MOOC Disrupters

Can faculty ensure massive open online courses provide quality and opportunity?

The politics of MOOCs
Richard Kahlenberg looks at MOOCs in light of social justice PAGE 4

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Will the need for profit trump students’ need for success? PAGE 7

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MOOCs for the masses? Not so fast

SINCE MASSIVE OPEN online courses burst on the scene two years ago, MOOCs have been heralded as a disruptive force for innovation in higher education that will magically solve the large policy challenges we face as a nation: How do we get more Americans to attend college and complete their studies? And how do we bring down the costs?

In California, where the two leading MOOC-based startups, Udacity and Coursera, were launched in 2012, a powerful Democrat in the state Legislature jumped onto the bandwagon earlier this year, introducing SB 520. This was a bill that would have forced the state’s 145 public colleges and universities to accept lower-division course credits from low-cost online college alternatives. It passed in the state Senate, but was put on hold when an experiment at San Jose State University, where Udacity was hired to provide remedial math courses, revealed how poorly served at-risk students are by massive online learning. Udacity founder Sebastian Thrun now says he sees that his courses can be “a lousy product.”

Florida is the only state whose romance with MOOCs has produced legislation. Earlier this year, the Legislature passed HB 7029, a bill allowing corporations and vendors to design, teach and grade courses that public institutions can accept credit for. As United Faculty of Florida President Tom Auxter has observed, “When commercial vendors replace online courses faculty now teach with courses designed by the vendors, they stand to make windfall profits at the expense of student learning.” That won’t happen in this incarnation of the law, as UFF and faculty bodies managed to block some of the worst elements in the final version of HB 7029. They are fighting to protect the integrity of public higher education offerings.

Right now, no one is making money on MOOCs, but some see them as a gold mine. As Susan Meisenhelder shows in “Follow the Money” on page 7, venture capitalists are sinking millions into new startups. Even Moody’s Investor Service is bullish on MOOCs—both as a business and an asset that will boost the PR profile of elite nonprofit universities.

The articles in this issue capture the reservations faculty and educational staff have over massive, one-size-fits-all education. On the one hand, teachers are open to new tools that expand teaching and learning options in the classroom. Michael Feldstein describes how adaptive learning technologies, for example, hold great possibilities for tailored learning (see page 17). On the other hand, faculty and staff are wary of silver bullets imposed by outsiders with vested interests that have little to do with what works best for students and their teachers. MOOCs open the door to even greater exploitation of a contingent academic workforce and a reduction of the faculty role in governance, their academic freedom and intellectual property rights, and their control over the curriculum and their jobs.

Hanging over all this is the concern that MOOCs, with their as-yet unproven utility for the majority of students our members serve, could actually stratify our students and society in ways antithetical to the promise of education in a democracy, argues Richard Kahlenberg in “The Politics of Online Learning” on page 4. AFT members are working for just the opposite—to reclaim the promise of affordable, high-quality education in the United States that provides equal opportunity for all.

—BARBARA McKENNA
Reclaiming the promise is about ensuring that students are taught and mentored by faculty and staff who are well-prepared, professionally supported and have a voice in academic decisions, whether they work full time or part time.

Too often, policymakers and higher education leaders preach the importance of higher education while disinvesting in its core functions, even claiming that new uses of technology compensate for what has been lost, which, increasingly, is a corps of faculty and staff who are supported, given voice and attached to the institution.

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New technologies have always shaped our work, and AFT higher education members have comfortably embraced online instruction as a teaching tool. But academic institutions must keep their eye on the prize—student success. That is the heart of reclaiming the promise of higher education.

This is our vision for higher education:

- Ensure rigorous instruction, while supporting independent and innovative research;
- Make college affordable and accessible to all students; and
- Foster diverse institutions that provide a rich educational environment for all students and that nurture the development of students’ cultural lives, their interactions with scholars steeped in their field and their interactions with students from different walks of life.

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Technology is no substitute for faculty-student engagement

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

WHERE WE STAND

THE EXPANSION OF MASSIVE open online courses (MOOCs) in higher education seems to be connected to any number of current trends in higher education: state disinvestment in colleges and universities; the debt burden on students and families; and less reliance on full-time, tenured faculty and more on adjuncts who are denied the professional conditions and compensation they need. We’re seeing a desire to increase access to postsecondary education, but, sadly, we’re also seeing a desire to profit off of it. Given all that, along with what some have termed “techno-determinism”—the belief that the cyber-revolution will inevitably and fundamentally reshape education as well as other societal institutions—MOOCs have staked out a place in the higher education landscape.

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Highly qualified, accountable and adequately resourced professionals are central to ensuring the academic integrity and rigor of educational offerings. These include on-the-ground educators interacting with students and staff, such as lab workers, counselors, information technology specialists and librarians.

But many uses of technology fragment and marginalize the role of a professional faculty. While technology, when properly used, can play a positive role in broadening access to and supplementing faculty instruction, it is not a substitute for the faculty-student engagement that is at the core of a high-quality educational experience. What’s more, technology is not the solution to rising college costs. Studies show that teaching with technology requires more resources, not fewer, in terms of time, technical support and pedagogical expertise.

Helping students succeed is more than delivering education efficiently. It requires permanent faculty and staff who are engaged in the development of a rich curriculum, and institutional policies that make the most educational sense. Student success also depends on educators having enough time not only to help students succeed in their studies, but also to advise students on the best pathways to their goals. Unfortunately, the systematic disinvestment in higher education this country has experienced has taken its toll on the core function in higher education—teaching.

Even though MOOCs are currently in vogue, many of the “problems” affecting

higher education are not “solved” by them. The remedy for disinvestment in colleges and universities is not selling off pieces so investors can try to profit. And it’s unlikely that the nation will move closer to its goals for college completion levels by relying on MOOCs, which have notoriously low completion rates—even for single classes, not to mention entire courses of study.

While some MOOCs will achieve worthwhile goals, such as making high-quality postsecondary instruction more accessible, others will collapse under the weight of their own failures and shortcomings.

The AFT and our allies are working with students and community allies to ensure that policymakers respect the role of technological developments as a means to enhance learning rather than to deliver a cheapened form of education. Ensuring that high-quality postsecondary education, in all its forms, is accessible to all who can benefit from it is essential to individual prospects and to our country’s strength.
Why MOOCs?
Five not-entirely-rhetorical questions about massive open online courses

BY STEVEN D. KRAUSE

VERY FEW PEOPLE had heard of massive open online courses when the term “MOOC” was coined in 2008 by Canadian educational activist Dave Cormier. That first MOOC, “Connectivism and Connective Knowledge,” taught by fellow Canadians George Siemens and Stephen Downes, consisted of a face-to-face course of 25 traditional students joined by more than 2,000 students who participated online. More MOOC experiments followed. The New York Times proclaimed 2012 as the “year of the MOOCs” after the education technology startups Coursera, Udacity and edX garnered national attention with millions in venture capital and partnerships with many of the most prestigious universities in the world.

In other words, in less than five years, MOOCs have gone from being an obscure experiment in open education and online pedagogy to a radical reimagining of higher education. Depending on your perspective, MOOCs will extend the opportunity of a college degree to millions of otherwise disenfranchised people, or it will destroy all that is valuable, good and noble about the traditional university.

Regardless of how one feels about the promises or perils of MOOCs, it’s hard not to be in awe of their meteoric rise in higher education. As Cathy Davidson of Duke University pointed out in “If MOOCs Are the Answer, What Is the Question?”, the debate about MOOCs has shifted the conversation in the popular media from “Is college worth it?” to “How can we make college affordable to everyone?”

I’ve been personally immersed in the MOOC phenomenon for about 18 months now, having dived into several as a student, as a scholar and currently as a co-editor. These experiences have made me think a lot about my own approaches to online learning and teaching. What I’ve been asking myself lately about what MOOCs might mean to teachers and students boils down to five somewhat (but not entirely) rhetorical questions:

1. Why ‘massive’?
The massiveness of MOOCs has attracted most of the headlines, especially in the mainstream media—50,000 students in this class, 100,000 students in that class. It has tantalized administrators interested in both raising enrollments and expanding institutional “brand name” recognition, and has reeled in some of the “star” faculty who have developed and taught the courses. Never mind that 90 percent of these students drop out of the class or weren’t students in the first place, which I’ll get to with question 2. To date, all of the synchronous MOOCs I’ve seen put all 10,000 or 20,000 or 50,000 students into one space. That large grouping might be interesting if the MOOC star gave a live lecture or performance, sort of like seeing your favorite band perform in an enormous concert. But there is no significant “live” event in MOOCs.

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Steven D. Krause is a professor of English language and literature at Eastern Michigan University and a member of the EMU Federation of Teachers. He is co-editing, with Charles Lowe, a collection of essays on MOOCs due out in 2014.
“live” event in MOOCs, since the lectures and other materials are typically prerecorded and there is often no evidence that the professor is ever actually present in the class at all.

Making matters worse, because of this massiveness, the student discussion forums in MOOCs are useless. Instead of being a space that mimics the “small group” discussion in face-to-face classes—an opportunity where students can get to know each other, exchange questions and concerns, and speak with the professor or a teaching assistant—the discussion forums are largely white noise that are more analogous to YouTube or Huffington Post comment forums. It’s like drinking in a conversation that’s spraying out of a fire hose. What’s the point of making MOOCs one big group?

MOOC providers could learn from the way we teach first-year writing at large universities. My university is typical: Eastern Michigan University has about 23,000 students, and all undergraduates are required to take “fresman comp,” with between 1,500 and 2,000 students enrolled in the course in any given semester. First-year writing is massive, but we don’t have all 2,000 or so students taking the class in one big lecture hall or online space. Rather, we divide students into 80 to 90 sections of 25, and we give them a similar experience in each class by having common textbooks, assignments and approaches to teaching. We do it this way because teaching writing is a labor-intensive and qualitative process. It is certainly a different endeavor than teaching other subjects where we’re comfortable in lecture hall formats.

It seems to me that these mega-MOOCs could just as easily divide students into smaller groups that all see identical versions of the class. With students divided up into manageable sections, I think the discussion and interaction among students within those groups could actually become a more supportive space.

2. Why ‘open’?
One of the most obvious reasons for the high dropout rate in MOOCs is that many people who sign up don’t have any intention of actually participating in the MOOC; rather, they are people who are curious about all the fuss, they check it out, and then they never return.

But those who start with good intentions may still drop out because there are no costs or consequences for quitting. One way to change that is to raise the cost of participation, which in turn raises the cost of giving up. Look, for example, at Coursera’s experience with Signature Track, a program it rolled out to serve as an authentication system to assign credit to the individual student. In the first Signature Track class, Coursera found the completion rate among paying students was 74 percent, compared with 9 percent in the nonpaying population.

Of course, not being free means limiting access, and that obviously has drawbacks. But failure isn’t free for the MOOC providers, both in terms of actual costs of providing MOOCs and in terms of the validity of the concept.

3. Why the focus on ‘gen ed’?
All the MOOC courses I have seen are trying to be like introductory classes common in most universities’ general education curriculum, or they are “edutainment” courses not analogous to any traditional college course for credit. Oddly, all the data suggests that most MOOC students are college-educated professionals who are interested in the particular topic and are not taking the MOOC because they want to see what college is like or to get transferable college credit. Coursera has acknowledged this audience problem with its move to partner with some flagship public universities and by pushing to get into the learning-management system business so it can take on companies like Blackboard.

While Coursera may have noble intentions, it’s also true that there is more profit in general education classes, since so many more students need to take courses like freshman comp rather than graduate seminars about Sigmund Freud. But there is also a real untapped population of would-be graduate students—professionals who want to continue to learn and participate in an intellectually challenging discussion but want nothing to do with formal graduate school training. Advanced undergraduate and graduate students are more self-motivated and self-disciplined than first-year students. Since online success correlates to student self-motivation and self-discipline, why not offer that Freud MOOC?

4. Why ‘courses’?
Let’s think outside the box for a minute and ask: What would a MOOC be if it weren’t a course? I have two guesses. First, perhaps MOOCs will replace textbooks. After all, both MOOCs and textbooks, as we know them now, are about delivering content from experts on a topic that scales well and is adaptable for individual teachers and students. And MOOCs, of course, have more potential for interactivity than standard print textbooks, since they easily can provide multimedia content and can be updated instantly.

Second, perhaps MOOCs are more of a resource around a particular topic or ongoing training. For example, in terms of the teaching of writing, imagine something that might be a cross between a site like the Purdue Online Writing Lab, which provides invaluable writing advice and stylistic information to anyone for free, and a fan fiction writing site, where lots of fan writers share stories that are read, reviewed and revised by other fans. It might still be possible for people to take some kind of test, for life experience credit or AP-like credit, associated with this sort of not-course-bound MOOC, but the main point would be more of an ongoing learning community. In my mind, this would return MOOCs to those early experimental days when they were less about granting transferable college credit and more about giving interested people an educational and community experience.

5. Will MOOCs replace higher education as we know it?
That is extremely unlikely. We’ve seen “transformative” educational technologies before that promised fundamental change—correspondence schools, courses on television, and what I can only describe as “traditional” online classes. So if history is a guide, the most likely future of MOOCs is that they will make all of us—teachers, administrators and students—think again about our goals in higher education. That is until the next big thing comes along.
By Richard D. Kahlenberg

Proponents of online education—from Stanford University President John Hen-nessey to Hoover Institution researcher Terry Moe—speak of it hitting education with the force of a “tsunami.” Presumably, they are referring to some kind of “good” tsunami, the type that produces creative destruction from which we all eventually benefit. But if implemented poorly by politicians who are looking to educate students on the cheap—always a distinct possibility—we will all suffer, poor and working-class kids particularly.

Politically, online learning presents a highly seductive model for state legislators because lawmakers are told it can promote equal opportunity and save money at the same time.

On the one hand, online learning, specifically massive open online courses, are said to be the great equalizer, giving community college students access to Ivy League professors, and providing students from India or Somalia the chance to take great classes. (Two-thirds of MOOC students are international, proponents note.) And low-income students who must work full time while attending college will have the flexibility to take classes at hours that fit into their schedules, supporters say.

On the other hand, digital learning holds the promise of reducing costs in education because professors can tape a series of lectures once, rather than spending time each year giving the same performances over and over again. And a professor has the chance to reach hundreds or thousands of students without the need to heat or maintain a single classroom.

State appropriations have already dropped as a share of revenue at public colleges and universities, from 32 percent in 1980 to 18 percent by 2009. For state legislators, the idea of being able to reduce higher education funding even further—and claim they’re actually improving opportunity for kids—is an irresistible proposition. This may help explain why the proportion of students taking online classes has mushroomed from 10 percent in 2002 to 29 percent in 2009. These enrollments have particularly increased in community colleges.

Too good to be true?

But is this storyline too good to be true? Yes, according to the strongest research. Online learning can produce positive outcomes for students, but mostly when colleges “flip the classroom,” coupling online lectures with face-to-face active learning sessions with professors, which rarely saves money. By contrast, low-cost, fully online courses tend to produce negative outcomes for students, particularly for those who are underprepared to begin with.

Shanna Smith Jaggars of Columbia University, for example, found in a 2011 study of 51,000 community college students in Washington state that completion rates were 8 percentage points lower for students in online classes than for those in traditional classes. Moreover, in a separate 2011 review of 36 studies, Jaggars found that on the equity issue, fully online classes “may hinder progression for
EDX AND COURSERA FOUNDERS say MOOCs have the potential to “democratize” education by opening up access to higher education. But are MOOCs really the answer for underserved students, whose numbers are growing?

Who is coming to college?

The digital divide remains a reality.

In 2011, reported Internet use at home varied greatly by racial group.

Reasearch conducted in 2011 illustrated the connection between income and Internet access.

Who does best with online learning?

White, academically well-prepared, middle-to upper-income students do best with online learning.

Who does worst?

A study of community college students in Washington state found that performance gaps in online courses are wider among students who already struggle in college—including males, black students and students with lower prior GPAs.

Yet MOOCs are seen as the great disrupter that will open doors to higher education for more people.

low-income and underprepared students.” She concluded, “Overall, it seems that community college students who take online courses are more likely to withdraw from them and that this tendency toward withdrawal is not due to the measured characteristics of those students.”

What works for students: Adult involvement

More positive results are found in “hybrid” classrooms, where online learning is supplemented by face-to-face sessions with professors. According to economist William Bowen, the former president of Princeton University, a randomized trial experiment of 600 students taking a statistics class at Carnegie Mellon University found that students taking an online class supplemented by weekly in-person question-and-answer sessions did just as well as a control group taking a traditional class.

Because flipping the classroom still involves face-to-face meetings between professors and students, however, it does not necessarily save money. According to Bowen, flipped classrooms “can even lead to higher costs.”

Unfortunately, state legislatures are choosing to fund inexpensive rather than high-quality online classes, particularly at two-year colleges. Three-quarters of community colleges offer fully online classes, while only 15 percent offer the hybrid variety.

In some ways, the enthusiasm for inexpensive online education today parallels the fervor among legislators for community colleges in
Online learning removes the adult influence to yet another degree, which hurts low-income students especially. As educator/writer Thom-as Toch has noted, the lesson of high-performing high-poverty elementary and secondary schools is that disadvantaged students need more adult involvement and more structure and guidance, not less.14

What works for conservatives: Defunding
Yet as a political matter, the push for cheap online classes is likely to accelerate, fueled by conservative ideology and private interests. Conservatives, who want to reduce the size of government and dislike labor unions, see online classes not only as a way of cutting public spending but also as a weapon to reduce the influence of organized labor. The Hoover Institution’s Terry Moe, who wrote a book titled Special Interest, equating teachers’ unions with tobacco and gun lobbyists, gloated in the Wall Street Journal that the cyberrevolution in education “will inexorably weaken the unions, sapping them of members, money and power.”15

Moreover, for-profit corporations see a big opportunity to make money off of expanded online learning in higher education. Though for-profit operators boast very low student completion rates, they are poised, Salon magazine notes, “to use their political leverage to secure a legally privileged place in the system.”16

It is no accident, writes journalist Andrew Leonard, that “the three horsemen of the MOOC apocalypse” are the deeply conservative governors of Florida (Rick Scott), Texas (Rick Perry) and Wisconsin (Scott Walker). The trio is using online learning to justify massive cuts in state spending to higher education in search of a $10,000 college education in search of a $10,000 college degree.17

Even Bowen, who calls himself a “convert” to online learning, has expressed concern that his advice about the benefit of hybrid classes will be ignored in favor of cheap cyberlearning models that are used to “justify a further defunding of public higher education.” Bowen writes: “Recent pronouncements by the governors of some states lead me to worry that the assumed promise of online education—and the overhyped promise of extremely rudimen-
tary online education that lacks any face-to-face component—could do real harm. States will be tempted to use relatively inexpensive online programs to serve the less-affluent, less-prepared segment of potential college go-
ers.” The result could be “an ever more bifur-
cated system of higher education in the United States.”18

Faced by an array of anti-union, anti-tax and for-profit interests, supporters of a vibrant system of higher education will need to form alliances to redirect the future of online learning to models that improve opportunities for students. Those most likely to be hurt by inexpensive online education—low-income and minority students—do not have the political power to withstand the storm by themselves. A new coalition needs to emerge that embraces technological change in a way that will strengthen, rather than weaken, the democratic promise of education in America.

Endnotes
8. Bowen, Higher Education in the Digital Age, 64.
15. Moe, “The Internet Will Reduce Teachers Union Power.”
Follow the money
Investors and corporations want to make big profits off MOOCs. Where do the needs of students fit in the picture?

IN MUCH OF THE PUBLIC commentary about technology, innovation and disruption in higher education, online education is touted for its promise to dramatically increase access. To be sure, broad access to high-quality higher education is a valuable goal that should inform higher education policy in any democratic society. However, in many ways, access is not the primary goal of those promoting online higher education.

Increasingly, online higher education is big business with huge profits being made by many private companies. None other than Rupert Murdoch, for instance, has opined that education in the United States represents a potential investment opportunity of $500 billion.

“Ed tech” is itself a huge sub-area in the “education industry.” According to GVS Advisors, an ed tech consulting group, investment in that sector hit $1.1 billion in 2012, a figure almost as big as that in the dot-com market. Profits are following for many investors in this market area. For instance, in just one year (from the second quarter of 2011 to the second quarter of 2012), investors in 324 companies offering ed tech products and services made $1.43 billion.

For-profits: A cautionary model
Online higher education has also become a hot spot for corporate growth. During the first part of the 2000s, stand-alone for-profit entities, such as the University of Phoenix and Kaplan University, were the leaders in the online higher education business world. And they were hugely successful. During that time, five of the top 25 growth companies in the country were education entities heavily involved in online education. In fact, reported Slate’s Anya Kamenetz, between 2000 and 2003, online higher education providers were the darlings of Wall Street and the highest-earning stocks of any industry.

Later in the decade, however, the American public learned why the profits were so huge. After a series of scandals about fraudulent practices, shoddy degrees, dismal graduation rates and a host of other issues, the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, under the leadership of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), investigated. Its report, “For Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success,” revealed that these for-profit providers spent more on advertising and recruitment than on instruction. Profits in 2009 alone were more than $3 billion, with a whopping profit margin of 19.4 percent, the committee found.

These profits primarily came from federal financial aid dollars (and still do), courtesy of the American taxpayer. As the Harkin report detailed, the amount of public money involved is enormous. In 2011 alone, $32 billion in federal financial aid—25 percent of all Department of Education financial aid funds—was funneled to for-profit colleges. Pell Grant money going to these companies grew from $1.1 billion in 2000-2001 to $7.5 billion in 2009-2010, twice as fast as the overall increase in the

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For-profits: A cautionary model
Online higher education has also become a hot spot for corporate growth. During the first part of the 2000s, stand-alone for-profit entities, such as the University of Phoenix and Kaplan University, were the leaders in the online higher education business world. And they were hugely successful. During that time, five of the top 25 growth companies in the country were education entities heavily involved in online education. In fact, reported Slate’s Anya Kamenetz, between 2000 and 2003, online higher education providers were the darlings of Wall Street and the highest-earning stocks of any industry.

Later in the decade, however, the American public learned why the profits were so huge. After a series of scandals about fraudulent practices, shoddy degrees, dismal graduation rates and a host of other issues, the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, under the leadership of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), investigated. Its report, “For Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success,” revealed that these for-profit providers spent more on advertising and recruitment than on instruction. Profits in 2009 alone were more than $3 billion, with a whopping profit margin of 19.4 percent, the committee found.

These profits primarily came from federal financial aid dollars (and still do), courtesy of the American taxpayer. As the Harkin report detailed, the amount of public money involved is enormous. In 2011 alone, $32 billion in federal financial aid—25 percent of all Department of Education financial aid funds—was funneled to for-profit colleges. Pell Grant money going to these companies grew from $1.1 billion in 2000-2001 to $7.5 billion in 2009-2010, twice as fast as the overall increase in the
program. In just four years, from 2006 to 2010, veterans’ educational benefits flowing to for-profits increased 683 percent.

**MOOCs enter the picture**
The latest for-profit online innovation, massive open online courses, known as MOOCs, seems poised to make a big revenue leap as well. Despite having no significant profits at this point and a product that is being given away for the most part, investors seem confident that profits are in their future and are prepared to put up the money necessary to explore the possibilities. The three big MOOC providers, Coursera, Udacity and edX have “cash to burn,” according to an *Inside Higher Ed* article, “How Will MOOCs Make Money?” by Steve Kolowich: Udacity has received at least $21.5 million of investor money and Coursera, $43 million. EdX, while technically a nonprofit, has been generously bankrolled with $60 million from MIT and Harvard.

The rationale presented to the public for this latest online learning innovation is high-minded and even utopian. With no acknowledgment of the dismal completion rates for MOOCs or the digital divide impediments to online learning even in the United States, MOOC promoters promise unimagined—before access to higher education and the dawning of a new age.

For instance, Daphne Koller, CEO for Coursera, writes in “How Online Education Can Create a ‘Global Classroom’” that MOOCs can erase “barriers between people of different cultures,” give students a chance to learn “without the limits imposed by physical or socio-economic circumstances,” and offer teachers everywhere “the ability to transcend boundaries.” Sebastian Thrun, head of Udacity, sees MOOCs as “the beginning of something magical” and somewhat more prosaically predicts “a tenfold increase in the market for higher education,” reports Don Clark in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Yet, for parents, students and the general public who focus primarily on what education means for people’s futures, for social mobility, a healthy economy and a robust democracy, a dip into the insider talk of MOOCs, their investors and industry analysts is both instructive and disorienting.

**What online-industry insiders say**
The burning questions in the for-profit education industry focus squarely and exclusively on what will make money for particular companies. Will Pearson be able to make massive textbook sales off of its involvement in MOOCs? Will charging successful students for placement services work as a viable profit-generator for MOOCs? What price will the market bear for MOOC student certificates of completion? MOOC companies are even exploring the possibility of making money by referring students, if they fail in their courses, to traditional colleges and universities where they might do better.

In the insider talk, Udacity and Coursera are not judged by the quality of the actual educational experiences they provide students, the degree to which they tear down barriers for students and instructors around the globe, or any of the goals so passionately discussed in public. The bottom line is business—which company looks positioned to make the most money, as George Siemens writes in “Quality Control in MOOCs” on the xEd Book blog. In the cases of Udacity and Coursera, it seems a tough race to call because “Udacity has a better range of monetization strategies—content, teaching, platform, recognition,” while “Coursera as a brand will rely heavily on their [highly respected, elite] university partners.”

Even Moody’s is in the mix with angles few industry outsiders would predict. Moody’s has projected, for instance, that MOOCs will be good credit news for elite institutions by allowing them “to use their powerful brand reputations to get ahead of rapid technological changes that could destabilize their residential business models over the long-run.” By offering MOOCs, elite institutions will further “benefit from favorable publicity, in the form of enhanced name recognition and political goodwill. In fact, the biggest bottom line benefit for them has nothing to do with education: “The most significant short-term benefit to the top-tier universities is blunting public criticism that wealthy universities do not provide enough service to fulfill their public mission and, therefore, maintain their tax-exempt status in the United States.”

In ways outsiders rarely ponder, industry analysts are also blunt about how larger political and social factors affect markets and profits. Insiders are keenly aware, for instance, that keeping tuition up and public funding down is not the horror for them that it is for American families. In fact, as finance analyst Gregg Bayes-Brown makes clear, that situation helps online companies expand their markets and increase their profits:

“As costs continue to mount in higher education, online courses will undoubtedly appeal to cash-strapped students looking to dodge a lifetime of debt. Furthermore, as governments continue to scramble for money in the on-going financial stalemate, other forms of income may dry up, leading to some universities running out of gas.”

Whatever one’s feelings about whether private companies are a plus or a minus in higher education, broader access to the full range of facts about corporate interests is a fundamental requirement for a discussion that leads to sound higher education policy.

Only when the public also “follows the money” in online higher education will we be able to make the best decisions about the future of higher education in our country.
There are dozens of MOOC providers, but some of the most popular include:

COURSERA (for-profit) Launched June 2011 by Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun, funded by $22 million from venture capital firm Charles River Ventures and venture capitalists Andreessen Horowitz and Steve Blank

EDX (nonprofit) Launched May 2012 by MIT professor Anant Agarwal; funded by $30 million invested by Harvard and MIT

UDACITY (for-profit) Launched April 2011 by Stanford professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller; funded with $59 million from venture capitalists including Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, New Enterprise Associates, GSV Capital, International Finance Corp., John Doerr and Yuri Milner

EDX
Relies on schools like MIT, Harvard and UC Berkeley to create top-notch open classes

UDACITY
Rejects 98% of professors who apply to teach courses

COURSERA
Relies on advisors from Michigan, Stanford, Princeton, Penn and others

AND THEIR MOOCs ARE ALL FREE
SO HOW ARE THEY FUNDED?

EDX
$60 million invested by Harvard and MIT

UDACITY
Raised $22 million in venture capital funding

COURSERA
Raised $16 million in venture capital funding

TWITTER
To compare: Twitter, now massively funded, only raised $5 million in the first round

WHAT MAKES THESE MOOC PROVIDERS SO SPECIAL?

THEY’RE ELITE

SO IF THESE MOOCs ARE FREE ...
HOW WILL FUNDERS SEE A RETURN ON THEIR INVESTMENT?
HOW MOOCs MIGHT MAKE SOME MONEY:

ALLOW SCHOOLS TO PAY FOR SPONSORING CLASSES:
Universities can pay to have MOOC courses taught on their campuses

MAKE STUDENTS PAY FOR CERTIFICATES OF COMPLETION:
Courses are free, but proof of passing would need to be purchased

OFFER STUDENTS ADDITIONAL PAID RESOURCES:
Students can pay for library resources, tutoring and other aspects of collegiate life

NO ONE’S TOTALLY SURE HOW MOOCs WILL MAKE MONEY

BUT ONE THING’S FOR SURE: MOOCs CAN’T BE COMPLETELY FREE FOREVER
Mitchell Duneier is the Maurice P. During Professor of Sociology at Princeton University. His first experience teaching a massive open online course to a world audience of 40,000 students was an exhilarating success. Yet just a few months later, he put his collaboration with Coursera on hold. AFT Higher Education senior associate Chris Goff caught up with Duneier online and asked him why.

CHRIS GOFF: Last year, you became a poster child for the MOOC movement, with a front-page article about your course appearing in the New York Times. But recently, the Chronicle of Higher Education called you a “conscientious objector.” They reported that you are taking a “wait and see” attitude on any future teaching for Coursera. What happened?

MITCHELL DUNEIER: Last fall, University System of Maryland chancellor William Kirwan announced that his system would experiment with MOOC technology in order to lower costs. I later learned that the Maryland system was gearing up to use my archived class to see if course materials such as this could be used to achieve “cost savings.” Fortunately, I found out in time to say no, which was my right as the owner of the material.

What precipitated your original interest in offering a course through a MOOC?

The possibility of teaching an Introduction to Sociology course to students from more than 100 different countries was very exciting to me when it was first proposed by Daphne Koller, the co-founder of Coursera. She made a fantastic case that access to people around the world is one of the greatest issues facing higher education. We also agreed that unlike computer science and other subjects, in which the answers to problems are pretty much the same around the world, sociology would be an interesting experiment because its problems are perceived so differently depending on the country.

Was it really possible to provide quality education to tens of thousands of students in more than 100 countries at the same time?

Yes. But, sadly, now the conversation about MOOCs has quickly shifted from worldwide access to cost savings for public universities if they replace courses previously taught by live instruction. The pivotal agenda of venture capital investors in Coursera is the revenue stream from institutional sales, not global philanthropy.

You must have some people asking, “What’s wrong with state universities achieving cost savings?”

I have no objection to cost savings. Maybe they should spend less on chancellor salaries, for instance. But we should be investing more—not less—in faculty hiring; move away from overworked, underpaid adjunct faculty; and invest in new facilities, research and so on. I’d have to be willfully naive not to see that Chancellor Kirwan is talking about the next step in further starving higher education.

Furthermore, it’s hard to separate his vision for the use of this material from future degradation of my colleagues’ work around the country. How demeaning to a professor in a state university to be told that his or her new job will include managing the lectures of someone at Princeton! And how impoverishing to the study of sociology to substitute the
celebrity version for the week-to-week teaching of the subject by many minds at institutions of varying prestige. What should those of us who teach courses for institutional sales tell graduate students as our lectures get used to eliminate their jobs?

What do you see as the impact on future research and faculty governance?

Well, the focus on finding new ways to cut costs on faculty salaries is also shortsighted if we wish to maintain the research traditions of our disciplines. The amazing higher education system we created after World War II—the envy of the world—was built on a foundation of a full-time, tenure-system faculty with a strong tradition of research, academic freedom and a central role in the governance of their universities. I worry that institutional sales of MOOCs from other universities thrust upon faculty will undermine this foundation.

But isn’t this the 21st-century reality?

William Bowen, our former president at Princeton, has written a prescient book on this question titled Higher Education in the Digital Age. Other, more radical prominent scholars, like Christopher Newfield of UCSB, and Dan Clawson and Max Page of the University of Massachusetts (The Future of Higher Education), have also been weighing in with deeply insightful studies. Clawson and Page, for example, reject the austerity line that claims that state universities have to be constantly cutting costs. It’s impossible to read the range of current studies and not see that this new “reality” will depend on the political choices we make.

What would it take for MOOCs to be a positive force for U.S. higher education?

I think we should begin insisting that faculties have a say in how their universities will use MOOC technology. We need to get back to the old shared governance principle that curriculum is a core faculty domain. I don’t have all the answers, but your members might be interested in an online course to be offered on Coursera by Cathy Davidson at Duke University titled “The History and Future of Higher Education,” beginning Jan. 27.

Isn’t it inconsistent to recommend a Coursera course when you have become a conscientious objector?

This is a new technology that could be used for a lot of good. No reason to throw away electricity because someone invents an electric chair. No one—least of all me—doubts that MOOCs have the potential to bring greater access and quality to higher education. They also have the potential to destroy higher education, especially public higher education.

“I have no objection to cost savings. Maybe they should spend less on chancellor salaries, for instance. But we should be investing more—not less—in faculty hiring; move away from overworked, underpaid adjunct faculty; and invest in new facilities, research and so on.”

Faculty say no to secret contracts

FACULTY MAY HAVE MIXED feelings about jumping on the MOOC bandwagon, but one thing has become clear in the past year: They’re resisting contracts forged between online companies and college administrations without their consultation.

In December, as AFT On Campus went to press, the San Jose State University Academic Senate was considering a strongly worded resolution calling for a policy change forbidding the university from signing contracts with outside technology providers without the approval of tenured and tenure-track faculty members in the affected departments.

The San Jose faculty has been thoughtfully responding to SJSU’s president’s forays into the online learning world. In April, faculty in the SJSU philosophy department wrote to a Harvard professor explaining why they wouldn’t go along with the university’s use of his edX platform course. “Let’s not kid ourselves; administrators at the CSU [California State University] are beginning a process of replacing faculty with cheap online education,” they said.

Faculty bodies at Duke University, Amherst College, the State University of New York and Rutgers University have also spoken out.

In June, SUNY announced a partnership with Coursera to offer MOOCs. “UUP is concerned about the quality of credit-bearing MOOCs and the impact that offering them would have on teaching and learning within the SUNY system,” said United University Professions President and AFT Vice President Fred Kowal at the time. “Also, we are alarmed by SUNY’s goal to use MOOCs to add 100,000 students without increasing faculty.”

In August 2012, Rutgers University faculty were appalled when they saw a leaked contract showing that the university had entered into a secret seven-year agreement with Pearson Inc. to provide online degree programs to Rutgers students and split the revenues. Faculty, who are represented by the Rutgers chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP-AFT), were not consulted.

The agreement with Pearson eCollege, a Colorado-based distance-learning company, gives the company rights to manage and market the courses developed by Rutgers and take 50 percent of the revenue in the first year. By the end of the contract, Rutgers will keep 65 percent of the revenue and hopes to have added tens of thousands of cyberstudents from across the world.

“The contract was signed without input from the people who teach the courses,” says Deepa Kumar, associate professor of media studies and Middle Eastern studies. “The university says it spoke to a couple of faculty, but what we have in mind is having an opportunity for everyone to discuss.”

“This represents an abject failure of governance,” says David Hughes, a professor of anthropology who serves on the AAUP-AFT executive committee. “It is the university abrogating its responsibility to consult with faculty and entering into a sweet deal with an outside company.” Beyond subverting the governance process and the union contract, the agreement raises red flags on the fronts of academic freedom and intellectual property rights, the union says.

On Oct. 9, the faculty of the Rutgers Graduate School passed a resolution rejecting current and future proposals for graduate degree programs managed under the agreement. The resolution also asserts the faculty union’s contractual right to bargain terms and conditions of employment under such agreements.

—BARBARA McKENNA
UNTIL RECENTLY, massive open online courses have not been an acute threat to traditional higher education, as most people accessing a MOOC were essentially auditing the class, earning, upon completion, at most a certificate for their efforts. They did not earn college credit.

That format, however, is beginning to change. This fall brought the news that the Georgia Institute of Technology plans to offer a master’s degree in computer science via MOOC starting in January 2014, and the University of Maryland, University College, plans to award transfer credit for MOOCs.

Soon, your college administration may ask you to move over for MOOCs. In the MOOC environment, faculty will need to negotiate strong language covering working conditions, academic freedom and intellectual property. In addition, MOOCs raise issues concerning control over quality and standards, credentialing and attempts to narrow the curriculum. And using MOOCs may result in the disaggregation of work and the contracting-out of work. These issues are now snapping into focus as colleges are offering credit for MOOCs, and powerful entities, like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, throw their support behind them.

Bill Gates laid out some of his ideas recently before the Association of Community College Trustees, saying that MOOCs can be used, in his words, to “flip the classroom”—meaning that students listen to the MOOC lecture at home and come to class to do their assignments. In this way, according to Gates, MOOCs will “increase the one-to-one time available between faculty and student.” (See sidebar.)

Others may view it differently, seeing their academic freedom lost to the rock star professor on the MOOC and being relegated to a glorified teaching assistant, spoon feeding someone else’s content to the MOOC students.

This picture of Gates’ flipped classroom may give us a good framework for analysis of the issues for collective bargaining.

**Intellectual property**

Those who see themselves as the lecturer in the MOOC—perhaps characterizing themselves as early adopters rather than rock stars—may see issues of intellectual property. They may ask: Who will own the course and the rights to use it? Without proper written agreements addressing them, the answer...
is likely to be that the college owns the course, the right to use it and the compensation flowing from it.

Determining under copyright law whether a MOOC is “work for hire” or whether the faculty member is the “author” of the work, adjusting the rights of the school and the faculty to use and be compensated for the MOOC, and settling other intellectual property rights between the faculty and the college regarding the development and use of MOOCs, all may be addressed through collective bargaining. These are important considerations, as, generally, if a faculty member creates a MOOC for a college as a work for hire, he or she is not the author of the work and does not hold the copyright; rather, the college does. While there may be some exceptions to the work-for-hire doctrine for scholarly work produced by those who must “publish or perish,” a work for hire, generally speaking, is a work prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her duty. In such cases, the employer is usually considered to be the author of the work. This relationship, however, may be adjusted through collective bargaining.

Similarly, where the faculty is considered to have authored a MOOC, compensation for the college’s use of the MOOC may be subject to collective bargaining.

Existing collective bargaining provisions addressing “distance learning” may or may not be applicable to MOOCs, depending on the particular language used in the contract, so this may be the first area in an existing collective bargaining agreement to look at. For example, to address the work-for-hire issue, contract provisions might say that the responsibility for developing any MOOCs is the faculty’s and that the college is not responsible for compensating faculty for developing MOOCs or reducing faculty workload so they can spend time developing MOOCs. The college, however, will want something for giving up any work-for-hire claim with respect to MOOCs, so perhaps language could be negotiated giving the college a free license to use MOOCs developed by the faculty for a period of time. The college may also want an agreement not to compete, which also may be subject to collective bargaining.

Faculty, however, might not have the resources to develop and produce MOOCs on their own and may, in fact, need the college’s help. If the college needs to provide support to the faculty for this purpose, ownership rights can be shared in a manner that may be subject to collective bargaining.

Faculty may wish to negotiate for intellectual property rights not only for those works they author on their own but also for those works designed and produced as a team, when they are members of such teams. Compensation for the workload generated by the MOOC may also be subject to collective bargaining.

Who will own the course and the rights to use it? Without proper written agreements addressing them, the answer is likely to be that the college owns the course, the right to use it and the compensation flowing from it.

From a different perspective, faculty’s use of a college’s resources without its permission could result in disciplinary action against the faculty.

Academic freedom

Faculty “guiding on the side” in Gates’ flipped classroom may have concerns over academic freedom, since they are now, essentially, teaching someone else’s course, to the extent they are teaching at all. This may remove the faculty voice in the curriculum, and it may run afoul of existing agreements and understandings regarding academic freedom.

The Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York recently sued CUNY over its so-called Pathways plan, attempting to protect its rights to shared governance procedures and fighting back against an external standardization of the general education curriculum. That plan did not involve MOOCs directly, but it was analogous given that it allowed a CUNY college to award credit for courses not taught by the faculty of that college.

Other so-called seamless transfer programs—such as Open SUNY, which essentially guarantees transfer credit using home-brewed MOOCs and awards college credit for independent commercial MOOCs—could all lead to cookie-cutter courses over which the faculty might have no control.

The Gates vision of technology

This may be the biggest untold story of education technology: When used properly, technology can amplify the human element in education.

“Every year, millions of people take an introductory course in algebra. Until now, that has meant that thousands of teachers had to present introductory lectures in algebra. But technology is changing that.

“I like to compare it to the change that took place in the world of music. Before recorded music, everybody listened to the best singers in their neighborhood or in their city. Over time, the record industry found great singers, put a budget behind them to help them get even better, and recorded their performances so we can now listen to the world’s best singers in our homes.

“The same thing is happening in the world of academic lectures. We don’t have to have 20 different people in a large urban area all giving a lecture in the same introductory course. We can get the greatest lecturers in the English-speaking world, every student can listen to them, and the instructors who used to spend their time preparing and delivering lectures can become 21st-century community college instructors.

“These instructors are gifted at relating to students, running small group learning sessions, and matching up students with the best resources available—the best lectures, the best problem sets, the best assessments. They have more time to get to know the students, explain difficult concepts and troubleshoot when students aren’t thriving. They are the architects and motivators of learning.

“The smart use of technology doesn’t replace faculty—it redeployes them, to the benefit of the students.”

—Bill Gates, addressing the Association of Community College Trustees, Oct. 2, 2013
Those guiding on the side in Gates’ flipped classroom may have concerns over academic freedom, since they are now, essentially, teaching someone else’s course, to the extent they are teaching at all.

Of course, some faculty may want to use a MOOC as a component of the courses they teach; indeed, they may want to have their students mix and match, or compare and contrast, various MOOCs as part of their courses. Doing so, however, may require the college to obtain licensing agreements with the MOOC providers.

Job security and workload
MOOCs may raise real concerns for some faculty about job security. Generally, protection from layoff may be subject to collective bargaining, and so may contracting-out bargaining unit work in particular. For example, a collective bargaining agreement could give the employer the ability to contract for MOOCs, provided that doing so would not result in any layoffs.

Looking through the other end of the telescope, MOOCs may increase the workload for some faculty. Whereas faculty teaching a traditional class were responsible for a set number of students, limited perhaps by the number of seats in the lecture hall, faculty teaching a MOOC may be responsible for a “massive” number of students. In this regard, faculty may wish to bargain very clear maximum class-size provisions.

Coursera suggests using “peer assessments,” essentially using students to grade the work, but this raises questions of unit work and contracting-out. Faculty may wish to bargain provisions stipulating that no student will earn college credit without having had at least one hour of faculty contact.

Whether compensation for MOOCs is service for pension purposes is another issue to consider.

Licensing issues
Finally, we look briefly at the mechanics of MOOCs. Where the college intends to use a MOOC provider such as Coursera, edX, Udacity or some other provider, there should be a contract negotiated between the college and the provider. Usually, the collective bargaining agent for the employees of the college will not be at the table when the college negotiates with the provider, but its existing collective bargaining agreement and its collective bargaining demands may influence the college’s negotiations with the provider.

There are many potential sticking points in the relationship. MOOC providers will no doubt want to standardize and control the content they provide on their platforms, and they will want to impose their own standards. They may insist on having the rights to remove any content not meeting those standards. Again, this may entangle MOOCs with the faculty’s academic freedom.

MOOC providers probably will not want to be involved in any intellectual property disputes with the faculty and may seek to negotiate to place that burden on the college. Similarly, MOOC providers likely will want to be able to use any content uploaded from any particular college on a worldwide basis and might insist on having a license to do so.

Once content is uploaded and digitized, it is easy to manipulate, and, in most academic fields, the content will need to be updated. What faculty member does not want to continually edit and rewrite his or her material? So, on the one hand, it is not hard to foresee that a MOOC provider may negotiate for the right to edit or supplement a MOOC after it is uploaded—improving or enhancing it, in its view—or make a montage of MOOCs, combining content from various MOOCs into one. On the other hand, faculty will want to keep the MOOC they uploaded current, and they will need the right to edit the content they uploaded onto the MOOC’s platform. So, while the contract between the MOOC provider and the college will be separate from the collective bargaining agreement between the faculty and the college, the terms of one will certainly have the potential to influence the other.

In sum, regardless of whether Bill Gates’ picture of a flipped classroom becomes the reality, MOOCs have the potential to shake up the world of higher education, if not turn it upside down, especially if students can earn college credit for taking MOOCs.

Collective bargaining, however, may be able to adjust the rights and obligations of faculty and colleges—and influence the negotiations between colleges and MOOC providers—to ensure faculty’s intellectual property rights and academic freedom are protected, while providing for job security and just compensation.
How do they do that?
Building and operating a MOOC takes a team of expert professionals

By MARTIN MANJAK

Forget the Sage on the stage or guide on the side. For online learning experiences to work seamlessly for students and instructors, the team of behind-the-scenes technical experts is key. The conversation about MOOCs, or massive open online courses, frequently leaves out the cast of thousands who make the whole thing work. But those counting on MOOCs to disrupt higher education and solve the problems of cost, accessibility, retention, completion, innovation and so on, underestimate the costs of technical support at their peril.

In New York state, State University of New York chancellor Nancy Zimpher has committed SUNY to enrolling 100,000 students within three years in online course offerings through a program called Open SUNY. SUNY has also entered into an agreement with Coursera, one of a number of MOOC-for-profit developers.

The premise of much of this effort is that online courses, through their broad reach, electronic nature and ability to deliver content asynchronously, will, in the long run, be less expensive in providing instruction than traditional classroom-based teaching, and that savings will be passed on to students.

Putting aside the question of pedagogical value for the time being, what does it take to build and operate a MOOC?

Content prep and delivery
Let’s start with the content. This has to be delivered to participants in some electronic format: text, audio and visuals have to be prepared, assembled and presented synchronously (real-time), asynchronously (prerecorded) or in some mixture of the two. Prerecorded elements have to be produced in an environment that lends itself to high-quality recording of the event. There may be substantial postproduction work if the content has to be edited or supplemented with other visual or audio components. This work is the province of audio engineers, lighting technicians, videographers and editors. Visual artists may be called upon to produce special graphics, images and animations. The process is comparable to designing and producing a textbook, which requires many

If the necessary investment in people and technology is not made, online education, on the scale proposed by some, will compound, not solve, the serious problems facing American colleges and students.

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specialized skills to complement textual content.

Once the content is prepared and recorded, it has to be delivered to the participants. This requires hardware to store and transmit the content (including student contributions), and software to manage it, keeping in mind all the different types of transactions that will occur in the course of the MOOC, involving students, instructors and the course material.

Managing the servers
Let’s start with the hardware layer. To paraphrase Roy Scheider’s famous remark in the film “Jaws,” we’re going to need server farms—way bigger server farms! It’s going to require a lot of hardware to run the databases and applications that will make it possible for tens of thousands of participants to interact within the MOOC. This means we’re also going to need dedicated system administrators to manage all those servers, even if most of them are virtual. Aside from the MOOC software itself, the servers will need patching and updates for the operating systems that run on top of the servers will need patching and updates for the globe in every imaginable time zone. Aside from scheduled maintenance, there’s no allowance for downtime when the MOOC is in session.

Maintaining academic integrity
Now let’s move up to the application layer. A MOOC is a complicated content-management system that must carry out some form of authentication to limit access to valid participants, deliver specific content modules, track the submission of user-produced content, manage the subject threads of discussion boards, and serve as liaisons to the technical production staff. Of course, the help desk will have to be staffed 24/7, particularly if the content is being delivered asynchronously. Users can be logged-in and engaging with content at any hour of the day, any day of the week.

How do you know that Eddie Murdstone is in fact the Murdstone who enrolled in the course? And how do you know that Mr. Murdstone actually took that test or produced the work he submitted to satisfy a course assignment? These are difficult problems to solve when class enrollments are in the hundreds. The problems are magnified when ramping up attendance by an order of magnitude and recruiting students from around the world.

As you can well imagine, the course management software and its various, interdependent components (Web servers, database management systems, application servers) will need monitoring and management to address performance, security and functionality issues. To continue with the analogy of publishing, pressmen will be needed to make sure the entire operation runs smoothly.

Staging the help desk
Finally, we’re going to need a technical support layer that users can contact and consult with to answer questions, reset passwords and serve as liaisons to the technical production staff. Of course, the help desk will have to be staffed 24/7, particularly if the content is being delivered asynchronously. Users can be logged-in and engaging with content at any hour of the day, any day of the week.

Based on the scope and nature of online learning, the answer to the question we initially posed—What does it take to build and operate a MOOC?—is: a secure, robust IT infrastructure and a lot of highly skilled, professional technical staff, working across three shifts.

If the product is plagued by performance issues, if students have difficulty navigating the site, if questions arise concerning the academic integrity of tests and assignments (particularly in a for-credit course), if faculty feel their material is not presented in a lucid and coherent fashion or they are not getting the technical support they require to do their job—in short, if the necessary investment in people and technology is not made—online education, on the scale proposed by some, will compound, not solve, the serious problems facing American colleges and students. And the expected savings may prove to be elusive.

One thing is clear: The increasing emphasis on technology to deliver and mediate instruction will result in increasing demands on the expertise and time of our professional staff. Failure to realize this will doom any attempt, massive or otherwise, to move learning online.
THE PHRASE “ADAPTIVE LEARNING” is an umbrella term that applies to an incredibly broad range of technologies and techniques with very different educational applications. The common thread is that they all involve software that observes some aspect of student performance and adjusts what it presents to each student based on those observations. In other words, all adaptive software tries to mimic some part of what a good teacher does, given that every student has individual needs.

Here are a few examples of adaptive learning in action:

- A student using a physics program answers quiz questions about angular momentum incorrectly, so the program offers supplemental materials and more practice problems on that topic.
- A history student answers questions about the War of the Roses correctly the first time, so the program waits an interval of time and then requizzes the student to make sure that she is able to remember the information.
- A math student makes a mistake with the specific step of factoring polynomials while attempting to solve a polynomial equation, so the program provides him with extra hints and supplemental practice problems on that step.
- An English-as-a-second-language student uses incorrect subject-verb agreement in several places in her essay, so the program provides a lesson on that topic and asks her to find and correct her mistakes.

In most cases, the software is adapting to details of student performance that would be obvious to any good instructor if she had the time to observe closely enough. Occasionally, there may be some extra bit of cognitive science knowledge built into the program that the average instructor would not know. For example, most teachers probably don’t know the details of how frequently and at what intervals humans should be retested on a memorized fact in order to ensure that fact gets into long-term memory. (And even those teachers who do know generally do not have the time to work one-on-one with students and requiz them appropriately.)

Adaptive learning technologies are potentially transformative in that they may be able to change the economics of tutoring. Imagine if every student in your class could have a private tutor, available to him at any time for as long as he needs.

What it’s good for

The simplest way to think about adaptive learning products in their current state is as tutors. Tutors, in the American usage of the
It is critical to develop a clear and well-articulated position on which teaching functions the software can fulfill and which it can’t, in order to defend the value of a real college education and the faculty who deliver it.

Coming in 2014: e-Literate TV
In 2014, tune in to e-Literate TV, a rich, multimedia experience designed to foster conversation about the sensible use of educational technology across campus stakeholder groups and among other folks who are passionate about education.
www.e-literate.tv/
CONTRACTS SETTLED IN CALIFORNIA
On Nov. 11, AFT 2121 and the San Francisco Community College District came to a tentative agreement for a new faculty contract running through June 2015. The parties had been negotiating for 11 months in a pressure-cooker environment, after years of budget cuts and salary take-backs and freezes, and while the City College of San Francisco responded to an accrediting agency move to withdraw the college’s accreditation, effective summer 2014. All of those issues were at play as the local’s members held a Halloween march on City Hall as part of Campus Equity Week observances (photo below).

The agreement restores 1.5 percent of pay cuts; preserves part-time faculty rights, access to healthcare and pro-rata pay; and maintains current class size and cancellation policies.

Meanwhile, the University Council-AFT, representing non-Senate faculty and librarians in the University of California system, also secured an agreement after 23 months of bargaining.

UC-AFT President and chief negotiator Bob Samuels notes that while circumstances in the system and the state have been far from ideal, the parties were able to agree on a 3.5 percent salary increase, retroactively effective July 1, 2013, and accommodations to a change in the pension plan that affects most employee groups at the university. The contract will run through June 1, 2015.

UNION SUES TO SAVE COLLEGE
The California Federation of Teachers filed a motion Nov. 25 for a preliminary injunction to keep City College of San Francisco open and protect access to higher education for the vulnerable student population that relies on its programs. On the same day, the city attorney of San Francisco filed a similar injunction. If granted, the injunction would block the unjustified sanction leveled by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges to disaccredit City College and force the shutdown of the college effective July 31, 2014.

Since the announcement of the sanction last year, City College has seen a precipitous drop in enrollment, losing well over 10 percent of its 80,000-plus students and in excess of $20 million in state funding.

“Because of the reckless and illegal actions of the ACCJC, community college students in San Francisco—returning veterans, low-income students, immigrants and others who can’t afford private colleges—are facing the insecurity and instability of not knowing how they will continue their education next year,” says Joshua Pechthalt, president of the CFT and an AFT vice president. “City College must remain open.”

The San Francisco Superior Court is expected to hold a hearing on the motions at the end of December.

FASTING FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM
Immigrant rights advocates fasting since Nov. 12 were visited on Dec. 3 by AFT President Randi Weingarten and AFT Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker, president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers. The fasters, encamped on the National Mall, are pressing the U.S. House of Representatives to pass comprehensive immigration reform by year’s end. On Dec. 3, after 22 days, four of the original fasters passed the fast on to new fasters. Ricker is one of hundreds of solidarity fasters who are fasting for immigration reform one day a week until Congress passes the law or adjourns for the year. More information at www.fast4families.org.

PHILIPPINE DISASTER RELIEF
In the aftermath of Super Typhoon Haiyan, the Philippines is facing the daunting task of rebuilding communities that have been left without essentials such as food, shelter, clean water, schools, healthcare, power and transportation. To help, the AFT has:

- Solicited volunteers to assist in relief and recovery, as our members did in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake in 2010.
- Sent an immediate contribution of $10,000 to help get supplies and other assistance to those who need them most.
- Opened up the AFT Disaster Relief Fund to help with recovery efforts, as we did after Superstorm Sandy, the earthquake in Haiti and the Oklahoma tornadoes.
- Continued to work with our labor, healthcare and education partners to assist the Philippines on its road to recovery.

Give to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund at go.aft.org/philippinesrelief.

VERMONT IS ‘RECLAIMING THE PROMISE’
AFT Vermont released its 2014 legislative platform, “Reclaiming the Promise of Public Higher Education,” at the 40th anniversary celebration of the Vermont State Colleges Faculty Federation.

The three major planks:

- Increase Vermont’s investment in state colleges and universities.
- Provide funding options to students that do not depend on the private student loan industry.
- Ensure that more higher education dollars are spent on students.

“We see the effects of students’ debt loads every day when we talk with students and hear their stories,” says VSCFF President Linda.
Olson. “We also know firsthand that the gap is widening between funds spent directly on students and funds spent on administrative excesses.”

LEARNING FROM ‘MANDELA’ The AFT and The Weinstein Company brought the story of Nelson Mandela’s life and his message of social justice, reconciliation and leadership to Los Angeles public high school students with a Nov. 21 screening of the film “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom” and a conversation afterward with AFT President Randi Weingarten and Harvey Weinstein, co-chairman of The Weinstein Company.

The AFT has posted lesson plans related to the movie on its Share My Lesson website. Share My Lesson—available at no charge for educators—offers lengthy clips from “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom” and several Common Core-aligned lesson plans for English language arts and world history classes.

“Film can be a phenomenal educational tool, and this film touches on the universal themes of fear, oppression, hope, reconciliation and forgiveness,” says Weingarten.

UNION UNCOVERS FRAUD The complaint of the Kean Federation of Teachers that an administrator at Kean University (N.J.) had lifted passages from other universities’ websites has resulted in the removal of Kean’s associate vice president for academic affairs. This is not the first time the union, which represents full-time faculty, professional staff and librarians, has confronted administrative dishonesty. Last year, the president and university board of trustees blew off revelations of inaccurate academic credentials listed on Kean President Dawood Farahi’s resume.

The KFT is being forced to act as guardian of Kean’s board of trustees-mandated ethical standards, says KFT President James Castiglione. “We teach our students to be ethical and scrupulous, and we expect our university officials to be held to the same high standards. It is unconscionable that a culture of academic fraud persists among Kean’s highest administrators,” Castiglione says.

SPIN THE ADJUNCT ‘WHEEL OF MISFORTUNE’ Students at Kalamazoo Valley Community College in Michigan got a chance to see what it’s like to have the kind of life that a majority of their teachers have. During national Campus Equity Week, Oct. 28-Nov. 2, the KVCC

National Day of Action Dec. 9 reclaims the promise

AS AFT ON CAMPUS WENT TO PRESS, AFT affiliates and their community partners held a National Day of Action to Reclaim the Promise of Public Education. In cities across the country on Dec. 9, parents, students, educators and community leaders brought together their communities to push for reforms that focus on teaching and learning, not privatization and austerity funding schemes.

Over the past year, community groups, teachers and unions have taken unprecedented steps to work together in highlighting effective, research-based education reforms and to advocate on behalf of students and teachers.

Together, they developed “The Principles That Unite Us,” a common vision for public education. These principles stand in sharp contrast to the corporate agenda for public schools, which disregards education and community voices and attempts to impose a system of winners and losers. More than 100 community groups and unions already have endorsed these principles. (You can learn more about them at www.aft.org/promise.)

In Los Angeles, the Day of Action event took place at the corporate headquarters of Westfield Group, which owns shopping malls nationwide. The company benefits from major tax loopholes and spends mightily on lobbying and elections to ensure it keeps its tax breaks. The event drew union members from AFT Local 1521, representing faculty at the Los Angeles community colleges, students, staff, parents, teachers and retirees.

The Union of Rutgers Administrators-AFT, working with RU student activists, sponsored a “flying phone bank” on Dec. 9 as part of the students’ and union’s legislative campaign for tuition equity. They called Gov. Chris Christie and selected state legislators, asking them to pass the New Jersey DREAM Act, which would allow state high school graduates who spent at least three years in a NJ high school to pay for college at the in-state rate. The bill would affect the children of undocumented immigrants born here and those brought here at a young age—known as DREAMers.

The National Day of Action was a first step in amplifying labor and community voices. This spring, watch for multicity and multistate campaigns and larger actions.

In addition to the AFT, national groups sponsoring the National Day of Action include the Alliance for Educational Justice, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Gamaliel Network, the Journey for Justice Alliance, the Leadership Center for the Common Good, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the National Education Association, the National Education Association, the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign and the Service Employees International Union.

For more information, go to Reclaim PublicEdNow.org.
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