

Extract from Minutes of Senate (March 20th 2013)

Senators Rush and Srinidhi asked the following question:

McGill recently partnered with edX to offer open online courses. To many this came as a surprise as the notion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC's) was only recently discussed at Senate.

edX is a not-for-profit enterprise of its founding partners Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that features learning designed specifically for interactive study via the web. Along with offering online courses, the institutions will use edX to research how students learn and how technology can transform learning—both on-campus and worldwide.

What are the next steps in the edX endeavor? How will edX be used to understand the potential of technology in transforming learning? How will the students be involved in this?

Senator Masi, Provost, answered as follows:

It is expected that the McGill community will benefit from the increased opportunities for technology-enhanced teaching and learning. The edX platform is designed to generate significant data with which to study how students learn in digital environments that will be used to develop assessment tools for these on-campus and broadly distributed courses, and to improve technology-supported learning on campus.

We are committed to using analytics and information from the edX platform to inform the evolution of our own technology-assisted teaching and learning models. Indeed, we expect our partnership with edX to yield academic and intellectual dividends for our students and faculty, and for our capacity to contribute in a meaningful and sustained way to the advancement of knowledge.

Next steps in the process of offering a few McGill courses by means of MOOCs in 2014 will require a considerable number of decisions and plans. I will be working with the Academic Policy Committee, most likely by means of an ad hoc working group drawn from its members, to identify the relationship between McGill's current courses offerings and MOOCs to be offered through McGill's partnership with edX, as well as to be attentive to academic governance issues that may arise.

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Phase 1 of the project will have multiple components including initial efforts to:

1. Identify existing McGill courses that offer appropriate adaptation to MOOC formats, cultivate “the will and skill” of our faculty, and develop a process for selection of the first set of McGill courses to be offered, including determining appropriate arrangements for their production.
2. Identify the questions we need to ask regarding McGill’s MOOCs, including questions about standards and policies.
3. Develop a program of ongoing professional development and training to professors and graduate students in Faculties, schools, and departments to ensure that our faculty can maximize the opportunities inherent in MOOC technologies
4. Address and reconcile any Intellectual Property issues.

Over the past five years, McGill has been taking a deliberate, integrated approach to information and communications technologies innovations at the University, examining how online, IT-based and face-to-face instruction can be informed by pedagogical research. Building on these efforts, we welcome the opportunities offered through the edX consortium, joining other leading universities in the delivery of MOOCs to students on campus and in the global learning community. I look forward to working with Senate to further these endeavors.

We joined edX because the founding institutions and the other consortium members share our commitment to improving the “residential campus experience” by learning more about MOOCs in this exciting new phase in technology-assisted university level instruction. As such, we will be seeking students, via focus groups and participation in the APC ad hoc group that will be formed, to help perfect McGill’s approaches. There will be ample opportunity for student involvement.

In response to a question, the Provost agreed that – in the interests of collegiality – he would present to Senate for approval any follow-up matters that might possibly fall within Senate’s jurisdiction.