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MOOCs4D: Potential at the Bottom of the Pyramid

International Conference

April 10-11, 2014

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT

The recent rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has generated significant media attention for their potential to disrupt the traditional modes of education through ease of access and free or low-cost content delivery.

The popularity for MOOCs (e.g., Coursera, Udacity, edX) is borne out through increasing demand for post-secondary enrollment, predicted to increase from 150 million students in 2009 to 250 million students in 2025. MOOCs have a distinct advantage in that they use technology to scale and are able to provide education to many more individuals, more quickly, than traditional brick-and-mortar institutions. Not only do MOOCs hold out the prospect of greatly expanding capacity to meet the growing demand worldwide, but they also offer the *potential* of enabling access to high quality education by all persons regardless of socioeconomic status, even in the most impoverished and under-served regions of the world.

These developments have generated considerable excitement in higher education worldwide. Coursera (in which Penn is a partner) currently has students registered in 196 countries, with two-thirds from US and Western Europe regions, about 6% from Brazil, 5% from India, 4% from China, and the remainder from everywhere else. Even with the rapid worldwide expansion of MOOCs, there are concerns about the relevance of content offered, languages of instruction, how to meet diverse learning needs, cultural differences in teaching, and accessibility in various regions with poor telecommunications infrastructure.

Focus. Among the questions that the Conference will address are: What are the obstacles that prevent access and use among disadvantaged populations at the ‘bottom of the pyramid,’ especially in developing countries? What issues need to be articulated, and what resources outside of MOOCs may be needed to enable access to education for all? Simply put: How can MOOCs be harnessed as a tool for development?

Format. The two-day MOOCs4D Conference will take place at Penn on April 10-11, 2014. Invited speakers will participate in a series of thematic panels; there will also be a major plenary session open to the public. The roundtable discussions are designed to stimulate critical and in-depth discussions of key issues related to the future of MOOCs in developing countries.

Partners: UNESCO, Organization Internationale de la Francophonie, International Council for Distance Education, and others.

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