

MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE HCI



Alan Dix, Talis and University of Birmingham, describes some of the inspirations and challenges he faces as he prepares to run a massive open online HCI course.

In the Autumn of 2012 I will be running a large-scale open online HCI course. No-one with an eye on the technology or education media can have failed to hear about the proliferation of massive online open courses (MOOCs) and other large-scale online education: Stanford-based Coursera and Udacity, MIT and Harvard's \$60-million investment in edX, P2PU (peer-to-peer university), and of course Khan Academy. In the UK, Edinburgh University have recently signed up with Coursera and the Open University are building on 45 years of experience in distance education as they run a MOOC on the design of open learning (nicely circular).

Bigger picture

I am partly running the course with an author hat on, promoting HCI in new ways; but it is also because Talis are interested in the infrastructure that surrounds these courses, and how it contributes to a bigger picture of the Open Education Graph interconnecting people and learning materials.

For me there are many new challenges. I have been filmed a few times when delivering lectures, but I have never spoken 'to camera'. My first attempts

used the built-in camera on my laptop, which meant that I seemed to stare at the viewer, when in fact I was looking at slides on screen, and then every so often my eyes would shift randomly away. Now I have a second camera, so I shift attention between speaking 'to camera' and speaking 'about slides'.

There are also technical issues setting up a micro-studio area in a small house (read large foldable white screen balanced precariously on the back of a chair). I note that when Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig started their AI class, they turned Thrun's basement into a mini-studio that was big enough for a team of 14 support staff ... there are some advantages to US-sized houses; my 'studio' is just two square yards!

Complementary education

Most online courses are aimed principally at independent learners; indeed part of the ethos is to open up education beyond institutional boundaries. This is important, and certainly something I hope to achieve, but I am also interested in the ways online education can complement traditional education. So I am actively encouraging other academics to use parts

of my material within their own face-to-face courses. This may simply involve suggesting their students use online units as supplementary material. However, I hope that some will make it a more integral part of their own classes, maybe skipping lecture slots and instead telling students to study units in the online course.

Of course, delivering 'information' is the easy bit of education, just what books do well and lectures do efficiently (200 student contact hours per lecturer contact hour!). The most difficult (and expensive) parts of education are around laboratories, problem classes, seminars, exercises, formative feedback ... and summative assessment. The last of these I will avoid, but we will be looking at ways to use combinations of peer discussion and perhaps peer assessment for formative learning.

Make contact

You can sign up for the course at hcicourse.com. If you are interested in using it as part of your own teaching, sign up yourself, but please also get in touch directly so that we can work out ways to support you.