CSUs revolutionize online teaching

BY ANDY LUNDIN – POSTED ON MARCH 26, 2013
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The CSU is continuing to experiment with innovative teaching methods via the usage of massive open online courses, or MOOCs.

While MOOCs have been used in the past at renowned universities such as MIT and Stanford University, San Jose State teamed up with Audacity, an educational organization that provides MOOCs, to be one of the first CSUs to provide MOOCs as a method of learning for students.

According to IEEE Spectrum, a MOOC is designed not only to support a significantly larger number of students per class but also encourages a learn-by-doing approach, in that students control how and what they learn and how they interact with the course material.

“San Jose State has taken it a step further in that they’re actually offering credit (at) San Jose state to three courses and what they’re doing is providing these four-credit classes not only to San Jose State students, but to others who might want to also participate,” said Erik Fallis, CSU media relations manager.

According to the San Jose State website, the three MOOCs the university is currently providing include developmental math, college algebra math and elementary statistics.

Each of these courses consists of 100 students. Out of the entire 300 only half of the students are from San Jose State.

The other half consists of “high school students, community college students, and members of the armed forces or veterans.”

While students could participate in the MOOCs at San Jose State for free, or most other MOOCs for that matter, the courses do not offer college credit unless the student pays tuition.

Trying to assess the effectiveness of student learning in the MOOCs at San Jose State is still a little premature, according to Fallis.

Since the MOOCs at the university began at the end of January, there currently is not enough data to decide whether or not MOOCs are generating positive results to students that participated in the courses.

Analyzing the results of the MOOCs will be essential in understanding what are efficient ways to provide the most beneficial teaching methods to students, Fallis said.

“We’re going to see a lot of innovation, we’re also going to see a lot of attempts to measure and assess the results of that innovation,” he said.

Colleen Greene, a systems librarian at Cal State Fullerton, agreed that there needs to be more work and research done before universities decide to fully utilize the MOOC system.

She said students involved in MOOCs do not have essential learning tools that other teaching methods would normally provide.

“There are absolutely no research or information literacy components to most MOOCs, which is detrimental to students that might hope to get credit for a college course,” she said.

Key report findings conducted by the Sloan Consortium found that “Academic leaders remain unconvinced that MOOCs represent a sustainable method for offering online courses.”

Greene, who maintains an online guide that covers a variety topics and issues regarding MOOCs, said there needs to be a better understanding of how MOOCs can be incorporated into CSUF if the school ever wants to utilize the program.
“As far as academic libraries, we need to start discussing what our role might be if our institution ever offers MOOCs. In what ways could our librarians partner with and become embedded into a CSUF-taught MOOC, to provide research instruction and assistance?” she said.

While other CSU schools have yet to apply a MOOC the same way that San Jose State has, the CSU still strives at finding new approaches to teaching, said Fallis.

“It’s hard to predict exactly what campuses will be developing in the future … we’ve been fairly pioneering as a university system when it comes to technology anyway. I think you’ll see a lot of technology solutions that will be proposed,” he said.

Fallis felt that making sure CSU schools provide the utmost consideration to the education of students is the CSU’s biggest goal.

“Our number one priority is student learning, so we want to make sure that as we go along, as we develop new solutions, that student learning is taking place and that students are actually getting the maximum benefit of their college education,” he said.

TAGS: andy lundin, CSU, CSUF, Daily Titan, MOOCs

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Andy is a staff writer on the Daily Titan. Serving as a staff writer of the Daily Titan is a requirement for all Journalism majors.

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