



# Faculty Forum

*from the Coulter Faculty Commons  
for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

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## **Parking Blues Bill Yang**

It is 6:20pm, Monday evening, Oct. 21st, 2013, and it is getting dark. It is the big night of the Jackson County School Bands' Fall Concert. I am supposed to drop off my twelve-year-old son, Thomas, five minutes ago at the Coulter Music Recital Hall for their final preparation for the night show. Yet, I have been circling around the Coulter Building for the past ten minutes desperately trying to find a parking spot. There is some kind of fair going on at the front lawn of the A. K. Hinds University Center with lively and energetic music playing along. That must have something to do with this shortage of parking spaces, I am thinking. After a few more rounds around the Coulter Building, I finally give up on finding a parking spot and decide to drop my son off at the loading zone in front of the Coulter Recital Hall entrance. Luckily, there are already multiple vehicles with loads of Jackson County middle school and high school student band performers doing the same thing and my son easily finds companion of his fellow band-mates. As for me, I have to carefully maneuver around the other cars in the cozy loading zone with the entry way half barricaded and I did it. Pewf! My next daunting task, however, is to ferry my whole and extended families to the event and now we definitely need to find a parking spot. I grow a bit curious as why we did not have at least some parking spaces blocked for the event, as I recall we often get email notices about parking lot closures due to some events on campus, say, some so-and-so foundation events. Maybe, I am thinking, because we have transferred over the past year close to \$100,000 of parking fine funds (80% of them!) to the K-12 system, we don't need to reserve any parking spaces for their events. Anyway, as I am once again circling the Coulter Building for a parking spot, now with my whole and extended families in a big SUV, all excited to see Thomas and his friends' performance, I suddenly see a car pulling over into a 24-hour reserved parking spot conveniently close to the Coulter Building and apparently the passenger getting off is not the Dean! Darn it, why didn't I think of doing that! I am thinking, well, another golden opportunity lost. After who knows how many minutes and how many rounds we have circled around the Coulter, finally, at the foot around the Forsyth, I found a precious empty parallel parking slot! Parallel Parking!!! Gosh, I have not done that for who knows how many years and my parallel parking skill is as rusty as the newly unearthed iron ore from Smoky Mountains! Last time when I did a parallel parking, it must be on the streets in the New York City when I used to drive to visit there! I was so terrible at it and that, I guess, was a big part of reason why I escaped to the Paradise in the Mountains, where here in the Paradise's rural settings, I don't ever have to worry about parallel parking a car, let alone the big SUV, which by the way does help me go about safely and smoothly in the winter mountains. I must have struggled for three or even more than five minutes to maneuver my SUV into the slot and the car behind me must be wondering earnestly what I was doing.

A nice and attractive looking 23-million- or even 30-million-dollar parking garage standing right in the center of the campus would definitely help out my last parking fiasco episode. It would

even make our current science and engineering buildings look, well, more modest than the garage, which, on another thought, is a statement I definitely don't want to rely to my potential STEM research sponsors. And the hefty parking fees! \$300 per year for most of faculty, staff, and students, and up to \$500 per year for the unlucky few who are entitled to the 24-hour reserved parking spots to finance the new garage, compared to the already increased \$96 per year current parking fee? Hmm, not sure if it will worth it. The current \$96 a year parking fee for 7,000 permits per year, according to a recent email memo from Chancellor Belcher, nicely covers the current parking services personnel and operations, even with more than \$250,000 a year available for parking services capital improvements. A \$23-30million parking garage of 1,200 parking spaces will increase our parking inventory by almost 20%. I guess this means we currently have more than 6,000 parking spaces in inventory for 7,000 permits. I heard from friends at other unfortunate places such as some unnamed colleges in New Jersey that they sell at least ten tags for every parking spot on campus! We certainly could use a few more parking spots to improve our ratio, I am just not sure if the \$23-30 million parking garage makes the most economical sense at this moment, given the current state budget situation. After all, the new HHS Overflow lot only cost \$600,000, although it is gravel. But, hey, we live in the mountains and my neighbor's driveway is gravel too.

For people like me in the Belk Building, we are fortunate when parking is concerned. We are surrounded by parking lots! We have the Belk Building parking lot, the J. W. Bardo Fine and Performing Art Center parking lot, the football stadium parking lot, even the Cordelia Camp Building parking lot and the A.K. Hinds University Center parking lot, all within a comfortable and healthy walking distance. The \$23-30 million parking garage proposal is like a very expensive solution to a non-exist problem for us. If this proposal is put out for a vote, I'll definitely vote no. Of course, for people who are closer to the center of the campus, they may vote a most definitely yes. Hold a moment, on this particular thought, my Political Science and Public Affairs colleagues would know better than I do: for such a "public" matter which will commit such a long term financial burden for everyone with the university, shouldn't we indeed put this big spending proposal to a "public" referendum, so that everyone it affects, including faculty, staff, and students can express their support or non-support?

### **MOOCs: Disruptive, Innovative, or Both? – The Higher Education "Fit"** **Carlie Merritt**

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) – perceived in the academic community as the worst fad or an exciting innovation for higher education. Dr. Sullivan, the President of the University of Virginia summarized the perspective of many administrators when she observed of MOOCs in 2012 that they are "surprisingly expensive, [have] limited revenue potential and unless carefully managed, can undermine the quality of instruction." Academics have criticized MOOCs for their size (a typical MOOC can have 10,000 participants). How can any institution consider awarding credit for a course that includes little or no individual attention – a correspondence course? MOOCs are also criticized for their failure to retain students (the retention rate is typically 7-10 percent). San Jose State University suspended 5 MOOCs this summer because more than half of the participants failed the final exams.

Another concern is that the online format may not be appropriate for inexperienced learners who have difficulties with reading and writing (especially non-native English speakers) and with time

or information management. High school students and people with no college experience could be encouraged to try MOOCs. Reports show that typically, 30% of participants are from other countries. According to Clark (2013), Coursera, a host and developer of MOOCs, has offered within one year over 328 courses from 62 universities in 17 countries. This includes 2.9 million users from more than 220 countries. In fact, approximately 42% of MOOC users come from developing countries.

So, why offer these courses that may be expensive to develop, may spin out of control with the large numbers, and have low rates of retention? If more than one third of the registered participants are outside the country, are university offerings serving the proper target audience? If retention and course completion are primary measures of success, as they are in traditional higher education, would the introduction of this model have a devastating impact on programs? If the goal is to offer free classes, where is the incentive? MOOCs require an investment in university support, course development and faculty instruction with no apparent return on investment. These are valid questions and each university needs to consider MOOC goals carefully.

In her article “From Campus to the Future,” Oblinger (2010) summarizes drivers of change in higher education. They include:

- An expanded market: the number of individual pursuing higher education has dramatically increased;
- Financial support: the competition for funding from other demands such as health care will continue to “squeeze higher education funding;”
- Cost of education: affordability becomes an increasing burden as infrastructure, labor and service costs continue to rise;
- Efficiency and productivity: institutions continue to examine ways to increase efficiency while reducing costs;
- Sustainability: for research, education and operations;
- Alliances: share infrastructure or leverage scale for greater “procurement power;”
- Student engagement and achievement: student motivation and engagement have a strong relationship with achievement;
- Diversity of suppliers: many types of competitors exist in higher education, including for-profit colleges, community colleges, open universities, corporate universities and certificate programs; and
- Accountability: measurable outcomes, return on investment are both critical to economic vitality.

An understanding of how MOOCs relate to these drivers of change must arise from examining the goals of open courses. The MOOC goals must fit within the higher education business model to have a chance for success, but also the MOOCs must be accepted for what they are... an alternative means to share information.

Expanded market. One goal for MOOCs is to share information that is important to the field with a larger audience, as both the supplier and recipient of information, ideas and perspectives. Some professors use MOOCs as incubators for innovation. Drawing from a global audience can

provide a wealth of new perspectives on relevant topics. From a core MOOC, social networks and interest groups can continue momentum, even after the conclusion of formal learning.

Financial support. MOOCs are often used for marketing programs. The attention and engagement of 10,000 MOOC participants can provide better program visibility than 10,000 brochures, especially at a time when the marketing budgets for many institutions have been severely reduced. Participants who invest in MOOCs are more likely to consider both academic alternatives, which increase student credit hour production, or certificate programs, which provide alternative funding streams for programs.

Cost of education. MOOCs cost little to the participants, except, perhaps, fees for proctored exams or materials, and they provide an opportunity for students to interact with the material and self-assess. Some programs offer courses on a variety of Liberal Arts topics that may better prepare students for enrollment in traditional college courses. Some programs also allow students who successfully complete MOOCs to waive courses, take competency exams, or award credit within the college program if they choose to enroll in the institution.

Efficiency and productivity. Many students enroll in college with little understanding of majors and minors, and hence, fade out of chosen programs within a few semesters. MOOCs provide an opportunity to vet students; in this regard, a 7% - 10% completion rate can be beneficial. Only those who become sufficiently engaged in the material are likely to complete the MOOC and enroll formally in a program. Even 1% of 10,000 MOOC participants represents substantial growth for most programs. The MOOC target audience includes life-long learners, military and business people, community members, and parents of prospective students, as well as those targeted to become students. So, along with marketing, community engagement, a traditional measure of productivity, is a realistic goal for a MOOC.

Sustainability. MOOCs provide opportunities to use learning analytics, both to strengthen programs by examining what best engages participants and to engage in research regarding learner behavior and motivation. Program developers must address issues of scale in today's economic environment, even if just a few courses are increased in size so that others may remain small. Faculty members have little experience with scale in traditional programs and could benefit from this opportunity to transfer MOOC successes into traditional course offerings. How many traditional courses, for example, take advantage of social media engagement other than traditional class or online discussion forums?

Alliances: Lack of direct return on investment, lack of faculty compensation and the size of the enrollment per MOOC provide incentives for team teaching to distribute the workload. MOOCs are a useful bridge for connecting programs with interdisciplinary content from within the university. They can also be used to forge relationships with community college partners or other colleges and universities. Alliances to address other issues, such as streamlined articulation and the development of consortium programs can result from collaborative MOOCs.

Student engagement and achievement. The motivation for participating in MOOCs varies greatly. Some participants are lifelong learners who wish to learn a new subject as "its own reward." Many are "lurkers," who read the material but never take examinations or assessments, much as they would do crossword puzzles. Others participate in the social media aspect of MOOCs and derive satisfaction from connecting to new people and ideas. One could surmise that individuals are engaged in the material and achieve their personal goals, regardless of the

traditional goals established for academic performance. The ability to attract an international audience, as well as a wide variety of participants within the U.S., can provide MOOCs with the ability to engage in ways that are not possible through traditional channels.

Diversity of suppliers. MOOCs provide opportunities to collaborate with other institutions rather than simply competing for students. If, for example, non-traditional MOOC participants can be encouraged to enroll in and complete community college programs, their chances of success in the upper division courses at the four-year programs improve. Also, the tremendous increase in program and university visibility afforded by MOOCs facilitates a competitive edge, especially if the MOOCs provide advising and support opportunities as well as course content.

Accountability. MOOCs could play an integral role in meeting the UNC Tomorrow goals (2008) through which UNC system accountability will be measured in coming years.

Global readiness: MOOCs provide a forum that facilitates communication between traditional and international participants.

Increasing access to higher education: MOOCs provide a forum to engage a wide variety of people, to discuss higher education alternatives, and to set an expectation for academic rigor in a cost-free (relatively) and risk-free environment.

Improving public education: MOOCs are open to anyone and can allow high school students a risk-free opportunity to sample content and share perspectives and experiences with a wide range of people.

Health: MOOCs would be a great tool to advance health information in communities and globally.

Environment: As an incubator of ideas, MOOCs could provide a means of examining innovations that would facilitate environmental sustainability, reaching many more citizens than traditional education, locally and globally.

Outreach and engagement: With participation rates of 1,000 to 100,000, MOOCs have tremendous capability for sharing information, generating new ideas and attracting new students.

MOOCs facilitate emergent learning through peer interaction and faculty guidance. Many faculty members who are used to (and desire to) control the interaction and progress during the life of their courses may find this sometimes chaotic and overwhelming format unacceptable. However, for faculty members who envision their role as facilitating the sharing of ideas and concepts, the ripple effect of social networking and cross-cultural/ interdisciplinary fertilization of ideas can be rewarding. MOOCs cannot be held to the same standard of faculty engagement or course completion as academic courses, but the learning experienced through MOOCs can complement coursework in a variety of ways.

University stakeholders should consider policies related to IT support, faculty and staff compensation, and quality metrics from somewhat different criteria than those used for academic and certificate courses. Perhaps Education Outreach or marketing dollars should stimulate MOOC development, much as Education Outreach dollars stimulated course development for distance education courses a number of years ago. Regardless of how the university ultimately fits MOOCs into its existing infrastructure, MOOCs can be drivers for outreach and innovation and should be given a legitimate place in the higher education menu.

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