President's Communications   Office of the President

5-29-2013

Pilot Program to Test Coursera Technology

Office of the President

Pilot Program to Test Coursera Technology

Our efforts to think strategically about our academic goals and the needs of those we serve has led us to partner with the Tennessee Board of Regents to test a new platform for delivering education online. We plan to share news of this opportunity broadly tomorrow, and I want to discuss it with you first.

We are working now to offer an 18-month pilot program through Coursera, an online learning company leading the way in areas including teaching structure, concept mastery, student engagement, testing patterns and technology support.

Coursera is nationally recognized for offering online courses to large audiences at little to no cost known as massive open online courses or MOOCs. Our pilot program will not include MOOCs at this time because our primary objective is to evaluate the possibility of additional teaching platforms and technologies and the pros and cons they offer. However, this is a big step in a new direction and one that I am proud to see us take. Coursera is the first of several platforms we are considering.

Chancellors, provosts and faculty leaders at each of our undergraduate campuses have been involved in initial planning discussions, and I encourage you to participate in the process as well.

We have worked with faculty members at each campus to identify courses that are well suited for initial testing - general education courses with multiple sections being offered in two concurrent terms. We expect two courses to be available through the Coursera platform in fall 2013. UT Martin has volunteered to test a music course, and UT Chattanooga plans to test an English course. It is possible UT Knoxville will join the pilot in spring 2014.

The courses will be available only to students on the home campus of the faculty member who develops the course, and fees will be part of existing tuition models.

The pilot program fits nicely into Goal 1 of the UT System Strategic Plan, Enhancing Educational Excellence, and we have been studying the University's online course and degree offerings as part of this initiative. This work also aligns with Gov. Haslam's "Drive to 55" campaign to have 55 percent of Tennesseans earn a postsecondary degree by 2025. And because of that connection, the state intends to provide funding for the pilot program.

We will study the efficacy of the Coursera platform at our institutions and at participating TBR schools. Faculty and students will be involved in providing feedback, and results will be shared and used to determine future plans.

It is important that we be open to testing new approaches and theories, particularly those surrounding the impact of technology on higher education, and diligent in efforts to respond to faculty needs and the needs of those we serve.

If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity or have thoughts you wish to share, please contact Katie High, vice president for academic affairs and student success, at khigh@tennessee.edu.

Thank you for all you do for the University and your commitment to academic excellence and student success.

All the best,
Joe