or just chatting with some peers. So the level of the course was the level that was defined initially. I mean, you can’t ask for an extra explanation or an extra example or you cant ask the professor to go deeper in one aspect because you want to learn more about this issue. Maybe this is a lack about the course in Coursera, you have a lot of material and you can Google and you can ask for material online but sometimes you feel that the material is not enough. You want to learn more in one specific aspect. In general, the courses are okay but some specific aspects could be maybe more detailed or should be more deeper.

That makes sense. So my last question is just is there anything important about this experience or something I haven’t asked about that you would like to share?

Well there’s a new feature in Coursera that I didn’t pay attention to yet. It’s the possibility of, let me check, because I have the window open here. It’s called specialization. You have apparently the possibility of defining in which aspects of your background you want to learn or to go deeper. For example, if you want to learn in math, apparently this option prepares for you several sequential courses about math. Calculus, statistics, math 2.0 again and some complimentary courses that will help you with your specialization. So I didn’t pay attention to this option yet but I think it’s very useful. Because I’m trying to prepare and that’s why I took those courses without certain logic. I didn’t choose the courses because of any reason but because of specific idea so maybe this is the solution of going deeper and learning a lot about maybe how to start a business or to be an entrepreneur or to learn abut strategy or whatever. So maybe this is the only platform that’s offering this option. A kind of linked and sequential courses all related to what you’re planning to learn.

So do you know what your next course will be? Have you already chosen one?

Yes, in March the course about six sigma, production, all this stuff. I don’t know what will happen after this course. I need to check the courses.

Do you usually just take one at a time or do you take more than one?

My first course was a kind of test because I really didn’t know at this moment if my English level was okay. If the information shared in the course would be enough or if it would be very difficult for me. So I only took one at the very beginning and after that I took three at the same time, and at this moment I’m taking two courses. What’s your big idea about how to start a business and content strategy for professionals. And at the same time I’m having this experience as a community teaching assistance for foundation of business
strategy course. I took the course in October and from Coursera proposed me to help or participate as a teaching assistant so I’m a teaching assistant too.

**So can you tell me more about that? How did you get chosen to be a teaching assistant?**

The letter was pretty generic but they used to tell you that because of your good grades and your level of participation and your experience you have been chosen among all of the students and you are the best of the best etc. So in this moment, we are 8 students form around the world. There’s a couple of guys from India, there’s one from Romania, there’s an Irish guy, a couple guys from United States. We are the brand new TA’s or teaching assistants. There is a kind of special community that we can share all our experiences as intermediate level students. We can share questions from students at this course at this moment, we can have online video chats as when we were students but at any moment with any of our peers at the teaching assistant level. And we have direct access to the professor for any questions or any opinions. Even we suggested to modify the grading system because there were infinite number of tests per week so we suggested him to reduce this number to 3 possibilities. Those changes were implemented so it’s not something that…I mean I was not forced to do this. It was a really good experience and at the same time professor take care of us of our opinions of our interest of our suggestions. So we are not working because of nothing, or we are doing this this because we are improving the course in this case, this specific course. And you feel a little proud about this. Because you are not just answering questions or fixing glitches or just giving opinions or scoring one test. You are participating in the structure of the course. Professor is person you can talk at any moment and this is really good.

**I didn’t know you did that so it’s very interesting.**

Yes it’s really interesting. It was a very interactive course. It was foundations of business strategy. It was 8 weeks long and we had to present or to send 3 different essays and a final study about the company we decided with all the tools that were presented during the course. And of course you learn a lot form the other side as a teaching assistant too. Because some really good questions or discussion appear at any moment and some really good essays are presented so you have access to all this material and this is really positive for me.

[End of Pablo Musso Interview]
Robert Llamas – Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself

I’m working in the airport industry. I have experience of 16 years. I have a Masters degree in science, and specialty in industrial organization. Degrees are kind of a bit similar from the states here in Europe or when I was studying so this is my degrees. I’ve been working 10 years in the automotive industry. For 10 years. I switched. I changed and I went to the airport industry. I travel a lot within Europe. Sometimes to China for supplier issues and customers. I was traveling during those 10 years during my previous experience and I fall in love with airports. You know, and I decided to work in airports. Currently, I am airport director or managing director in the Balearic Islands, in Ibiza. I don’t know if you know Ibiza. So I’m working here for the last year. Previously I was working on Mallorca, which is an island very close to Ibiza and to all the places in Spain. So this is my background. I’m very interested in this kind of studies and courses that I’m learning a lot with Coursera platform and this is the second course that I’m doing. The first one was related to entrepreneurship and I found it very interesting because I had the opportunity to relate with people form different countries and cultures and this is something that I like very much. So all different perspectives of the same problems depending on the country that you are living or experiencing your work. This is my background.

And with that entrepreneurship course that you took with Coursera, can you tell me a little bit more about the interactions you had with the other students and what you learned or how it benefited you?

Okay, I tried it last year. It was called “grow to greatness” or “great to greatness” something like this. It was a bit strange, the name. I can email you later. And it was interesting. It was 5 weeks course and every week we had a case to resolve. So I created a forum, a forum yeah? In the course forum, sorry, I created a group that was called Skype International Group. And some people were asking to get into this group. Okay, and we created a group of 6 or 7 people. And we talked with Skype for 1 and a half hours a week and we discussed everything related to the course for that week. And we tried to resolve the cases all together. And we got good friends there. I’m still having good friends out of that course. We were people from the States. One girl from the States. We have someone from Germany, from Germany. We have people from Hungary. We have people form Ireland and Brazil and myself. In fact I had an interview because of this group. One of these peers that I had. He was working for Skype, for Skype. And he had connections with the bloggers of the Skype and they made an interview to me. I could send it to you, if you are interested, by email. So I had an interview on the Skype international blog and it was very interesting for me. I was very satisfied with this interview. And that course exceeded my expectations because of this international relationships. I enjoy a lot with that because of the same problems as I told you before we had
all different perspectives. We had different ways of solving the same issues. And this is something that was missing for me. We had the opportunity to make that just without moving from your home. You didn’t need to even to travel. Just to have dinner and afterwards at 9:30 or 10:00PM like you. This was the time because it was feasible for all of us. You know, from Brazil, from the States, from Ireland, from Hungary so it was great experience.

**With this course that you are currently taking, do you also do something similar? Or what is your interaction with this course?**

I have not created my Skype group now because I have a lot of work and I don’t have time enough time for that. For the next one, I will try yeah. This time, I didn’t arrive on time to create it. So my interaction is in forums. I get into the discussion in the forums and this is enough. I think that this is enough. It’s more interesting to have these Skype sessions. It was quite more interesting but okay, it’s enough to have this minimum interaction by forums.

**And how many hours a week do you find yourself spending on Coursera or doing Coursera related activities?**

It’s a kind of 3 or 4 hours. During the week, in the meanwhile I’m doing sports, some sports. And I have my speakers, and I go running and I hear all the readings that I need. The videos, not the readings. The videos. And during the weekends I read the readings. So I try to take advantage of my free time when I’m doing sports something like that. But at the end of the week its 3 or 4 hours. No more.

**Are you using any other platforms besides Coursera?**

I just use Coursera, just Coursera. I found out something similar in the past, I remember it was a similar platform but in the end I went to Coursera because I see a lot of courses there. More than any other platform. Very interesting.

**With that, what do you like most about Coursera? And what do you like least?**

I like more absolutely the relationships between peers, you know. This is the most interesting. The most interesting. I really miss these Skype sessions that we had. I think that it was a kind of 50% of the power of these kinds of courses you know. I’m running well now with my current course. Content strategy, I see that I’m having 50% of the background that I had when I was interviewing with all the people at the same time. Interactions in real time so you have a lot of learning on that experiences. And the worst, okay I have in this course. I need to make some homework. I have to prepare a kind of project. And I’m a little bit overwhelmed with my current job and so on. I’m not having enough time to do it. In the last one, when we were discussing in the Skype. We hadn’t
to do any homework. Just preparing the case, read, take your notes, preparing and exchange and that’s all. So it was very interactive and you didn’t have to spend a lot of time alone working by yourself. This is the worst issue I would say.

**So where did you study for your masters? Was it in Spain?**

Yeah, I had my masters in Barcelona. I studied in Barcelona. In the Industrial Engineering School. You know, it’s engineering of industrial processes. Organizational industrial processes. It was a master of science. It was in Barcelona. I had a post graduate on financials that I studied in Barcelona as well. And that’s all. Everything was in Barcelona. International city as well.

**Okay, and in your opinion, what are some key differences with Coursera and university courses taken in person?**

Yeah, the key differences. I would say that the way of doing the courses, I would say, is similar to the rest of the courses. Okay, you don’t get the interaction with the teacher. So I have to say that it’s better to have this interaction with your teacher. You know, but I think the main difference… the key thing that makes it profitable is this interaction with people from different countries. I tell you always the same (I’m sorry) but this is the key difference I’ve seen in this kind of platform. The others, you can find similar courses. In person, online, with videos… all of them are good teachers, you know. They have a good background, all of them. But the main difference is that you are getting interaction internationally. It’s global. And this is amazing how easy it is to connect with people from too many different countries at the same time. It’s very simple with this platform and this is what is giving added value to us. Definitely, this is the main difference. However, I see that all of the course are well organized with the exams and everything is well organized I think. It could be better, maybe yes. But what makes the difference is this international relationship between peers.

It’s funny you say that because even with these interviews I am doing, a lot of the respondents are all over the world. Someone from Jamaica and Germany and Israel. Really everywhere, it’s true.

Yes, I’m very happy with this group that we made because I don’t see that they are not doing too much of these kinds of groups with Skype. So interactions are in the forums. You write…the others are answering. You know, I see hundreds of opinions. Sentences. And you can get lost very easily. I think maybe that this is a step forward for these platforms. Try to make small groups and try to make weekly arrangements between 6..5.. even 7 people and talk together in real time, you know. I don’t see that this is used too much in the platform but I think that this could be the next step. To create this atmosphere. Not only writing but talking to each other.
Was it always the same group of people or did you have others join your Skype discussions as well?

Always the same. I remember when I created the group at the beginning we were kind of 12 people. And all of them were very willing to participate but from the first session we just kept 7 people. So we were only 7 people in the group. At the beginning it was 12 but people that wants to have the commitment every week, you don’t find too much. And at the end, we were just always the same people. You know, and it was funny I remember that some of them… they had ideas. They were entrepreneurial people and they had their own problems in their projects. And they wanted to comment with us their projects. So we the rest of the people tried to recommend, you know, recommend him or advise him so it was very good. Very interesting experience from that point of view.

Yes, and do you use any social media sites in connection with Coursera? Such as linked in or Facebook or twitter?

Uh, yes I have started with the current course. Which is content strategy. I started to use twitter and Facebook. Yes, so I am interacting as well with these kinds of tools.

Can you give me some examples of what you are posting?

Posting, only in forums. In the Coursera platform, in this course, they only use this platform to inform us. Only to inform about the progress about the course. I’ve learned that there is not too much interaction. The interaction is only in one way, you know. Just for information. Just to keep you updated anytime. So it could be another platform for having personal interaction but in this case, I see that they are not using it like that. You have to post everything in the forums. This is what they need. Because you have to vote and they need to evaluate your participation. So they need all the information to be in the forum.

With Coursera, how do you measure your own success? What are your goals?

At the end, it’s interesting to have the certification. But this is not the key issue for me. For me, the key issue is to learn and to interact with other peers, you know, and that’s all. I think that you have to pass 70% of the quiz and you have to present a specific project about Men’s clothing retail which is based in China and they want to expand in your country. In this case, in Spain so I have to create all the content strategy to have the company expand into my country. In the end, my project will be evaluated by 2 or 3 different peers. They will put me a score and I need to have more than 70% score. Something like this, if it
happens they will give me a certificate. But okay, this is not the key issue for me of the course.

**How did you choose this course? What do you look for when enrolling in courses?**

From the beginning I try to chose something related to company management but I’m working in this field so I don’t want 100% of my time only in that. I have enough with my job so I try to mix both concepts. A bit related to management but something that makes me get a bit of fun. Different from the rest. In this case, I try that because I’m interested in twitter, in Facebook, how the companies communicate with each other with the public with the customers. And this is teaching you how to create the proper information to communicate to your customers. Stakeholders and so on. So that part was interesting for me and a little bit related to my profession. It’s a kind of mixture. Want to get fun but something related to my job as well. And I see a lot of courses. Before deciding which course, I see, maybe 200 courses. Different courses and I choose just one of them. It takes time for choosing my course.

**So have you chosen your next course or will you take a break after this?**

I have some of them in the horizon. I don’t know. If I have time, I will try it. For me, I have a bit more time during winter and autumn. Not in the summer. During the summer we are overwhelmed. But I have chosen some of them that are in the horizon. And I will decide as soon as the date arrives.

**Is there anything else related to your Coursera experience that I haven’t asked about that you would like to share?**

I’m really surprised how easy it is to connect with universities from the states and all over. And for free, you know. Still, I’m asking myself, why? How is it possible? What is the benefit of the university? Publicity? Maybe, advertisements. Publicity. I don’t know. Maybe they learn from a lot of different students because they are making a lot of surveys. It was very amazing. I think that it was a very good experience. But the most…the key one and I have to repeat it is the real time interaction with people. Like now you are in the States and I am in Spain. And in just two minutes we can connect each other and we can talk about something. And between the cases of Coursera you have common cases to resolve and talking with different people. Its really good that Coursera makes it simple for us. And there are important universities behind it so it’s really good.
Do you recommend Coursera to your friends and family?

Yes, I recommend it to everyone. Everyone that wants to talk in or learn English. I recommend this as a way of leaning. Not only the subject related to the course but also the language. For Spanish people, who we normally know a minimum of English, what we need is practice, practice, practice. This is a good way of practicing. I recommend it to all of my brothers, friends, peers and at work even. I see a lot of Spanish people getting into Coursera. I see it in this course. There are a lot of Spanish people and I think that what they want is to practice English. I see a lot of people in the forums from Asia as well. This is something that I’ve seen in the platform. And they are entrepreneurial people as well.

[End of Robert Llamas Interview]
Stelios Baiou - Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

My name is Stelios. Born in Greece, living in Greece still. I’m a student at the University of Macedonia studying business administration and I’m very near graduation. Very near to getting my bachelor’s in the coming months. I’m unemployed currently, just finished my exams in February and am waiting for my results. Who knows, maybe I didn’t pass. In the meantime I have some free time so since last year I’ve been a little bit getting to know Coursera and massive open online courses. In fact, the first time I heard about massive open online courses was 2012 from a colleague at work but I didn’t have time during that period. In 2013 I had time so I tried to get a grasp for what it is. I’m 23 but very into education and I enjoy reading things, reading things about very different disciplines also. Economics, management, even history for example.

Is this your first Coursera or MOOC course?

In fact, I have enrolled in 4 courses maybe since October but I just watched some videos and was not so active. I just enrolled and read some descriptions but was not so interested in the whole procedure of the course and getting a certificate. And this one in 2014, the content strategy course is one I paid some attention to the description, what was required, the assignments and I was interested to get the certificate. So I decided yes, it was okay for me and I can tell you it was the first course I attended all videos and did the assignments, also the case study assignment and I earned the certificate.

Are you planning on taking more courses on Coursera?

Yes, I’m planning on taking more courses in this month and the coming months. It all depends on what I will do and my free time but yeah as for now I have enrolled in one course and maybe I will plan to enroll in many more.

And how many hours per week did you spend on Coursera with this Content Strategy course?

Yeah, I can say I have spent maybe between 4 hours to 6. Taken in fact the case study aside.

Have you taken MOOC courses on other platforms besides Coursera?

No, I haven’t even looked or did the research because I really like much Coursera’s platform. I know there are others…I am aware but I am happy with Coursera.

Can you tell me what you like about Coursera and what you dislike?
Some 3 or 4 facts that I like about Coursera is, first of all is the feasibility, like the easiness of the platform. The platform really accommodates students that want to learn. Also it takes in mind how it can be optimized for people to minimize the hours spent on doing nonsense things. Like it’s very easy to access the course, see the videos, see the notes, see the forum. Even for people who are maybe 40 or 50 years old who maybe let’s say are not that tech savvy. It’s still easy for them to access the material. For the second part, they do a really good job explaining what is online courses, how it can help you, how to attend etc. Third and fourth it has a very good variety of institutions and also subjects being taught on Coursera platform. It has a good variety. That’s good. It has very many interesting subjects. Also the common behind the platform seems like it adds some credibility. Suppose for example I had a question, and staff replied me in one day so there is a support staff or system. Someone supporting that. I think the course had many advantages like there were very many professors from universities expressing their views in the videos. That was very good because you had a real variety of opinions. And mostly from an expert of his kind.

And can you tell me about what you dislike?

Also this variety that I was telling you about can bring some annoyance…not annoyance sorry but confusion very near to the notion that there are a 100 classes something and you have to spend some time to enroll and see what it offers and make some decisions. It takes time. So for someone who just wants to spend a little time to know what it is, sometimes this can be a little confusing. And this maybe not for me or for you since in fact we are part of a generation called the Millennials but for someone else. That’s one part I think could be a little disturbing.

And with the Content Strategy course, were there any areas of improvement?

And something they can maybe improve in the next courses will be maybe they could explain more detail some notion some subjects because the videos were a little bit short. Maybe they can go into some further conversations. You look the video with the idea in your head that maybe that video could be longer and the people were telling very nice things and they could carry on. Also I didn’t like the fact there were no notes or documents to support the videos because you know not all persons are accustomed or like or can watch videos. Maybe some other persons just want to read some notes. The videos are a very good way of educating people cause you feel different. But there are many people for example I can recall when I was commuting before from university to work or home and I had one hour on the train I could just pull open my tablet and read some PDFs or notes and it was very easy.
And what is your level of participation with the discussion forums and so on related to the course?

Mostly just reading. Not so much posting but maybe one or two likes but just reading the forums. I am more of a reading/listening person, especially when people are talking about subjects when I do not know so much myself.

So do you think you will try to participate more in the forums in your next course?

Yes, that is for sure. Because I have seen that people can ask many questions and I see the eagerness of people to respond. Even let’s say if they were to ask a very naive question. Many people were very eager to respond to them without harassing. It was a very good environment and you can just ask. People were eager to help.

Can you tell be about how Coursera is benefiting you?

The way Coursera is benefiting me and I think many persons is you can have access you can have information that is on the basis free. Easily accessible on a easy to navigate platform by a great variety of universities and a great variety of subjects. I really like the notion of Coursera and free education whereas internet from the start has been a universal thing for people to login and share and express information and that is what has driven such a revolution in the last 15 years. So I think that the MOOCs and Coursera especially since they were the pioneers will transform in the next five years the way people view education and institutional education and access to information also. Because now there is a way to obtain the knowledge on a university level so it’s a little bit from an authority let’s say and not just random information on the internet which could be irrelevant.

Can you tell me about any social media you use in relation to Coursera?

Yeah, I have used linked in with relation to Coursera. I have also taken a look at the linked in groups in the forum. Many people who were expressing their views also the university staff so it was very good. I didn’t participate myself because I’m not in that level. I was not having some great expectations about this course you know but I took the course because I wanted to grasp some notion about this area. I’m not a professional. I’m a student but it was very good to get a little familiar with the subject. I also joined the linked in group.

Can you tell me about how you choose which courses you want to take?

On the one hand I take courses based on what I would like to do myself professionally, and what is my job experience is about and my studies also. On the other hand I can tell one or two courses I have chosen entirely based on
home research. For example I have Geography course and guitar. Mostly courses based on what I have studied and my job experience and what I want to do professionally.

Lastly, can you tell me about some key differences you experienced with Coursera and traditional classes taken in person?

Well the first of all is the difference is the easiness of taking a course online. It’s more easy than going to the campus the university. Walk into the class and maybe the class is crowded maybe the professor isn’t too eager to teach or compassionate with the students. Usually the courses on Coursera the professors are very… they have the ability to transfer knowledge. The level is usually very good in that aspect. It’s very different but something that I like about Coursera is the flexibility compared to in person classes.

Great, and is there anything else you would like to share with me about your Coursera experience that I have not asked about?

I would like to add on the other hand university classes are different than Coursera and distance learning. Because you are there in the class and you get to ask questions to Coursera and extremely easier to ask this in person to person than email. It’s easy to communicate with someone when you are in the same area. Also with Coursera involves hundreds of thousands of students it isn’t very easy for them to respond to questions so with university it’s very different. You have somewhat personalized service. So for someone that has great expectations for this kind of education…no, you wouldn’t get it. It’s very different but if you like yourself the notion of online courses and if you adapt your mind to that you are very near to obtaining some crucial and nice knowledge.

[End of Stelios Baiou Interview]
Stephen John - Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself

I’m from Chicago and currently 24 years of age. Recently, I graduated from Michigan State and decided to move Seattle to begin my career in Supply Chain Management. I like it quite a bit. Different challenges every day makes the time go by so much faster. I intend to stay in this industry for quite some time.

Can you please tell me about your previous experience with MOOCs or more specifically Coursera?

This is my first full time course. But I am interested in furthering my business knowledge and will enroll in more Coursera courses. I’ve only taken one official course though I’ve signed up for one before but only used it as a reference. The other course I didn’t because my work schedule was taking too much of my free time. I signed up for an operations management course and used it for reference in my job.

How many hours a week do you find yourself spending on the course?

I spend about 5-7 hours a week if I had to guess.

Are you familiar with other MOOC platforms?

The only platform that I’m familiar with is Coursera. It is the only one that I know of. It has a good variety of classes and I haven’t felt the need to look into other platforms.

Why did you decide to take this particular course?

I was interested in learning more about entrepreneurship. The other reference course I studied because I wanted to advance my learning in operations management. I had a particular interest in cycle time, flow rates, etc. This helped me see my job differently and helped me to create tools so that I could fully supply our production rates. I was hoping to gain a different perspective in daily operations.

Can you tell me about your participation level or interaction with other students?

I didn’t really participate with other students. I posted on the discussion board a few times but I didn’t really follow up on my posts. I see a lot of people would like to meet up but I was limited on time due to my work schedule.

What are some strengths or weaknesses that you experienced with Coursera?

It was very convenient. I was able to study whenever I wanted. I didn’t like the personal interaction with the professor which was zero. I would like to see a bit more
visual videos. I know this would take a while to create, but seeing examples while the professor talks would be very helpful.

**Can you tell me about why you were interested in Coursera?**

I love learning and constantly making myself better. I saw this as an opportunity to better my performance at work so I decided to join the course. And it was a good decision on my part. It’s free education with highly regarded professors are teaching classes that could costs thousands at a local university. I see this as a great opportunity to better society.

**What kind of role do you see MOOCs having in the future?**

I think it will a have a larger role but it won’t overtake the traditional style of learning. Educating many more people will, hopefully, help us to make better decisions in our daily lives. I think the trend will continue to grow. I wish I had this in college so I could’ve saved a few course hours and used it elsewhere.

**Can you tell me about some of the differences you experienced with Coursera versus university classes?**

I still prefer the traditional learning style. I like the interaction between the professor and student. Having the ability to ask a question and get a real time answer is difficult to replace. You can also hear other questions from different students as well. They can ask questions that could possibly provide a different perspective. I think this is the major difference between the learning styles, but MOOCs have tried to address this concern with discussion boards and emails. I just don’t think it’s that affective as of yet.

**Can you tell me about what is effective with Coursera? What is it helping you do?**

MOOCs are preparing me for my future positions. I’m planning to move into finance in my career, and it is important for me to review my finance and accounting skills. Going back to school for a refresher will be too costly. MOOCs are a great alternative to my dilemma.

**Please describe what your plans are after MOOC course?**

I plan to use the tools I learned and apply them to my daily work life. The course that I’ve taken is relevant to my job. I was able to gain a different perspective on operations, and it helped me plan more effectively. I’ve used what I learned to develop tools that will help make my job easier.

**Can you tell me more about how Coursera has benefited you?**

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The only personal benefit that I’ve seen is a reduction in time worked (on the specific task). It was difficult planning supply for a factory that didn’t fully understand its throughput and cycle time. Based on my analytic tools, I was able to reduce inventory and increase turns, which is very good for our working capital. I was able to leverage what I learned from Coursera in my daily life.

Any other comments relating to Coursera you’d like to add?

No, just that it’s a great idea and I can’t wait to continue my education.

[End of Stephen John Interview]
Bob Rowley – Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself

My full name is, well you know my email, Storer H Rowley. I’m the director of media relations at Northwestern. I’ve been in that post more than 2 years. My background is in journalism. I spent 30 years working for the Chicago Tribune. I was a foreign correspondent for 12 of those years in different countries. Before that I was a white house and pentagon correspondent for the tribune. I was also a national correspondent based in Dallas covering the Southwest roaming from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego on different stories so I’ve had a broad experience in journalism over the years. Since I’ve been at Northwestern, I do a number of things but as the director of media relations, I’m in charge of the website for the university and the E-newsletter that we put out twice or three times a week to the entire university community, students, staff, and faculty, sort of telling the story- the story of the university. As such, I wrote those stories that you saw, probably, about the first MOOCs. We also have a program called semester online which is a different online program and predating both of these programs, which really just started in the last year, we have 5 masters programs online and all sorts of other online learning. So really those earlier programs were Northwestern University, serious, full complete programs.. they just happened to be online. Semester online was a new experiment, a consortium with other universities and now Coursera, the MOOCs program is the latest and newest of online learning. And I also wrote a story like you are doing research. When we had that first MOOC, I reached out by twitter to try and get some reaction so you have the reaction in the story I wrote by people who were taking our first MOOC.

And how many courses does Northwestern currently offer on Coursera?

We’ve offered three in the fall. And in the winter term we have now offered an additional three. Two of them were in January, the third one will start in March. We’re looking for the next courses to be offered but six so far. And in the background, while these are being moved into the pipeline, others are being prepared.

Okay great, my thesis supervisor in Copenhagen is actually helping to co-develop CBS’s first MOOC course. And can you tell me a little bit about your educational background?

I went to Harvard. I have a BA in English and American literature and the French language. I came out of Harvard and went right into work looking for journalism. It
was the post-Watergate era, everybody wanted to be a journalist. I’ve always been writing so it seemed like a good career for me. I went to work for the city news bureau of Chicago, a famed boot camp for journalists. It’s now defunct but for a hundred years, it’s where you earn your keep. You know, they put you out in the police stations covering crimes and fires and you work your way up to politicians and city hall and courts and it was great. In some ways, it was as big or great in education as the Ivy League was for me. And then I kept applying to the tribune and getting rejected. But I kept coming back like a bad cold and finally I got hired as an intern one summer. I was working for WINB radio then as a morning drive news writer. You know I was the person, when you hear the morning drive radio at five, somebody got up at one to go start writing that stuff at three. So I was glad to quit a full time job for an internship and three days before I was out on my tail, they hired me. That was the summer of ’79 so I had a great run. I worked at the Tribune all those years and I always wanted to go back and get a masters but never did because I kept getting great assignments. I got assigned to live in Mexico and cover Latin America for three years. My daughters were both born there. In those days, Mexico city was the worst polluted city in the world, 20 million people there. 7 tons of lead came into the air everyday and now I think China is far worse. But we actually left that for three years because you actually had your kids tested for lead and if it got to a certain level you moved because it was developmentally terrible and bad for the old and worst for the terribly young. And then we were in Canada for four and a half years and from there I covered a lot of …well Canada was kind of quiet for news. Canadians will not like this but it’s kind of like the Maytag repairman of news. I covered a lot of wars from there, things got very quiet sometimes so I would say well there’s war in Yugoslavia, do you need an extra hand? So I was on the foreign desk. So from Canada, I actually covered the fall of the Soviet Union and the Republics, some of which were right near where the Olympics are now. The wars in the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia. I went ashore with the marines Somalia when we went in Somalia in 1992. The Panama invasion when we went in there. So then I go back to Canada and cover some great stories about the high Artic. It was a great assignment and then finally Israel. For the last years as a foreign correspondent I covered the Middle East. Then I came home covered foreign affairs and defense issues as an editorial writer on the Tribune editorial board then I was the national editor of the paper for 7 years then I went into higher ed. And when I came to northwestern I got my masters of science in communication, so that answers the first part of your question.

So with this transition to higher education, did you work somewhere before Northwestern?
Yes, I worked for Elmhurst college. I left the Tribune in April of 2009 as newspapers went south. And I went to work as the executive director of government and community relations at Elmhurst college in the west suburb in Chicago. It’s a great school with kind of a religious background. I worked there kind of as a lobbyist. I went from assigning people to cover earmarks in congress as stories going to ask for them as a lobbyist which was interesting. Going down to Springfield to you know, ask for aid for students, state aid for students. The only time I really felt like I needed to shower was when I had to register as an Illinois lobbyist. That was a bad day. Then it was kind of fun. The same motivation that gets you into journalism gets you into higher ed. Doing good in the world, helping the next generation learn the path. Doing the public good, kind of a public service thing. So I loved Elmhurst and after about two and a half years there someone at Northwestern who I interviewed with in my first time around had an opening and asked if I was interested. And since I was commuting an hour.. two hours round trip everyday to Elmhurst, it made a lot more sense. I live in Evanston so I can walk to work now. And it’s a good university and it had an opportunity for me to actually get the masters I’ve always wanted to get and an opportunity to teach at the Medill school of Journalism or other schools there. So it’s a really good fit on all sorts of other fronts. And part of what got me interested in the MOOCs was getting my masters. I’ve always wanted a masters. I lecture in journalism now I don’t need it for journalism so I got it in communications. And a communication degree here is kind of a managerial communication degree. You learn change management, leveraging networks, leadership and decision making, public speaking, all these great things. But what you’re learning is kind of like plugging into the matrix. And learning the best that’s known and thought about technology, innovation over the last 30 or 40 years. It’s now studied in school. The stuff that I lived through when I wired my phone to the wall to send a 300 blog from my little laptop. It wasn’t even a laptop because it didn’t open in those days. So all this technology and the internet came to the floor during my time in journalism so I got to go back and learn why apple works. Apple works because of design as you’re learning. So that kind of got me interested in the MOOCs. That Northwestern needs to be on the cutting edge on this new transformation in higher education and who knows where it’s going to go. I’ve seen disruptive technology destroy the print newspaper business. Not destroy it, but really diametrically change everything about it. You know, it’s gone from news to content…and it’s commodity news. Not all of it but a lot of it is going to disappear from the great journalism that I knew. And the same thing could happen to higher ed. Will technology manage us or will we manage it? And that remains to be seen whether the freight train that hit journalism and so many other industries might also careen through higher ed. I think Northwestern is smart. Their attitude is we’re going to try different kinds of online education and we’re going to do
it both for our students who may want to learn that way and our faculty who may want to learn diff techniques of teaching. We’re just as much for the pedagogies that we might learn and how do you apply these online teaching techniques that you’re learning maybe to your bricks and mortar class that you’re teaching in the school in real time in the presence of real students. So there’s this synergy between the new things that we’re learning and the classrooms where actual people are sitting. So it’s interesting. But I also think that the university realizes that the train is leaving the station. And they can either be on it or not. And I think that we’re very comfortable being early followers. I don’t think we want to be the lead on everything in online education but I think we’re in the sweet spot of being early followers and adopting what seems to be working and being tried in other different places that seems to be most interesting most useful most powerful most popular and I don’t know most possible to use in learning ourselves, if that makes sense.

How closely are you involved to this MOOC movement at Northwestern? Can you tell me a little more about that?

I’m the PR guy essentially. I’ve interviewed all the people who are teaching so far. And it depends on the class and it depends on the professor. I know that the course that I’m currently taking, that you’re currently taking, is being discussed to be given to alumni. So right now it’s an open MOOC to the world but they’re learning from this. They’re figuring out (I think) how to apply that and offer it to Medill alumni or a maybe wider group so that we’re giving something of value to our Medill alums. Many of whom did not grow up in the content world of journalism but grew up in a day before the internet so it might be interesting to them the same way my communications degree was interesting to me. Todd Murphy, who’s teaching a basic course in engineering. He taught one of the second MOOCs offered in the fall and he has woven the MOOC that he’s teaching in the bricks and mortar class that he’s teaching in the classroom. I don’t know all the ways he’s done this, I can give you his email or reach out to him, but I think he might be the one that is most interesting for your research because he is using a couple of really innovative things. Another engineering professor created this board that you can draw on in real time which displays backwards so it can be read by people looking on from the other side. If you look at the story I wrote about, it’s described in there. So that’s kind of one technology that’s he adapted for the web and for the MOOC. He was also working with some really bright grad students who were trying to learn from what was done in the MOOC and apply it to the classroom. Again I don’t know all the nuances of that. Another interesting thing about that class is they were partnering with a high school in Pennsylvania to teach that course. That particular course was aimed at really high
achieving high school students as well as college students and they partnered with an actual classroom so here’s an opportunity for an American high school student in Pennsylvania to learn at one of the great elite American universities in engineering. So that might be worth something following up with him on two levels. Each professor tries to do something unique with their course. Those are the two so far that I think would be interesting and of course Owen Youngman, the course I mainly wrote about in the first story I wrote on MOOCs. He is a Medill professor who taught a course about understanding the media by understanding Google and he has Google glass and at last year’s commencement was taking video pictures with his wearable computer eyewear of various Medill students and Google glass the computer on his eye was part of that. Part of the material of his MOOC, separate from that but he is the digital professor at Medill already involved with Google to be one of the early beta testers of the eyewear but he as able to weave that into this MOOC because it was a cutting edge technology. So there was a portion of that MOOC last fall that dealt with wearable computers. Isn’t it amazing, this stuff is just out there.

So are you taking other MOOC courses as well?

No, I took Owen’s course in the fall and I’m taking this content course now. Both of them because, well Owen, I knew Owen at the Tribune. He was the head of digital at the Tribune. He was the guy at the Chicago tribune who tried to get old time foreign correspondents like me to adapt to the web and he didn’t have a lot of luck at first because we were all like we are writing our very important foreign stories about the middle east peace process here, don’t bother me with photos and videos and all that. We were idiots but you know, who saw it really coming that fast? Owen did. We had a meeting in Hong Kong, where all the foreign correspondents came. Every three years all the foreign correspondents would meet in a global city that was making news. In ‘97 Hong Kong was making news because it was going back to China. So we went there we met with the governor and Chinese officials. We went to Guangzhou and some other cities but we had meetings with high muckety-mucks from Chicago who would lecture us about you know here’s what’s going on at the Tribune so you can be grounded on what’s going on back home and Owen was out there saying you know you guys if you participate in the internet a little more with us, you could reach readers everywhere, not just in Chicago and you’ll have the ability to interact with your readers. Again this is 1997, and we’re like you know we’re very important foreign correspondents, don’t bother us with all this but we learned…we changed but he was cutting edge then he’s cutting edge now. I took his course because he has been at the Medill school of journalism now for some years as the digital professor which makes perfect sense so when I realized he was taking the first MOOC, a.) it didn’t
surprise me a bit that his has been selected and b.) the topic was brilliant because having just been through my masters program all about disruptive technology. This was all about Google and news right down to how the algorithm works and what you can learn from that, how it drives our life, even how we get all upset about privacy, oh my god the internet knows this and that about me, then we get pissed off you know if Amazon sends us something about flowers, and we’re like they should know me better than that! They’ve studied my profile. We’re equally upset about privacy invasion and you know about them not getting it right. It’s just bizarre but it’s true so his MOOC was great. It was about that and I learned from it. This MOOC was about content strategy, and that’s what I do. I tell the story of the university, I have a staff of 12, some of them write the stories, some of them do the multimedia and we try and tell the story everyday of the university so the content strategy MOOC was an opportunity to hear from 8-10 professors mostly from Medill, some from the Kellogg school of management on the best that’s known and thought about on content today. It seemed like it would be a smart thing for me to do for two reasons, 1.) to keep attune to where Northwestern MOOCs are going so I can write about them, cause I have to keep writing and promoting them. And they move so fast, you know Stanford is already saying they’re a waste of time, the people who started them are starting to say that they’re not everything they thought they’re were going to be and you should look up the news stories because it’s really interesting and you know every six months, it changes. Your thesis will be fine cause there’s lots of studies but it’s changing so fast even you might be disrupted. But at Berkeley, where they’ve started saying already they’re realizing how some things about them aren’t as true you know with this whole curve of 80,000 students sign up and 1,100 finish. But you know maybe that’s still good that 80,000 showed interest. But you know it’s a factor. That’s why we like to be early followers, not leaders on this. We want to be part of it but we want to make sure that we don’t overextend until we know where the technology is going. But I took this course for two reasons, because I wanted to learn the material myself because it’s good for me as a media guy and the other reason because I wanted to see how Northwestern MOOCs are evolving.

And with that, in your opinion, do you see Northwestern pushing forward with this, or backing off a little going forward?

I see right now, steady as she goes. I mean we are in the learning curve right now. Our administration feels strongly that this is an opportunity for our faculty to learn about a new pedagogy and putting it to work in our brick and mortar classrooms and also for Northwestern to be part of a national, rather international or global kind of trend. We want to be part of what’s going on and MOOCs and Coursera seems to be the best
type if platform to suit our needs and we want to learn as everyone else is learning. We want our students to have the opportunity and our faculty to learn from it to apply what they find interesting to their classrooms or not as they see fit. There’s a degree I think, at least from the PR person’s point of view, that this is reputational. You know, Northwestern is in the mix doing what everybody else is doing to learn from it and trying to do cutting edge things with it. I think we’re going to continue and we’re putting a lot of resources into it. It’s an extraordinarily time consuming thing to create, like 400 or 500 hours. And a lot of the faculty who do them them, are doing them you know because they want to learn too not that they’re getting compensated for every hour. It’s a huge investment and I think we want to learn from it we’re a university. We’re about learning so we try to learn from it as we’re doing it.

Is Coursera the only platform Northwestern is currently involved with?

Yes, for the time being there’s two different online learning organizations we partner with. The first one before the MOOCs was called 2U. If you look it up online, 2U.com. It’s an organization that does a different kind of online learning course. A little before we started doing the MOOC we started something called Semester Online. Semester Online, you can find a story on our website about that was well. Its about a collaboration, a consortium of different schools across America who are all sort of like minded peers. It's different form MOOCs that these are for credit, undergraduate, paid tuition courses that are available to anyone inside the consortium. So a Northwestern student that wants to learn about country music might take a course on Semester Online from Emory in Atlanta where maybe they have a great country music professor and maybe a student in Emory in Atlanta wants to take a course in journalism from Northwestern. It’s very specifically for undergraduates paying full tuition, roughly comparable to what you would pay at Northwestern or Emory or any of the other scores of schools involved in this consortium and that’s a very different platform. Their technology, 2U’s technology is kind of like the multi news environment that John Stewart will mock on The Daily Show. Where he’ll mock at a local news program that has..”we have 9 reporters!” And then you’ll see them all blocked out in little pictures well 2U’s has this technology that can allow up to 20 or more faces on the screen at any one time in real time interacting with the professor so you can’t be Googling and reading your e-mailing during class cause we’re going to see you. The professor is going to see you so you have to participate. It’s a way to make it meaningful, accountable and students who are in these classes are going to be judged on their participation and they’ll be able to be seen by the professor so if they’re drinking coffee or changing clothes or doing something wild or wacky you know …that’s not cool in class. So that’s one set of things, and then the MOOCs is
what you know. Massive, open, free, anybody, anywhere, anytime. There are things that are on the so program that are synchronous and things that are asynchronous. Real time, classroom time, where you participate together and asynchronous lectures when you’re not. But on the MOOC, you can tune in anytime, anywhere. It’s free and there’s no accountability. You do the work, you click on all the work, you get it sent in and you get a certificate for whatever it is. And those are the two new technologies we’ve used. We chose Coursera, we didn’t choose EdX, we didn’t choose Udacity, Coursera seemed like the best one for us.

**Is Northwestern concerned about the low completion rate? And since you know the professors personally, how do you think they evaluate the success of these Coursera courses?**

In varying interesting detailed ways. And you know the next round that we will be looking at is exactly that question. What have we learned? It’s been six months, what did we learn? I would highly recommend if you’re interested, and I can help you get in touch with Owen Youngman because he’s written 6 or 7 op-eds analyzing the data, the results and the teachings that he did in that class and the response he got. Would that be of interest?

**Yes, definitely.**

Cause he’s the professor. He’s taught it, he’s written about it. And we’re looking at his data and his conclusions and we’re making our decisions on how successful it’s been based on that. Maybe when we’re done with this, just shoot me a short e-mail summarizing the meat of what you told me about Copenhagen Business School, master’s thesis working with my professors on this and the fact that you’re working with your professor on this will be interesting to him. And it’s an opportunity for him as a leading thinker on MOOCs to be part of your thesis which may be interesting for him. But I also think it will give you the credibility that a professor at another business school in another country is really interested in this. Just shoot me a short note and I’ll forward it to him and recommend that he does and interview with you. I’ll highly recommend it and say that I’ve done one and you’re serious and all that. And I think he’ll probably do it and I think you’ll get much more out of him than me. You’ll get good data out of that for the analysis. You get anecdotal stuff from me but you won’t get any deep thoughtful analysis. And Owen will send you his blog, and his op-eds in the Financial Times and other places, which you should look at.
And lastly, what are some weaknesses that you’ve experienced or areas of improvement that you see for Coursera?

The problem for me as a student now, not as the PR guy for Northwestern. As a student I see these as wonderful opportunity courses. The problem with a MOOC is there isn’t someone grading you. You’re not paying money generally, unless you buy that extra certificate so it’s not like you’re going to get an important credit towards your masters or your PhD. So the big problem so far that I see, and again this is me personally as a student, is that 80,000 people sign up and maybe 1,000 or 2,000 finish. But I don’t know that that’s a bad thing. It means that 1,000 students from all over the world learned about Google and media and finished the course on it. And that 80,000 people around the world or 50,000 was the figure for Owen’s class were interested. And I think that’s fabulous. That mother in Paris or that grandfather in China or that student in Evanston high school can take a course at a great elite university from a marvelous professor in a specialty like engineering or a specialty like journalism. It’s a wonderful world is flat educational kind of thing. And you know professors are taking MOOCs from other professors to see how they’re doing them. Owen did before he launched his course. I think it’s a remarkable reflection of how the world is changing. I think it’s a good thing to jump on and learn as we go because it goes so fast. No one can predict 100% where it’s going so it’s smart for universities to be involved; it’s smart for students to be involved. And our lives are so busy so we have to really be committed to finish 6 weeks of course work when we’re working 10-12 hour days, 6 days a week. So it’s not surprising maybe that at the beginning, oh I surely want to learn all this stuff and then oh I have to read 6 books…eh I don’t know about that. So I think that’s the downside, there’s no mechanism, there’s no enforcement mechanism, it’s really all voluntary, but then again that’s okay. 1,100 people graduated from Owen’s course with their certificate and that’s a good thing. It’s many times the number he would have taught in his classes at Medill. 10X. 20X. So he’s reaching more people. That’s a good thing too even if it’s not as great as we might have hoped it would be judging from those early numbers.

[End of Storer Rowley Interview]
Sylvia Schmidt – Interview

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

I’m 27. I finished my masters last year. No the year before. It’s already two years. Well one and a half, I finished in December. I did my bachelor’s and masters degree in media production. I specialized in user experience design is what it is called. It’s about taking websites, taking data, and looking how people can manage the site, how people can improve the site, how people can improve processes and such things. But I have pretty broad background in anything to do with media from writing pieces, to taking photos, cutting videos, cutting audio. It’s a broad background but I’m currently starting outside of my work field. I’m mostly working in a small hotel because my mom got sick so I had to come back home. She’s fine now but it’s been over a year so it’s a little hard to find a job directly in my field of study. I’ve been taking MOOCs because I’m going crazy. If you’re home a lot and if you’re taking care of someone, you do have time but you need to be flexible about it. There’s an hour here and hour there where you literally have nothing to do so you can sit around, or you can read but after a month or so I couldn’t do that anymore so I started out doing MOOCs. Cause you know you can watch half a lecture or so then you can just stop and take care of anything else that’s coming and then get back to that.

Which university did you go to? And where are you currently?

Currently, I’m in a very small town in Bavaria. I got my degrees from a university for applied sciences also in Bavaria. It’s across the state, so I’ve never left.

Is this your first MOOC? Can you tell me a little bit more about your previous experience with MOOCs?

I’ve taken and finished about 10 right now so it’s really not my first. The first one I took was on Coursera. It was competitive strategy. Ludwig-Maximilians university Munich. It was something that I, competitive strategy was something that was brushed on in my studies but it was not something that was deeply covered so I thought that it would be a fun time to learn a little bit more about that to really learn about the business side because I come from a really technical study. It’s essentially an engineering degree that I have so there’s lots of math and physics, not so much business. So I started out with that and because I specialized in user experience I also took also at the same time, a psychology course at Udacity. And those are the first two that I started off with and ever since I haven’t stopped.

How many courses do you usually take at one time?

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Usually no more than two or three. Usually it’s two. Any more than that and it can get tough. Because you can’t really know beforehand how much time a course will take. You get these little information about how many hours the professor thinks you’ll need but it’s not actually true. Sometimes it can be vastly different from what is required to do the course well. So I’ll take two most of the time. Sometimes they just overlap. Some will be finishing as the other two is starting so they just over lap. They are somewhat simultaneous but not exactly.

With all of the MOOC courses you have taken, were you able to finish all of them?

I didn’t finish all of them. I finished most because I’m really choosy about what I spend my time with and I’ll maybe watch the first lecture and if it’s really something that I can’t stand about it then I’ll just drop out. I don’t want to put my time and effort into it. But I’ve got a few where I’m not completing which means I won’t get any recognition for the course but I watched the videos and such because it’s interesting but it wouldn’t have any value to get a certificate. Especially if I don’t have as much time as I thought. I’ll just watch it, maybe look at some quizzes but I won’t do assignments.

How many hours do you spend per week on the current course?

I kind of compressed it. This is one of the course where I was lucky enough to have a couple of weekends off in between because I’m working at a small hotel so I don’t usually have weekends off but I compressed it. I did a few weeks in one day. A couple of weeks in a day. So I can’t really say how much time it was but three days to get all of it done. Three full days where pretty much started at 9 in the morning and finished sometime in the evening. So I guess about 2 or 3 or 4 hours per week. Maybe.

And how about how much time did you spend with the other courses that you did not compress?

That’s really difficult to say because one of them I just finished yesterday. Moralities of everyday life and it was one where the readings and lectures were really heavy. And watching the videos would take up to two hours because the lectures were that length. And there were additional readings and such so that took a lot of time too. I had to watch some TED talks for example or read some articles. And then there were quizzes you had to take so you didn’t have to write an assignment and I guess I spent about 4 or 5 hours per week for that.

And it sounds like you have plans to continue to enroll in more MOOCs?

Yes! I have a couple more starting next week.
And you mentioned you’ve taken a couple courses on Udacity. Can you tell me about what other MOOC platforms you have experience with?

Other ones I’ve used is open2study. Its from the Australian open universities. It’s a small platform I’ve just fooled around with. It’s really small cute courses. These are 4 week courses that start every month again and again and again so you can take them as often as you want until you finish. But you have a weekly structure once you’re in it. So you have to watch some videos and answer some assignments I think they call it but it’s basically quizzes. And there it’s really easy, they’re cute courses. They’re really short but they compress a lot of information into them without really getting too heavy. So it’s a really great starting point to delving into deeper courses like Coursera or Udacity later on. I’ve looked at EdX but I didn’t like it. I didn’t like the platform. Its as simple as that. I’m unwilling to spend time with that user experience design because that’s what I do. And I see the mistakes and I think oh no.

And what would you say is your favorite platform that you’ve experienced?

I would say the one that we are on. Coursera. By far. I think that is because there is time pressure behind it so with Udacity and such I’ll start a course and I’ll let it lie and take it up again and it takes forever to finish a course like that because I can stop. I don’t have any sort of time limitation and on Coursera you have these weekly intervals where you have to do something. There’s a little bit of pressure behind it and it’s helpful at least for me.

And what made you decide to take this particular course? What did you hope to achieve by taking it?

I took the content strategy course because I hoped to get a little deeper information or to maybe get some different perspective because I know a lot about content strategy I have to say. It was part of my studies and I had to learn a lot about it. Look at content and how to focus strategies but it was, first of all it was mostly in my bachelors studies so its been quite a while. Now, 3 years or so since I’ve finished that. And there were a couple of courses that you had to take and not all of them were really good. We had some guest lectures for some of them and I wouldn’t have taken the course if I would have known that it was going to be like that. But since it was for professionals I thought it would go a little deeper. They touched on a couple of things that I didn’t know, that I hadn’t heard before but most of them I knew about. I hoped I’d get a little bit more out of it than I actually got out of it.

So the course didn’t really meet your expectations?
Not quite. Not quite, it was an okay course. They did pretty well on the videos and such but they could have gone a bit deeper. Much more like an introduction than a professional level course.

Can you talk to me about areas of improvement? Or what you would have liked to seen?

I would have liked the material to be deeper. I’m not so sure about the grading that they evaluated. The case study it was interesting. That was one fun part about the course where you really had to use what you learned but seeing the submissions of others...kind of frustrating sometimes cause you could see that some didn’t get a particular piece of the lectures and maybe if they had some kind of step by step evaluations instead of one big project they could have improved the learning process. That’s something I would have liked. But I liked the case study it’s not like I didn’t like it.

Can you tell me a little bit about your participation level in the course or with your other MOOCs?

I usually read the forums. I don’t always post. Sometimes I post more, sometimes I post less. It depends on the topic. There were some courses where I posted amazingly much and I would spend way more time with the discussion board than the actual course material. But on this course, not so much. I kind of read the most interesting, the most updated threads and if something came up that I knew the answer to, I would post it. One or two threads I did start because I had some questions where I thought maybe someone else could help me but overall I didn’t participate that much in this course or well in others I did a lot more. Anyway I’ll always read the discussion boards at least.

Are you pretty happy with the responses you receive when you do post?

Yeah, yeah sometimes it’s just controversial topics. Where you want to get feedback from a very different viewpoint from yours because you’re having some kind of problem where you think about it and you come up with one type of solution but it doesn’t quite make it where you want it to be so if there’s radical posts, it helps kind of fine tune your own thinking to get a different perspective to maybe get where you want to go. Usually the discussion boards are pretty great. On the moralities course, they were kind of strange because they were so much about very personal, very controversial topics. And some people just have very strong opinions and kind of bordered on their responses on being insulting and such but that’s the nature of those discussions. If you have moralities discussions in real life, they would be just the same way especially if you start them with a stranger.

What are some strengths and weaknesses of MOOCs that you’ve experienced?
The strengths are simply that you can get there from anywhere. You can kind of manage your own timeframe. You can watch the lectures at 2’oclock at night if you can’t sleep or whatever. You can watch them at 6 in the morning before you go to work for a few minutes. That’s great, that’s beautiful. But what I learned from college, from my time at university is the true interaction you can not have that on discussion boards. You put out your thoughts and such and you get responses. That is not a problem, but you always have time delays. For example, in Europe we’re up to eight hours ahead of the US. Most of the MOOCs participants are from vastly different countries so you might get some answers but it’s always later, it’s not true interaction. There’s usually quite a bit of time delay in between. That’s what’s different with classes. You can ask the professor. You can ask somebody who knows what they are talking about. To rely on a peer that has some insights. Usually even if some people are that good at the subject they may have great thoughts you can’t really exercise relying on the source. You have to check it out or you have to rethink it.

**With your background, can you tell me a little bit about your interface with Coursera and some things you liked or disliked?**

The Coursera interface, let’s see, the basic ones are really great. You can get really easily to discussion, you can usually get really easily to videos and such but every course has a different menu. The menu you arrive at can be changed by the course staff and sometimes they don’t get it right. For example, in the content strategy MOOC, it was kind of hard to find the discussion boards because they aren’t called discussion boards. You have one that links you to the discussion boards, I think it was called, something about weekly discussion postings. Yeah, that is different than other Coursera courses where it’s simply called discussion boards or forums. So that is making the interactions really harder and the other interactions you’re having within the forums is upwards and downwards. There’s little arrows. And they’re okay, they’re fine but it can be hard to find some threads in the discussion board. If you are looking for a particular thing, you have to trust that someone posted it in the right category and so on. That they attached some text so you can actually look for it, and that’s kind of not so great because people don’t always have the expertise. For example, they won’t know what tags are so search engine tags are a great idea that you can post them but most people won’t because they don’t know what they are and why they’re useful. Lots of people complain about the discussion boards because they can’t find threads in the end so that can be hard but it’s always been a problem with forums. So I got no ideas how to correct it.

**And can you talk to me a little bit about key differences with Coursera and classes in person?**
It’s kind of different in a lot of ways because when I started my masters degrees we were very few people in courses, or classes I’m not sure which one is right. We were just 10 people so you had a personal relationship with your professors. They could introduce a topic but they usually like to have more direct open discussion with those 10 people sitting around you. That’s something very different from Coursera. You got to ask questions. You usually had some kind of interaction. I’m an active note taker. I like to write a lot of things down. I do that with Coursera but sometimes I’m just transcribing what people are saying. While usually in my masters I usually took down notes. Just small pieces of information, not so much whole sentences. And there were a lot more assignments or interaction opportunities because one of my professors usually talked about a topic and then introduced practical examples. And you played around with that during your lecture time. So it had a whole other level of interaction.

**Do you use social media sites connected to the MOOC courses? Do you have any examples?**

I don’t usually.

**Okay. Can you tell me a little about how you choose the courses you want to take?**

That’s kind of different. This course now, I actually thought about last year but it was too late. I wanted to take the one starting next week last year but I think I was like 4 weeks too late to actually complete it and it was taken down rather fast so I didn’t have a chance to watch the videos entirely. Sometimes I just stumble across them. On Coursera they usually have this small place on the right where you have a watch list and if I’m bored I look through the courses and I add things to my watch list. I get emails if the course is rerun or if it starts again. Sometimes in discussion boards people tell about some course they’ve taken that they thought it was great. And actually I’ll look some up and if I think it’s interesting I’ll add it to my list. But I also just browse the courses on the smaller platforms it’s easier. On Coursera you can’t look through them all. On Udacity there are less so you can see the new ones that they started and same goes for open2study. You can quickly scan through them.

**Have you stayed in touch with other students you have interacted with in MOOCs?**

I’ve stayed in touch with a couple. Some of them I’ve added on Facebook but I don’t know. But I’m not there that often I have to say. I mostly use it to stay in touch with friends as a private medium. I get status updates from time to time and such things but no not close contact. I usually spend a lot of time with people on the discussion boards. Especially if you start a thread, you keep posting and sometimes I don’t know an email comes from somebody like two
months later and those people just want to tell you something else and they just want to share their thoughts. Also with people from different cultures or different backgrounds they usually add to it because we see just a little different. I mean sometimes there can be a huge difference but usually it’s just on a smaller scale.

**Can you tell me how you benefit from MOOCs?**

The biggest benefit to me is that I’ve taken my bachelors and masters degrees so the programs were very structured and you didn’t have much time to look at anything outside your subject. Your attention was straight down to focus on what someone else thought was important to focus on. Not so much that you get time to focus on what you want. So I actually took one or two extra courses and studied one semester more just to get some time to see something outside of my own discipline. And that’s what I get from MOOCs. The opportunities to take intro to psychology or something that I didn’t have the opportunity to before. That’s a great benefit that I get to see just a little bit onto other disciplines. I don’t think I will stop. MOOCs are a great way, especially to get some food for thought. They have a lot of information and introductory so it’s easy to follow. You don’t need any beforehand education.

**Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you want to share related to MOOCs?**

That’s actually a difficult question. I don’t think so. I’ve taken some very diverse topics as I said business to psychology to moralities now which is a little like psychology to HIC which is human computer interaction and content strategy and it’s amazing how many people you see in all of these courses even thought they are so different and you get to recognize names of people in the forums and it’s kind of cool you get to say hey I know you. At the same time its kind of strange cause people maybe also recognize your name for example I had one incident where someone I had a Udacity course with I met again a couple months later in a Coursera course and she recognized me by the way I did forum posts I seem to do that in a very linear way and she recognized the way I posted.

[End of Sylvia Schmidt Interview]

### 8.4 Appendix D – Coursera Blogs

5 Blogs from Coursera: Dipendra, Feynman, Ines, Laura, Wang.
Hi everyone! My name is Dipendra, a college student in Kathmandu, Nepal. I wanted to write and tell you about my journey as a Courserian.

Last June, I signed up for “Introduction to Sociology” from Princeton University on Coursera. The course experience began when the first reading materials and lectures were posted. I was nervous and scared to start, as I didn’t know what to expect.

Over the weeks, my insecurities subsided as I became hooked on the discussion forums. I looked forward to hearing back from my fellow classmates. The discussion forums were very lively and never sleeping. The topics we discussed would go on and on for hours, which was never the case in an in-person classroom that I had experienced. It was exhilarating.

A lot of local study groups were forming, and I took this initiative of doing that here at Kathmandu. The in-person study group was motivating as well; I could see a wide range of discussion going on about a particular issue simultaneously in person and on the discussion forums.

This type of immersive and organic learning experience helped me see hundreds of diverse perspectives on the topic of sociology. I also had a unique sense of ownership of the class. After the six weeks were completed, I started looking at things through the sociological lens. I would try to look at existing personal and social issues around me in Kathmandu, and apply different perspectives I saw from my fellow classmates on the problem.

My story doesn’t end there. A few weeks after the completion of course, I was invited to visit Princeton University in October by my professor! Professor Duneier invited me to visit him because of my active presence in the class through our weekly Google+ Hangouts and my participation on the forums. I had become familiar with Professor Duneier over the weeks from watching lectures from thousands of miles away, and it was a surreal experience to see him right in front of me. We talked about the class experience and I got an opportunity to attend the live lectures at the university. As an added treat, I also had the pleasure of meeting two other very impressive personalities during the visit including the Princeton University Provost and Daphne Koller, co-founder of Coursera.
30+ Coursera classes and a Google Internship

Feynman Liang is one of Coursera’s ‘top 50’ students by number of courses he has completed. To date, Feynman has taken 34 courses! We have asked him to share tips for the Coursera community on how to tackle taking multiple courses on Coursera.

At first, I was skeptical about taking classes online. Since I was already enrolled in a 5-year bachelor’s program between Amherst College and Dartmouth College, what reason was there for sacrificing my already scarce time to take classes online? With hesitation and the intention of dropping out when the class got hard, roughly a year and a half ago I enrolled in my first course on Coursera: “Machine Learning” with Professor Andrew Ng.

What a life-changer. As I worked through the course, I noticed overlap between Coursera’s lectures and my actual college classes. Pretty soon, I was walking into class only to find myself reviewing material already covered on Coursera. Likewise, often the quizzes and programming assignments on Coursera were a great place to actually apply the theory covered in my college lectures. Rather than competing for my time, I discovered a pleasant symbiotic relationship where the two classrooms reinforced each other.

Although I haven’t yet earned credentials for my courses on Coursera, my takeaways from all of them have been no less significant. After completing Professor Ng’s class, I found that not only did my actual grades improve, but I had also gained an awareness of advanced topics within machine learning. Boy was that exciting; I could actually sound intelligent when I talked to my professors during office hours!

As I took more classes on Coursera, the impact online education had on my everyday life became more and more significant. Despite never taking a CS101 class, I was able to use my computer programming experience gained from Coursera to satisfy the prerequisites for an algorithms class at Amherst College and a parallel programming class at Dartmouth College.

Perhaps my most significant (so far, at least) reward from online education was during my summer internship interviews. Although I signed an NDA to not disclose the questions, I can say that both Professor Sedgewick’s and Professor Roughgarden’s algorithms classes cover more than enough to ace technical interviews. Thanks to the preparation provided by my online classes, I am a software engineering intern this summer at Google.
But, as you fellow Courserians may know, often the gap between online education and real-world impact seems quite wide and the utility of online classes may be questionable. To help bring the two closer, here are some of my important lessons learned from my experience with Coursera around how to handle multiple courses and putting what you’ve learned to good use:

TIP 1: BE HUNGRY FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE.

Knowledge is only as useful as the extent to which it is utilized. Be on the lookout for places to apply your online education. In my personal experience, I’ve found people to be much more interested in my understanding of the material than in logistical details surrounding what’s an “official” college class.

TIP 2: DON’T BE AFRAID TO DO POORLY OR DROP OUT.

How well you do in an online class certainly won’t impact your GPA, and no one has to ever know when you drop an online class. This is dramatically different from college, where your performance goes on your transcript. Forever. So, make sure to take full advantage of the opportunity to try out a variety of classes and instructors without repercussions. I often find myself dropping classes because they’re not what I thought they would be like and completing classes I never thought I’d be interested in.

TIP 3: HARD SKILLS ARE WHAT MATTERS AT THE END OF THE DAY.

The knowledge you gain from an online class is yours to keep and is the most valuable thing you’ll take away at the end of any course. The more, the better.

Until next time, stay hungry and stay fast, fellow Courserians!

Feynman Liang

P.S., GigaOM just wrote an article about Feynman on 8/9/13 with more tips. Feel free to read more here: How to pick the best MOOCs: 6 tips from a Coursera junkie - GigaOM
My name is Ines Cifuentes. I am 58 and living with Stage 4 breast cancer. One of the tough things about advanced cancer is how much it takes away. My days are long as I can no longer work.

I took the Coursera course, “Modern and Contemporary American Poetry”, taught by Al Filreis of the University of Pennsylvania. I chose it because as a physics major in college I didn’t have time to take a poetry course. When I saw that we would be reading William Carlos Williams, one of my favorite poets, I signed up. I didn’t learn about Coursera until the course had already started so I began the third week in and tried to catch up. I never did; I am now signed up to take it again in September. I am very happy that I can do that. And they are adding Wallace Stevens!

It was wonderful to be able to take a class on poetry taught by a fabulous teacher and a great group of TA’s. I was impressed by how Professor Filreis used a variety of instructional strategies and technology to create a community of learners. The TA’s were great and they provided an in-house classroom that we could all watch and be a part of. We learned from watching and listening to them how to read poems closely and talk about them. The class included weekly live webcasts, online readings of the poems, quizzes and writing assignments. Participants joined online forums and in some parts of the world met in person. In the last live webcast several students talked about how the course was transformative.

In my experience one is lucky to have a teacher who is passionate about what s/he studies and wants to share it with you. Al Filreis does that with modern poetry. His enthusiasm is infectious and his deep knowledge of literature reminds us that reading poetry matters in life.
Getting the most out of your Coursera experience

Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of guest posts from Laura Cushing, one of our amazing Coursera students. Laura is freelance writer and avid course taker (7 courses so far!).

Welcome to the wonderful world of free education! When I started my first course at Coursera, I was so excited. I had no idea what it would be like! Would I be able to keep up? Would I be able to interact with my professor and my fellow students? I was a bundle of nerves waiting for the course to begin. And when that course opened - there was so much to do. So many things to discover, and keep straight. Now that I’m on my seventh or so class, I still feel that excitement of beginning a new learning experience - but a lot less anxiety. Now I know where everything is located, and how to use the Coursera system effectively.

Here are some tips and tricks for how to get started on your education adventure!

Choosing Classes

There are so many classes to choose from! When I first saw the list, I wanted to sign up for everything. Learning opportunities abound! After taking a few deep breaths, I started to approach things a bit more logically. I made a list of the courses I was interested in, and open them up to watch the introductory videos and read the requirements. I also got out the calendar to check dates; some courses overlapped and I knew I wouldn’t realistically be able to keep up with five or six classes at once.

My advice to you is to examine all the classes you’re interested in. Make a list! But then cull that list down to see which ones you can take together without overwhelming yourself. Remember that most courses will be offered again, so you can take any classes you miss the first time during the next go around. Don’t just examine start dates, but be aware of how long a course will run. Also, take a good look at what the course will involve; most classes list a Work Load that tells you how many hours per week you can expect to spend on the class. Don’t spread yourself too thin; you want to have a successful and positive learning experience.

Before Class Begins

When you sign up for a class, you should receive an email that lets you know that you are registered for said class. Make sure it doesn’t wind up in your spam folder (this happened to me)! Add Coursera to your address book if your email is picky so that you will receive all your course notifications. You may want to set up a special folder in your inbox so that you can view all your Coursera emails together.

Some classes use textbooks. Either it will be one that is free online (like this one for the Science from Superheroes to Global Warming Class; or it will be optional to purchase. If your textbook is optional and you want to purchase it, you want to get it before the class begins. The closer to class time, the harder it can be to find the book at a reasonable price. A lot of textbooks have e-book versions that can be purchased or even rented for a lower price than a physical copy. Another great option is to search for a used copy of the textbook from a used book seller. You can usually purchase a used previous edition for a fraction of the cost of a new current edition. I ordered my copy of the Worlds Together, Worlds Apart textbook for my A History of the World Since 1300 class months before the class started. I was able to find a previous edition, used but in good condition, for five dollars!

Before your classes start, take a bit of time to set up your Coursera profile and adjust your account settings. You can find both of these options in the drop-down list under your name in the top navigation bar. Setting up a profile will allow other students to know a bit about you. You might want to make some new friends in your classes. Settings let you set your time zone, change your password if needed, and change your name and email address. Make sure you are using the name you want to appear on your certificates of completion.

When Class Starts
The big day is finally here! Your course is starting! When you take a look at the course’s homepage for the first time, there is definitely a feeling of excitement. So many things to do! Do you jump right into watching videos? Read the readings? Get on board with the discussion forums and introduce yourself? So many choices. In the center of the page, there is a section for Announcements. There is usually a Welcome to the Course sort of posting there, which is a great place to start. The right column will show you what is new - new lectures posted, new quizzes, and/or assignments. The left column contains links to all the course content. Some helpful professors mark a section with Start Here. If they don’t, a good idea is to start by checking the syllabus. This will show you what you are in store for as the course progresses. If your syllabus lists dates that quizzes and assignments are due, it can be helpful to note these on your personal calendar.

Before you do anything else, take a moment to adjust your course settings. When you are on your course page, the dropdown list under your name in the top navigation bar will include course settings. On your course settings page, the first option is for Email preferences. I recommend setting this to receive notifications from the course staff - but NOT from the discussion forums. The reason for this is that once you start participating on the discussion forums, you may find yourself with threads that receive hundreds of replies. This can easily lead to inbox flooding which can feel overwhelming. You can still check threads you are subscribed to even when you aren’t receiving email notifications; just click the Subscribed button on the discussion boards to bring up those threads. The second setting on the course preferences is for your video settings. Choose what is appropriate for you, or leave it set at default.

Making Class Work

Here’s some tips for getting the most out of your class work! I’ve found that when it comes to watching a class video, I get the most out of them with subtitles on. To turn subtitles on, click the CC button and select your language. I take notes as I watch a video, pausing where I need to. I find that writing notes out by hand helps me remember best, but I know of some students who print out the subtitle text and highlight important points. There’s no wrong way, just find what works for you. One thing that has been invaluable to me is being part of a small study group. Whether it’s on Facebook or StudySpace, or an in-person meetup, a small study group of friends can help you focus and stay motivated.

Find a schedule that works for you. If you have a little spare time each day, watch one video a day and do a little reading throughout the week. If you have a big block of time on a weekend, use that to complete a project or test. Keep involved with discussions, and use the discussion boards to read up on or ask questions about any topic you want more information on.

When Class Ends

Double check to make sure you have met all the requirements you need to in order to get a certificate if your class is offering a certificate of completion. If there is still time, finish up any assignments you may have missed, even if you will only get partial credit. The forums and materials will stay up for a short time after the class has ended, but in many cases are gone within a month or so. So if there are any threads you particularly enjoyed and want to save, or you want to make a copy of your essays, now’s the time to do it.

When grades have been tallied, you will usually receive an email that you have earned your certificate of completion. Not all courses offer certificates. For graded courses, you will be able to find your records on the Course Records page (https://www.coursera.org/account/records). From here, you will be able to print any certificates of completion you have earned and also share your scores on Facebook, Twitter, or Google+. Go ahead and share, and be proud! You’ve earned it.

-Laura Cushing, Coursera student
How to earn 40 certificates: An interview with China’s MOOC Superstar

Interview conducted by and translated from original Chinese by Coursera team member, Eli Bildner.

Guokr.com’s “Ten-thousand Youth Conference” bore all the hallmarks of a rock concert: hundreds of effervescent twenty-somethings, a flashy AV setup, migrating packs of autograph-seekers. But at this gathering, the “rock stars” signing autographs were, in fact, tenured professors from greater China’s top universities, and the animated audience was comprised of MOOC fans from across the country.

I met a number of remarkable people during the Guokr conference (as a Coursera translation partner, Guokr has translated an impressive array of courses into Chinese). I met Professor Benson Yeh, of National Taiwan University, whose course on probability featured the first MOOC-based multiplayer gaming platform. I met Zi Lingzi, at 14 years old the youngest member of Guokr’s MOOC Academy. And then there was Wang Zhen. When the emcee called him up to the stage, the audience erupted in applause. I’d never heard of him, which clearly signified by remove from the China MOOC loop; Wang Zhen had already achieved local renown as a MOOC superstar, having earned 40 credentials (over 30 of them from Coursera).

Earlier this month, we had a chance to connect with Wang Zhen via email.

Coursera: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Wang Zhen: My name is Wang Zhen. I was born in Nanyang, in Hubei Province, in 1984. In 2002, I entered Beihang University, in Beijing, to study applied physics, and in 2009 received my master’s in computational physics from Beihang as well. Now, I live in Beijing’s Haidian District, where I work on computational modeling for a manufacturing business.

Coursera: What originally inspired you to start taking MOOCs? What was the first course you completed?

Wang Zhen: Ever since I was small I’ve always been a very curious person, but even having spent so many years in school I’d never found a relaxed, self-directed learning environment. If MOOCs hadn’t appeared, it’s possible that my curiosity would have remained buried forever. Fortunately, in 2011 I found Stanford’s three online open courses: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Databases. Conveniently, at that time I was pretty free, and thus my MOOC studies began. And from then on I’ve fallen in love with MOOCs and their free atmosphere.

The first course I completed was Sebastian Thrun’s Artificial Intelligence course. Or, it could have been Andrew Ng’s Machine Learning class; that depends on which course, in 2011, first released its certificates!

Coursera: In total, how many MOOCs have you completed to date?

Wang Zhen: To date, I’ve completed 33 Coursera courses, including one Princeton course that didn’t give statements of accomplishment. I’ve also completed some Udacity courses and EdX courses, and one Google course on Gamification.
3 Courses Wang Zhen has taken that you should consider taking too:

<table>
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<th>University</th>
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<td>University of Illinois</td>
<td>Hetero Parallel Programming</td>
<td>1/6/2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enroll in Cryptography
Enroll in Model Thinking
Enroll in Parallel Prog

Coursera: What are some of the things you’ve learned through your MOOC studies?

Wang Zhen: What’s most excited me has been artificial intelligence and machine learning. We live in the era of big data, and every year — every month — we see smarter products emerging. Through taking MOOCs, I’ve gone from being a machine learning and artificial intelligence “outsider,” to a hobbyist who’s able to fluently comprehend the literature, and who could, one day, make it a profession.

Coursera: In what ways — if any — have MOOCs changed your life?

Wang Zhen: MOOCs have definitely changed my life. First, MOOCs have pretty much taken over my non-work life. Through MOOCs, I’ve also met a ton of students who are as passionate about MOOCs as I am. Third, for the first time in my life I’ve attracted attention from the media!

MOOCs have also changed the way that I think in a personal sense. Today, I think of MOOCs mostly as a way of organizing knowledge. Even though there are so many disciplines out there, there are also many fundamental principles that are similar. I love that feeling of understanding a subject by learning about all that surrounds it. Of course, I also hope that my studies can help my personal development, and can help my career.

Coursera: What’s been most challenging about pursuing this course of study?

Wang Zhen: Honestly, regardless of whether I’m just auditing a class or doing the assignments, I’ve never thought that completing a class is a particularly hard thing to do. It’s certainly a bit hard cramming it all in, but since I’m pretty far from retirement, spending time like this is what I should be doing. Either way, I feel more pressure from my family. For example, my father will tell me: “Don’t spend so much time studying all those crazy things. Put your time into something that will make you money.” This kind of talk gives me a ton of pressure. So I still need to find a balance.

Of course, there are plenty of times when class is hard — but it’s interesting too! For example, an assignment in “Probabilistic Graphical Models” (Stanford) took up two days of free time. Cracking RSA passwords in “Cryptography” (Stanford) kept me up to 2am. A large-scale NP problem in “Discrete Optimization” (University of Melbourne) took up 20 hours, and I still didn’t figure it out. But I don’t experience this as pain. Rather, solving these kinds of problems gives me a tremendous sense of accomplishment and happiness.

Coursera: What role do you think MOOCs can play specifically in China?

Wang Zhen: To many Chinese, the appearance of MOOCs has significant meaning. We all know that China is a country with educational inequity. Tons of people, for many reasons, aren’t able to benefit from great teaching. MOOCs can fill this gap, can let knowledge flow irrespective of barriers like location or environment. My hope is that through MOOCs, no person’s unique talents will be stifled for reasons like these.

Of course, for many reasons, if MOOCs want to play a role in China, they still have a long way to go. Both from the general atmosphere, and from government, MOOCs will face challenges. But the desire of young people to learn is something that can’t be overlooked.
Coursera: Is there any advice you can give to fellow Courserians who are still working on completing their first course?

Wang Zhen: Here are a few tips:

1. Seek happiness. Can you gain happiness from taking a class? If you can, I think you’re going down the right path. Otherwise, try another class or do something else that makes you happy.
2. Do your homework early. Deadlines are set; your free time isn’t. If you wait for the last minute, there’s a good chance you’ll miss the deadline.
3. Cherish the forums. Through the forums, you can find basically all the materials you need for studying. Using the forums is also a great route for solving hard problems. For nearly all of the hardest problems I’ve solved, I’ve gotten inspiration in the forums.

Find a study partner. This should help you finish your homework, and keep up your progress.

Coursera: Is there anything else you’d like to share with the Coursera community?

Wang Zhen: I’ve got less and less hair. Is there a correlation between taking MOOCs and going bald?
8.5 Appendix E: Various Discussion Posts from Coursera

Yasmine Misad - 6 months ago

As a non-native English speaker, I have no problem watching the videos without subtitles and understanding all of it. However, when it comes to writing texts, especially a "strategic" content, it is somehow harder to do that in English (my third spoken language) and choosing those particular words that make all the difference etc.

So the idea is, maybe it could be helpful for people like me, to let's say submit an essay in English but also in the mother tongue and eventually when there is a peer review, it could be done by people speaking that particular language (whether it's Arabic, French, Chinese or whatever...).

no need to dig deep in all the variety of languages that exist, and English will always be mandatory (in case no people speaking that language are willing to do the review). I think providing this option will make it a lot more easier for people to enjoy the course.

What do you think?

Sarah M. Hall - 5 months ago

Should fluency in English be considered in the assignment evaluations?

One of the assignments I am peer reviewing is in very stilted English. Sometimes I can read between the lines and figure out what was intended. In other places it's more difficult, and I fear I might have misunderstood. Sorry, this is very anglocentric — I realise that for a lot of people on the course, English is not their first language. I suppose the only reply can be: 'Just do your best', but just wanted to flag this up.

Is it even worth mentioning the language level in the evaluation, or shall I just ignore it and give the student the benefit of the doubt?

Verita Luzz - 6 months ago

Hey John.

I also appreciate any correction on my grammar because English is not my native language (I'm from Mexico), so forgive my spelling in the future, I'm not that good writing in English but I'm trying my best jeje.

JBL Thabet - 5 months ago

I will share a wise edict from one of the classes I have taken at Coursera, there are "many" English languages spoken around the world. We have to respect the differences.