

Entrepreneurship: The First MOOC in Malaysia

Muhstak Al-Atabi

Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) appear to be a very hot topic in the education circles with the promise to change the world educational landscape. This paper reports on the first MOOC to be offered by a Malaysian University. The MOOC described here is a course on Entrepreneurship and it attracted very good response from students all over the world. This course is expected to inspire more interest in the MOOCs in other Malaysian Universities.

Introduction

Distance learning, where students take courses while being physically separated from their teachers for majority of the duration of the course [1], is by no means a new phenomenon. It has been delivered through mail and TV and recently through the Internet. Nevertheless, distance learning is viewed as a second option or an alternative type of education and it did not really grow to the level that it becomes a major segment of education provision. However, this may be quickly changing now. In 2011, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) about Artificial Intelligence offered by Stanford University attracted 160,000 students from around the world, with 23,000 of them managing to successfully complete the course, which gives a completion rate of 14%.

MOOCs are offered openly, for free, to students anywhere in the world [2]. Although the first MOOC was offered by the University of Manitoba in 2008 [3], MOOCs seem to be picking up now as two trends are converging, namely the inability of physical campuses to cater for the higher education needs of the growing world population and the maturity of the technology that makes broadband internet more accessible and reliable.

A good number of leading world universities are offering a growing number of courses to the worldwide audience and many others are seriously considering joining the movement. The MOOCs are delivered over a number of platforms, some of them are general purpose, such as Coursera, Udacity, Canvas, OpenLearning, and Course-Builder (by Google) while some are institution specific platforms such as Edx jointly developed by Harvard and MIT and Class2Go developed by Stamford [4].

This paper reports a MOOC offered by the School of Engineering at Taylor's University. This MOOC represent the first ever to be offered by a Malaysian University.

MOOCs and Malaysia

Generally speaking, Malaysia has sufficient places at the institutions of higher learning for its citizens. The country has a healthy combination of 20 public and 45 private universities as well as foreign universities campuses including the University of Nottingham, Monash University, Curtin University, Swinburne

University of Technology, Newcastle University and Herriot Watts University. As a matter of fact, the Malaysian Government plans to attract more international students to Malaysia making it a regional educational hub. A careful implementation of MOOCs can be one of the useful tools to achieve this goal as it can play a role in internationally branding the Malaysian universities as well as providing risk-free trials to interested international students who can attend MOOCs at the universities (or programmes) of their choice before registering. It is postulated here that it would be useful if Malaysian universities can offer an array of high quality MOOCs that can reflect the standards of the higher education in the country.

Taylor's University

Taylor's University is a leading Malaysian private university with more than 12,000 full time students. It is a comprehensive university offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in medicine, pharmacy, biosciences, engineering, architecture & design, computing, hospitality, business, law, education and communication. Taylor's University has been ranked "Excellent" by the SETARA rating commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia) and it is a national leader in education innovation and quality.

Taylor's MOOC

Entrepreneurship is a course offered to engineering students at their second year of undergraduate programmes at Taylor's University. It normally has around 80 students registered and it is aimed at developing business related skills to complement the technological knowledge and skills acquired by the engineering students. The course is offered over a 14-week semester and it includes a series of lectures as well as a group project whereby the students work on developing a business idea using their newly acquired entrepreneurial skills. The course also features variety of tutorials and project pit stops where the students are given feedback and guidance on their projects' progress. The course outline is given below.

1. Why Entrepreneurship?

Entrepreneurship is the art of making the world a better place, through orchestrating various resources with the intention of creating value and enriching life. Entrepreneurship represents a set of skills that can be utilised by anyone to enhance the quality of life in both for-profit and non-for-profit contexts.

2. Think like an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs are very optimistic people. They see opportunities where others see problems and obstacles and they keep a rather romantic view of the world, believing that they can make it a better place. In this lecture, students will learn language and thinking skills and techniques that will help them think like Entrepreneurs, identifying opportunities and taking appropriate actions to realise them.

3. Build an Entrepreneur dream team

Entrepreneurs' goal is not fix all their weaknesses, but rather to amplify their strengths and surround themselves with people who can complement them. Building a successful team is a highly important skill and students will have the opportunity to build teams of both on-campus and online students to work throughout the semester on a project of their choice.

4. Execute like an Entrepreneur

This exercise gives the students the opportunity to work with their team members on a short project. The project needs to be completed within 24 hours. This gives you the chance to assess their skill levels as well as learn from the experience of other teams.

5. Focus like an Entrepreneur

Being able to focus one's energy and other resources on a particular project is important, especially as a new project starts. Students will work with their team members on identifying the project that they will work on for the rest of the course duration.

6. Create Value like an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs create products and services that we need and desire to have at a price that we can afford. These products and services make life easier, safer and more enjoyable. They affect the way work, study and play. Entrepreneurs achieve this through creating a balance between what is technologically feasible, economically viable and humanly desirable. Through this balance, product such as iPhone are borne.

7. Manage projects like an Entrepreneur

A short introduction to project management is provided here including the use of Gantt charts and identification of critical paths.

8. Learn like an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs have an open mind and they are always on a learning curve. For them, life is a school and they learn most of the time from other people. In this activity, students are required to identify a successful Entrepreneur that a student knows and share with the class the reason behind the choice of that Entrepreneur and shed some light on what makes her(him) different.

9. Inspire like an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship is a journey that you will need to inspire people to join you on. In this lecture, students will learn the importance of well articulated Vision and Mission for a business.

10. Communicate like an Entrepreneur

Business is all about people. Whether your staff, customers, investors or the governmental officials, you will need to communicate, communicate and communicate. This lecture will provide students with a framework for an effective communication that can be used not only in business context, but in life at large.

11. Sell like an Entrepreneur

Understanding markets and marketing is an important skill for an Entrepreneur. This lecture will introduce students to the essentials of marketing.

12. Manage risk like an Entrepreneur

While Entrepreneurs are optimistic, they also have a balanced view of the world. They have two antennas, one seeking opportunities and the other sensing for associated risk. Students will be exposed to different techniques that they can use to protect their business activities.

13. Be a global Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs realise that the world is their staff recruitment field, source of raw materials and market. Hence a global attitude is very important for an Entrepreneur. This lecture will expose students to the global dimension of Entrepreneurship.

The author is the course leader for this MOOC and currently he is the dean of the school of engineering at Taylor's University. It is hoped that this MOOC will inspire other Malaysian universities to follow suit and offer high quality MOOCs that will be reflective of the standards of higher education in the country. Once this MOOC is concluded, reports about its design and performance will be made available to both institutions of higher learning and the officials of the Ministry of Higher education. The authors intend to report on the level of success of the MOOC in terms of students' numbers, countries, as well as the percentage of successful completion of the course. Qualitative data on the students learning and experience will be gathered, shared and analysed as well.

Converting the Course into a MOOC

This module is offered as a MOOC and will start on 27 March 2013. The platform selected to deliver the MOOC is OpenLearning. OpenLearning provides many social media like features such as forums to enable students to comment and receive comments encouraging interaction while learning. OpenLearning has other interesting features such as karma points, which are gained via obtaining positive comments from peers, and badges that can be issued either automatically or when a certain learning goal is achieved. These features, together with a life progress bar, are designed to encourage learning and collaboration throughout the course.

Within 20 days of the announcement of the course online, more than 500 students from 75 different countries registered for it. This is a far cry from the 160,000 registered at Stamford, but nonetheless is a promising start. As a matter of fact, having a relatively smaller class size can be a positive thing to enable the course coordinators to give more support to the online students and hopefully resulting in a better successful completion ratio.

All the online students will need to watch all the recorded lectures and complete all the assignments and other activities of the course. The key component will be that the online students will need to complete the group project as well. The on campus students are required to 'recruit' online students on their teams. Online

students will need to build their teams as well. Keeping up with different course milestones will be very important. Once the team's project is on track, it is hoped that the online students will be motivated to complete the course as their commitment is not only important for their success but also to the success of their team members. The course is available at:
<https://www.openlearning.com/courses/Entrepreneurship>

Conclusions

This brief paper reports on the first MOOC in Malaysia offered by the School of Engineering at Taylor's University. The initial response, from participants around the world, was very encouraging to say the least. This course will be delivered and closely analysed and its information will be shared especially with other Malaysian institutions of higher learning.

References

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