MOOC’s  
An Analysis for BCIT

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**Introduction**

This report is a result of an email sent to the Faculty of BCIT on July 12th by Paul Dangerfield, Vice President of Education, which posed the following question, “*Anyone want to consider piloting an open, large on line class? It would be interesting to see what happens*.”

I responded with a yes that I would be interested as I had been following the news about MOOC’s, particularly the ones reporting on the Stanford *AI* MOOC which had attracted over 160,000 Learners.

The concept looked revolutionary from an educational viewpoint, so I was quite intrigued by what I was reading and game to try the concept out.

(Also, what could be more fun than becoming a *rock star* of education?)

A little research quickly revealed that there were numerous MOOC’s available to try, and it seemed to me that the fastest way to get down the learning curve for delivering a MOOC was to participate in one.

I would then bring to bear my educational expertise as an Instructor and my business training – I worked for years as a securities analyst, finding efficient and profitable companies for my firm’s portfolio managers to invest in, and am currently a Director on two start-ups – to the analysis of MOOC’s and how best to execute the model at BCIT.

**I signed-up for two courses from Coursera [[1]](#footnote-1)**, ***Introduction to Finance*** (Gautam Kaul, U of Michigan) and ***Fantasy and Science Fiction: The Human Mind, Our Modern World*** (Eric Rabkin, U of Michigan).

**This would allow me to explore two types of MOOC’s which exist: A “hard” math-oriented course (right vs. wrong answer, no areas of grey) and a “soft” literary course (lots of room for opinion and personal insight/analysis).**

**It would also allow me to investigate the two forms of marking currently used in MOOC’s – *computer grading* (for numeric answer, multiple choice and true/false based questions) and *peer assessment for essays* (opinion based answers).**

However, my research quickly showed there are numerous problems with MOOC’s, which suggest to me that **the concept is a failure, both as an educational product and as a business model**.

My analysis and conclusions are supported by the report below.

**HOW TO USE THIS REPORT:**

This report is fairly long. There are some who may wish to scan what I have written.

For your assistance in finding the information you need:

1. There is an ***Executive Summary*** for my report immediately below this page.   
     
   For those in a hurry, just read the Executive Summary and those parts of the report which interest you.  
     
   Please note that *all* of the points in the Executive Summary are ***hyper-linked*** to the appropriate section in my report: Hover with your mouse over any point in the Executive Summary and follow the instructions in the screen tip (usually: *CTRL + Click to follow link*) to jump to the appropriate section in my report.
2. This report is divided into the following parts:

* **Executive Summary** (starts on page 4)
* **Part I – BCIT’s role in MOOC’s** (starts on page 6)
  + A response to Paul Dangerfield’s email of July 12th and the implications for BCIT of implementing a MOOC.
    - My recommendations are drawn from the analysis completed in Part II.
* **Part II: The MOOC’s Report Card** (starts on page 11)
  + A comprehensive analysis of my experience with the two MOOC’s I am involved in, what I liked about them (KUDOS), and what I found disturbing about them (CONCERNS).
  + This section concludes with my Grade for MOOC’s, which is an “F” – MOOC’s fail both as an educational product and as a business model. (See page 41.)

***NOTES*:**

1. I have highlighted in **bold red font points which I consider extremely important.** So a reader can quickly skim through the report reading these points and the **titles/text which are in blue font**.
2. If anyone is interested in the emails/other documentation provided by Coursera, please let me know. I have a complete record of these on file.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*(All points below are* ***hyper-linked*** *to the appropriate section of the report if you wish to jump directly to sections you are specifically interested in.)*

[Part I – BCIT’s role in MOOC’s](#_Toc332983613)

[BCIT is not going to pilot a massive open on-line class (MOOC) without the commitment of a significant amount of resources.](#_Toc332983614)

[BCIT is not going to successfully deliver MOOC’s using text-based materials.](#_Toc332983615)

[Conclusion 1: BCIT could go it alone, cheap-out, use $10,000, and go Mickey Mouse with a MOOC, but we’d only be kidding ourselves.](#_Toc332983616)

[We need answers to the questions so ably raised by Mark, Rosario and Jo-Ann about education and online education *before* we apply any resources to what in my professional opinion may be either a dead-end technology, or if not dead-end, then perhaps not appropriate for BCIT.](#_Toc332983617)

[Conclusion 2: MOOC’s are not the only fish in the high tech educational sea, nor are they in my professional opinion, a particularly healthy fish – we should be exploring other educational technologies.](#_Toc332983618)

[Conclusion 2a: In my professional opinion, as an Instructor, as a specialist in firm analysis, and as a Director on several start-ups, BCIT could better use its resources to improve its traditional or online teaching delivery and methods.](#_Toc332983619)

[Conclusion 3: If BCIT does seriously consider running a MOOC, I recommend that we opt to use the infrastructure of a firm like Coursera to deliver it … why reinvent the wheel, pay to develop the required technology, and for getting down the learning curve, when we could take advantage of an existing platform to develop the foundational expertise we will need?](#_Toc332983620)

[Part II: The MOOC’s Report Card](#_Toc332983621)

[KUDOS](#_Toc332983622)

[Slick websites – a significant contribution of resources.](#_Toc332983623)

[Ivy League institutions producing and donating real course content.](#_Toc332983624)

[Dedicated Instructors, Assistants and Team Members at firms like Coursera.](#_Toc332983625)

[Big Selection of MOOC’s, sourced near cost-free to firms like Coursera, but extremely costly to the educational institutions donating them.](#_Toc332983626)

[High quality content – not cheap to create. (I estimate the TRUE cost of a MOOC to be $15,000 - $50,000 per course.)](#_Toc332983627)

[Convenience for the Learner *currently* at *no* *dollar* cost.](#_Toc332983628)

[CONCERNS](#_Toc332983629)

[Poor business model – the economics are *not* there.](#_Toc332983630)

[You can supply Content without generating Learning.](#_Toc332983631)

[No *dollar* cost to Learners, but MOOC’s are not free for them either.](#_Toc332983632)

[Poor definition of a “peer” with resulting negative consequences.](#_Toc332983633)

[No assistance from professionals, meaning Learners must rely on “peers” of questionable ability. Combine this with the fact that the sheer quantity of information on the Forums is overwhelming, often of poor quality, and with limited search capacity, and the result is disastrous.](#_Toc332983634)

[Idiotic, rude, misleading and small-minded posts.](#_Toc332983635)

[Grading insanity (Finance MOOC): A computer *cannot* provide the professional feedback of a person.](#_Toc332983636)

[Grading insanity (SF & Fantasy MOOC): How does one *competently* mark an essay if one speaks English as a second language, or is functionally illiterate, and/or one doesn’t have a clue about education, intelligent marking, or the materials being marked?](#_Toc332983637)

[Who is that Learner – cheating and the validity of performance.](#_Toc332983638)

[No appeal process for errors in questions/marking.](#_Toc332983639)

[Marking is not useful to either the Instructor or Learner.](#_Toc332983640)

[The homework in neither MOOC was particularly useful.](#_Toc332983641)

[The qualification is of questionable value.](#_Toc332983642)

[Questions about accommodating learning disabilities and other issues.](#_Toc332983643)

[Workload issues.](#_Toc332983644)

[Machine cold efficiency, with a false bonhomie, but *absolutely* no humanity, no mercy, no kindness, and no understanding.](#_Toc332983645)

[Effective instruction requires personalized attention.](#_Toc332983646)

[The Disposable Learner I: Failure to follow-up and deal with issues.](#_Toc332983647)

[The Disposable Learner II: Extremely high failure and drop-out rate.](#_Toc332983648)

[Conclusions – Grade for MOOC’s = “F”](#_Toc332983649)

[Based on the Report Card generated above, MOOC’s are a failure, both as an educational product and as a business model.](#_Toc332983650)

Part I – BCIT’s role in MOOC’s

Please see Part II for the underlying analysis which supports the information below.

## BCIT is not going to pilot a massive open on-line class (MOOC) without the commitment of a significant amount of resources.

* MOOCs are a massive undertaking and if we go it alone, there is a huge learning curve to get down – pedagogical, technological and organizational.
* All the *costs* of a MOOC are front-end loaded, including providing a cyber-secure way of testing knowledge for accreditation purposes.
* *Revenues*, if any, are uncertain and back-end loaded.
  + Compare this with a normal course where costs are spread over the course cycle, revenues are front-end loaded, and we have a high degree of certainty of collection once a Learner is accepted at BCIT.
* MOOC’s are expensive to mount properly (see **PART II** for details of calculations):
  + For the two I am attending, each provides a *minimum* of 1200 minutes of professional video, requiring an estimated 3,600 – 6,000 minutes (60 - 100 hours) of planning, preparation, writing, editing, rewriting and filming and the commitment of several professionals *just to create the content*.
    - Assuming $50 per hour, that’s an estimated cost of $3,000 to $5,000 (accounting for only the HR component) to create the materials alone.
  + Now add the delivery costs of the MOOC.
    - My calculations below suggest you can add a delivery cost, primarily man-hours, using conservative assumptions, of between $15,000 and $42,000.
* **Total estimated cost of delivering a single MOOC: $15,000 to $50,000.**
  + Is BCIT willing to commit that kind of resources:
    - To conduct an "experiment"?
    - To a concept with huge costs and no proven revenue generating model?
    - To an educational delivery method which, based on stats published to-date, seems to have drop-out / failure rates exceeding 90% of enrollees?
  + Finally are we willing to *donate* that amount of our precious resources to an organization like Coursera by joining their stable of Institutions/Instructors who are currently providing content free of charge?

## BCIT is not going to successfully deliver MOOC’s using text-based materials.

* Existing competitors are big, established, sophisticated, well-known (Ivy League schools) and well-funded (access to large endowment funds and significant venture capital funding).
* They offer a broad range of free courses to Learners, with Coursera, alone, currently providing enrollees with 117 different MOOC’s to choose from.
* To compete, BCIT would have to produce a MOOC that is up to *current* *standards*.
  + Current standards allow *anyone* to enrol at no dollar cost in MOOC’s offered by Instructors associated with the likes of Harvard, MIT and Stanford.
  + Enrol and you get to participate for free in a course which provides hundreds of minutes of high quality video produced in a studio by AV experts.
* If we at BCIT are going to start delivering MOOC’s, even as an experiment, I would be forced to say that the statement, *“Go big, or don’t go at all”* applies in spades to this undertaking.
  + BCIT cannot afford to “cheap-out” on its experiment if it wishes to establish a reputation, and collect quality data for a serious analysis of whether the MOOC route is one that we wish to pursue further.
    - I am making an assumption here that collecting data for further analysis and building a reputation as an Institute of Technology in an emergent area of educational technology are key reasons for proposing this experiment.
  + Unless we deliver a very high quality, and competitive product, our experiment will fail to provide us with the information we need to correctly assess this method of teaching.
  + A low quality product could also hurt our reputation as an Institute of Technology and as an educational institution committed to delivering a top-notch education to its Learners.
* “Something” will happen if we run a MOOC, and I have no doubt it will be interesting, ***but if we don’t do it right***, then that “something” will fail to provide us with the appropriate data for decision-making about the feasibility/economic intelligence/educational wisdom of BCIT offering MOOC’s, as well as potentially endangering our reputation.
* My professional assessment, based on what I have seen to date, is that we are looking-at between $15,000 and $50,000 of resources (release time, combined with AV facilities, professional film crew/editors/technology/software/professional support) to mount even *one* *simple* MOOC.
  + That is why this method of course delivery has been *monopolized* by Harvard, MIT and Stanford, as well as VC backed private/for-profit ventures – they have access to huge endowment funds (multi-billion dollar funds in the case of the US Ivy League schools) and/or deep-pocketed investors.
* **The for-profit ventures also involve the collaboration of multiple post-secondary education institutes who *currently* *donate the content for free*.** 
  + The well-known universities in the stables of firms like Coursera have access to large pools of money and to even larger pools of professors who work from September to March and even then, deliver only one or two hours of face-time to their Learners per week so that they may engage in research such as the MOOC’s experiment.
  + In other words, these Institutions/Instructors, unlike BCIT, have the time / resources necessary to create a quality product and *then to give it away* to firms like Coursera.
* **Bear in mind that firms like Coursera, because they do *not* bear the full burden of the expenditures, can currently cope with the massive front-end loaded costs of creating and mounting a quality product, with no guaranteed revenues, and with any revenues earned being all back-end loaded.**
  + **Given the costs estimated above, one wonders how much longer this substantial contribution of resources by Institutions/Instructors to the operation of for-profit firms like Coursera can go on?**
  + **Once it stops and these firms have to pay the *full* costs of their content, will they be able to remain in business?**
* MOOC’s may be market coups for the wealthy likes of Harvard, Stanford and MIT *providing a valuable branding exercise*; however, they may be extremely costly drags for the rest of us non-Ivy League participants who are following in their enormous wake.

### ***Conclusion 1: BCIT could go it alone, cheap-out, use $10,000, and go Mickey Mouse with a MOOC, but we’d only be kidding ourselves.***

## We need answers to the questions so ably raised by Mark, Rosario and Jo-Ann about education and online education *before* we apply any resources to what in my professional opinion may be either a dead-end technology, or if not dead-end, then perhaps not appropriate for BCIT.

* **The path to a successful online education future involves answering the following key question:**
  + ***How can BCIT design effective and engaging online education with an acceptable cost/benefit ratio?***
* Before committing resources to MOOC’s we need to recognize that they are currently highly fashionable, but that does not mean they are either effective or desirable.
  + And never forget that this season’s high fashion is next season’s thrift shop donation!
* We also need to consider that MOOC’s, despite the marketing hype, may actually be a dead-end from an educational perspective.
  + **If you read *Part II* of this report – *The MOOC’s Report Card* – you will see that MOOC’s have a great many drawbacks which their boosters are conveniently ignoring.**
    - Having now participated in 2 Coursera MOOC’s, my experience has been *quite* *unsatisfactory* … and that’s after many millions of dollars have been spent to design the platforms, to build them, to create quality content, to attract users, and to ensure ease / fluency / “appealing-ness” of use … yet the whole thing fails, and fails very rapidly in my opinion.
* As a result, before rushing into this area, we need to understand MOOC costs/benefits, as well as their advantages/disadvantages. We then need to compare MOOC’s with other online tools and course delivery methods which:
  + May be more effective (both from a cost perspective and an educational delivery perspective).
  + May be more appropriate to BCIT.
    - BCIT either alone or in collaboration (that is, collaborating with other post-secondaries or joining a firm like Coursera) has *no* competitive advantage in the area of MOOC’s.
    - We must not forget that, in addition to MOOC’s, there are all kinds of other online educational technologies, existing and emergent, which we should be investigating, and many promising ideas in the education sector we should be exploring.
      * These are areas we may be able to mine, given our limited resources, far more profitably, intelligently, efficiently and effectively.
      * Even more important, many of these educational technologies/ideas may be in areas of niche activity in which we could bring, unlike to MOOC’s, a very strong competitive advantage.
* **We need to get creative, we need to get original, we need to seek out the niches, and we need to look for online technologies which would set a *GOLD STANDARD* by which education *should* *be* delivered.**
* Then we need to make an *informed* decision as to the optimal use of our scarce, and valuable, resources and time.
  + As Mark so ably points out, “*if the goal is to increase access, MOOCs aren't needed. We can do this with good quality online courses and an open access policy*.”
* I will close this section with a quote from one of Rosario’s emails, which I think nicely encapsulates very precisely some of the things we need to think about:

As much as I consider myself an advocate of openness in education (OERs) and believe in education for all (Millennium Development goals), I am not certain I believe in the advantages of delivering MOOCS when comparing them to quality online learning experiences in conventional educational settings.

Transposing the MOOC model to a conventional setting, such as the kind of programming we offer at BCIT, poses challenges in terms of supporting learners, ensuring quality of learning experiences and, most relevant to the BCIT context, assessing learners in order to grant a credential.

The MOOC model has organically evolved to be a no fee delivery to massive numbers of Learners, unconventionally supported by peers. Although the model continues to evolve through the introduction of small “credentialing” fees at certain institutions (U of Toronto is an example) the issues of quality and learner assessment are still at the forefront.

As we continue to debate MOOCS, I would like to get us to reflect on WHY would BCIT want to deliver content in this format? WHO would be our audience? How would introducing a new delivery methodology contribute to transforming teaching and learning? What would be the implications for using this model and could they be addressed through good learning design of online provision?

### ***Conclusion 2: MOOC’s are not the only fish in the high tech educational sea, nor are they in my professional opinion, a particularly healthy fish – we should be exploring other educational technologies.***

### ***Conclusion 2a: In my professional opinion, as an Instructor, as a specialist in firm analysis, and as a Director on several start-ups, BCIT could better use its resources to improve its traditional or online teaching delivery and methods.***

### ***Conclusion 3:*** ***If BCIT does seriously consider running a MOOC, I recommend that we opt to use the infrastructure of a firm like Coursera to deliver it … why reinvent the wheel, pay to develop the required technology, and for getting down the learning curve, when we could take advantage of an existing platform to develop the foundational expertise we will need?***

Part II: The MOOC’s Report Card

# KUDOS

## Slick websites – a significant contribution of resources.

* The MOOC’s firms, Coursera, Udacity, Edx, etc. have beautifully designed websites.
  + Professional design, logo and graphics.
* Coursera in particular is well laid-out and graceful, has powerful use of white-space, is easy to navigate, is gentle on the eye, is intuitive to understand and pleasant to use.
  + This website is SIMPLE while delivering COMPLEX info.
  + Trust me, as someone who has now designed multiple websites, complex websites, which *appear* simple, are extremely expensive to design and quite difficult to create – there was a significant contribution of resources, including planning time and expertise to create these sites.
* **Institutions/Instructors signing-up with these organizations get to use these excellent websites “for free” to reach a vast pool of potential Learners *provided they are willing to donate Instructor time and materials*.**
* For BCIT to *independently* deliver a truly competitive product would absolutely require the support, knowledge and technical resources of website designers, Instructors, and IT, media, AV and animation experts.
  + PowerPoint and text based is NOT going to cut it, given the strong nature of the competition that exists and is already delivering MOOCs, *for* *free* to Learners.
    - We must have the ability to present quality videos and animation.
  + We would also need an attractive and well-designed website, with the ability to handle large numbers of online Learners, to handle discussion groups, to collect and assess assignments / exams, etc.
  + Marketing this would require significant additional resources, since we have lots of competition in the field from Ivy League schools such as Harvard and MIT.
    - We would need connections / financial resources to get into the media (tweets, Facebook, online and traditional print journals) and to generate the high profile articles and online coverage needed to capture audience and potential Learner attention.
* **Comment:** Institutions/Instructors which wish to compete with existing MOOC delivery firms would have to create their own website(s), and the other required infrastructure, and then successfully market them.
  + - Given the high standard already set, it would be uncompetitive, and foolish from a reputational point of view, to launch a low quality version of these MOOC’s.
    - To attract Learners would require significant marketing resources to compete against the likes of Coursera, Udacity and the top tier schools currently participating.

## Ivy League institutions producing and donating real course content.

* Currently the main participants in the MOOCs field are Harvard, MIT and Stanford, with a variety of other top tier US educational institutions now contributing their resources to the creation of MOOC’s.
* **These are intended as real courses, with high standards, and in order for a Learner to *legitimately* complete one of these MOOC’s successfully it will require discipline, time commitment, and a significant amount of work.**
  + **The key word here is “*legitimately*”.** 
    - **As discussed below, validating the identity of the person completing the assignment, quiz, exam, etc. is a key concern with MOOC’s.**
* The two MOOC’s I am enrolled-in provide very high quality video-based lecture materials, delivered by Instructors from “name-brand” American universities.
  + If anyone has not yet logged-in and looked at these videos, I highly recommend doing so – they are superb.
  + However, I would note, that unlike what was said in the Daphne Koller TED Talk about Coursera, there is no interactivity in these two MOOC’s.
    - Yes, the Professors do occasionally tell Learners to pause the video, but nothing happens while it is paused.
    - Thus, contrary to Coursera’s P.R., feedback on Learner activity is *not* being collected as the materials are presented. (At least, not in these two MOOC’s.)
* **Comment 1**: Given the high quality of these videos, BCIT might want to use MOOC’s as a way to demonstrate to new Instructors how to deliver materials.
  + - This would be an innovative way for BCIT to use these sites as a teaching tool for our Instructors.
      * It would be a low cost and inventive way for BCIT to profit from these sites.
* **Comment 2:** BCIT might want to use MOOC’s as a back-up resource to be used by our Learners to supplement the teaching provided by our regular Instructors.
  + - I would recommend this with caution, as it might cause some of our Learners to become dissatisfied with the performance of their BCIT Instructor.
* **Comment 3:** Institutions/Instructors which wish to compete with these existing MOOC firms would be at a severe competitive disadvantage.
  + - It would be expensive and difficult to go head-to-head against the existing MOOC suppliers. I do not recommend it.
      * Consider: The average Learner is given a choice – an economics MOOC, offered by BCIT or one offered by Harvard; an AI MOOC offered by BCIT or one offered by MIT; a stats MOOC offered by BCIT or one offered by Stanford.
      * Which one do you think the average learner would choose to enrol in?

## Dedicated Instructors, Assistants and Team Members at firms like Coursera.

* The Instructors contributing to the MOOC’s I am enrolled in are first-class presenters.
* They and the Assistants / Coursera team members appear dedicated, hard-working and to be true-believers in the MOOC concept.
  + If anyone has not yet logged-in to one of my MOOC’s and looked at the site and the videos, I highly recommend doing so – the performance of the presenters is excellent.
  + **It is my understanding the Institutions/Instructors are *not* being paid for their work, and no model has yet been devised which will pay them, so they are *donating* their time and effort to create very detailed, high quality and informative teaching materials.** 
    - After Unit 1 completed in the SF & Fantasy MOOC, the Instructor created almost 2 hours of *additional* videos discussing the assignment, which had already been marked and handed back.
      * In my opinion that was above and beyond the call!
  + As well, Instructors / Assistants / Coursera Team Members are monitoring the massive forums and *trying* to provide responses to Learner concerns.
    - That having been said, they are distant, unapproachable, do not accept personal emails/requests, and probably because of the massive number of posts, ***appear to be merely sampling the forums*** – many issues go unaddressed, or they are addressed incorrectly because the monitors have not been participating in the full discussion, and have missed the “essence” of the problem they are trying to address.
* **Comment 1**: It is the early days of MOOC’s, they are in fashion and in the news. They are an “experiment” and thus rich fodder for Professors seeking to enhance their “publication” profile by contributing lecture materials.
  + - Institutions/Instructors have been willing to donate their time and effort just because they are participating in such a grand experiment.
      * However, with no compensation, except emotional, for what must be hours of dedicated labour, one has to ask how long Institutions/Instructors will be willing to step-up to the plate and provide this level of free labour?
      * And given firms like Coursera have received many millions of dollars of VC funding, how happy are Institutions/Instructors going to be if they keep giving and yet get nothing tangible back in return?
    - With no viable revenue model can Institutions/Instructors ever expect to be paid for contributing their labour to the creation of these MOOC’s?
    - **If the for-profit firms like Coursera had to bear the full cost of producing these MOOC’s would they even be in business?**
* **Comment 2**: The for-profit MOOC firms have been able to pull-off the MOOC’s concept because almost all of the labour needed to operate has been donated to them.
  + - If they start having to pay for this labour, then they will need to find a viable revenue model.
      * **Without a viable revenue model, the MOOC’s concept must fail on pure economics alone for the private-sector firms.**
    - **For the Ivy League institutions, such as Harvard and MIT, MOOC’s will continue because they will become a form of branding.** (See discussion below.)

## **Big Selection of MOOC’s,** sourced **near** cost-free to firms like Coursera, but extremely costly to the educational institutions **donating** them.

* First out the gate and first down the learning curve, the existing MOOC’s firms already have considerable content across all fields from electronics to literature, from science to math, from history to economics.
  + Currently 117 MOOC’s are listed on the Coursera website alone.
  + There are a number of other organizations offering MOOC’s, so there are literally hundreds of options available to Learners.
* **The for-profit firms did *not* pay full value for this content (if they paid for it at all)**
  + **The content was uploaded voluntarily by Institutions/Instructors** **which bore the full cost of their creation.**
    - This would consist of:
      * The Instructor’s/design team’s time to create it.
      * Ongoing operational costs.
        + Someone has to monitor/manage the MOOC as it operates.

*Though personalized interaction with Learners is non-existent, nevertheless you cannot just upload a MOOC and let it run on its own*.

* + - * The costs to close a MOOC down once it completes.
      * Other resources, such as the use of video equipment and facilities.
* **Comment:** MOOC’s are NOT free to the Institutions/Instructors which create them and operate them.
  + - There is a significant upfront cost to create these things.
    - There are ongoing costs to maintain, run and update them.
    - Institutions/Instructors which wish to compete with these existing MOOC firms would have to create their own content and delivery systems, and then find the resources to market them competitively.
    - Given the high standard already set, it would be uncompetitive to launch a low quality version this content (e.g. primarily text or cheap videos).

## High quality content – not cheap to create. (I estimate the TRUE cost of a MOOC to be $15,000 - $50,000 per course.)

* Coursera and the other MOOC firms offer high quality content.
* Excellent use of professionally created video to convey material in an expert manner.
  + For those who have logged on to my MOOCs, note the superb quality of the videos, the uniformity of the production values, how well they were written, and the professional nature of the approach.
  + These videos, in my opinion, were not cheap to produce.  They appear to have been expertly scripted and edited.
    - Each video involved the commitment of at least two people (1 speaker/ 1 “AV-tech” person), probably more, in its production, plus I suspect the use of a professional studio and professional filming equipment.
    - I doubt these videos were done in an ad hoc fashion in someone’s office using a web-cam installed in their laptop.
* Note that there is very little use of text-based learning materials in MOOC’s.
  + The orientation is primarily towards visual/aural learning, two of the most powerful teaching methods which can be used to reach Learners.
* MOOC’s are expensive to mount properly:
  + For the two I am attending, each provides a *minimum* of 120 minutes/week x 10 weeks =1200 minutes of video, professionally produced.
    - To produce 1200 minutes required, by my guess, 3x to 5x that amount of time for planning, preparation, writing, editing, rewriting and filming and film editing.
    - That's 3600 - 6000 minutes (60 - 100 hours) of commitment by several professionals just to create the content.
      * Assume $50 per hour, that’s a cost of $3,000 to $5,000 to create the materials.
  + Now comes the delivery of the MOOC.
    - Further to my previous comment that MOOC’s are NOT FREE, here is quote from an email from the Instructor for the Finance MOOC I am attending:

*Dear Carol Edwards,*

*The first week of the course is over. It has been an exciting and hectic experience for all of us. Nate and Tim have been monitoring the forums, posting various updates, clarifying how the assignments and grading process work, how to download various resources, etc. Taylor is busy creating new and interesting assessments and Lauren, Nate, and I are evaluating the assignments repeatedly to make sure they are relevant and make sense. And, of course, the Coursera team is vigilant and*

*managing multiple courses*.

* + Let’s see: There’s the Instructor, Nate, Tim, Taylor and Lauren … that’s 5 people from a single University running *one* MOOC. PLUS there is the Coursera team – who knows how many people that would be – my best guess would be between 10 and 25 operations people for a start-up with the level of funding I have been able to ascertain that they have received.
  + So, the delivery of this *one* MOOC requires the ONGOING time of between 15 and 30 people, for a minimum of 10 weeks, but I suspect 14 weeks (2 weeks before/after to open and close it).
  + Now, granted, they are not working full-time on this one MOOC, but let’s put an average of 2 hours per week (and I think that is way too low) per person … so between 2 hours/wk x 10 weeks x 15 people = 300 hours and 2 hours/wk x 14 weeks x 30 people = 840 hours to deliver *one* MOOC.
  + Apply an average salary of $50/hour and this MOOC cost, using conservative assumptions, between $15,000 and $42,000 to run, JUST in man-hours alone. There would be other costs, but we will ignore them as probably being nominal.
* **Total costs to create the materials and run a *single* MOOC:**
  + **Between $15,000 and $50,000.**
    - The costs would be at the high end for the first run-through.
    - Costs would then drop-down for subsequent offerings of the same MOOC, but since the majority of the costs are for actual delivery, the cost savings would not be that great on repeat courses.
  + Anyone want to bet that we at BCIT could use those resources far better to develop and deliver its traditional live/online courses?
* **Comment 1:** As noted above, MOOC’s are NOT free to the Institutions/Instructors creating them.
  + - There are significant creation and maintenance/operation costs associated with them.

## Convenience for the Learner *currently* at *no* *dollar* cost.

* Learners may:
  + Log-on anytime, from anywhere.
  + View the information for as long as they want.
  + View the information as often as they want.
  + Choose how they want the information delivered:
    - All at once.
    - In chunks (pause and then restart or access the video at any point on the timeline and play however much of it they want, rewind and re-view, etc.).
* Learners get access to videos which appear to be professionally made, using high quality studio equipment, inside a professional studio, with professional editing.
* Learners get many of the advantages of an online learning delivery system, with *currently* no dollar costs.
* **Comment 1: That having been said, judging from the number of desperate posts on the forums from people seeking assistance with the subject matter, and with the assignments (from understanding what exactly they have to do, to how to do it, to how to submit it), there are serious problems with the content.** 
  + - **As described below, supplying Content is not synonymous with generating Learning.**
    - **For people who speak English as a second language, despite the existence of online translation programs, there appear to be serious problems translating complex concepts.**

# CONCERNS

## Poor business model – the economics are *not* there.

* It should be noted that many of the advantages cited in the previous section for MOOC’s are economic, and largely involve reducing the cost of MOOC production and delivery to the firms providing them.
  + These cost advantages are also *temporary*:
    - They exist *only* because Institutions/Instructors have been willing to donate generously of their time, expertise and resources without compensation.
    - Once Institutions/Instructors come to expect to be compensated for their contributions, costs for firms providing MOOC’s are going to soar.
    - They will need a revenue generating model if they are to survive.
  + Problem:
    - Costs for MOOC’s are 100% certain, fairly large, and front-end loaded.
    - A revenue generating model has not yet been successfully demonstrated.
      * Revenues, *if any*, are highly uncertain, are potentially small, and back-end loaded.
* ***Revenue Generatin Plan #1*: Charge Learners for a *generic* certificate *if* they want it, after completion of the MOOC.**
  + **Why generic?**
    - **Because institutions like Harvard, MIT and Stanford are currently *not* comfortable putting their names on the certificate. (I suspect because of some of the problems described below.)**
      * ***That reticence all by itself should be a red flag to anyone pondering the attractiveness of MOOC’s as educational tools*.**
  + Under Plan #1, certificate charges would be nominal – most plans call for under $100 per MOOC completed.
    - Why so low?
      * If you do a Harvard, for example, MOOC, the certificate of completion does *not* state it is from Harvard.
      * Instead Learners would get a generic certificate *not* an Ivy League name-brand one.
      * This is not an attractive “sell”, even at under $100, given the discipline, the time commitment, and the amount of work one must do to *legitimately* complete the current MOOC’s.
        + If a Learner is expected to commit to say Harvards’ standards for completing a course, they can be reasonably expected to want to receive a Harvard certificate, not a generic one.
  + **From the literature, it can be stated that though many Learners start a MOOC, probably because of the learner problems described below, only an extremely small proportion successfully complete them.**
    - In the case of the Stanford AI MOOC, only 1/8th (12.5%) of the applicants completed.
    - Though there seem to be very few official statistics published, based on my experiences in these two MOOC’s, and my expertise as an Instructor, I’d venture that for the current MOOC’s the success rate is significantly less than 12.5% of those who enroll.
    - I have seen numbers as low as 5% for the percentage of enrollees who complete a MOOC.
      * Coursera recently reported 1 million enrollees in its MOOC’s.
      * Let’s do the math:
        + 1 million enrollees x5% to x12.5%= 50,000 to 125,000 complete.
        + Assuming 25% are willing to buy a generic certificate at $100 per certificate, then the revenues generated would be $1.25 m to $3.125 m.
        + With over 100 MOOC’s offered by Coursera, that works out to revenues of under $10,000 to a maximum of $30,000 per course.
        + However, I estimate above the *true* cost of one of these MOOC’s to be $15,000 to $50,000.
        + In other words, if firms like Coursera had to pay the full-freight for their MOOC’s, instead of having them donated for free, they would be probably be operating at a loss if they used Plan #1 as their revenue model.
* **In my professional opinion, PLAN #1 will fail.**
  + **With a small number of Learners completing, and an even smaller number prepared to pay for a generic certificate, combined with only being able to charge a nominal amount for such a certificate, revenues will be inadequate to cover the true costs of MOOCs.**
* Alternate plans are being investigated, such as providing potential employers with access to the names of Learners in their area who have taken the MOOC’s associated with the skills they are looking for.
  + POP concerns will have to be addressed for this plan to be successful.
  + In addition, because of the difficulties associated with marking enormous numbers of hand-ins, the grading on MOOC’s is often pass/fail
    - This is not attractive to Learners who like to see where they rank. However, it will probably be even less attractive to employers.
      * Yes this Learner completed a MOOC, but at the bottom of the class or at the top?
  + **Finally, and even more importantly, how does an employer KNOW that the person who received the certificate for completing the MOOC is actually the person who did the work?**
    - **Validating Learner identity remains one of the major problems with MOOC’s.**
* Other revenue plans have been considered.
  + But it is unknown if any of plans proposed will generate sufficient revenues to cover the significant costs of producing, operating and delivering MOOC’s.
* **Comment 1: MOOCs … the economics just is not there … and if the economics is not there, then I am willing to bet that MOOCs will not stand the test of time – *they are losers as a business model*.** 
  + - This means that:
      * Institutions/Instructors ought to rapidly come to their senses and realize *donating* these courses to firms like Coursera does not make economic sense.
      * The private sector firms offering MOOC’s, once faced with the *true* costs of producing quality MOOC’s will be bankrupted, or choose a different course delivery method, within 3 years.
      * This does not mean that MOOC’s will go extinct.
        + I predict that EdX (Harvard/MIT collaboration), and similar operations existing wholly within the walls of an academic institution(s), will use MOOC’s as a valuable branding exercise.

With their large endowment funds, and huge skilled labour base, these top tier educational institutions can use MOOC’s as *loss leaders* to establish global branding.

MOOC’s can be used to attract into traditional live/online courses large numbers of Learners who are interested in getting a certificate with an Ivy League name on it, rather than the generic certificate currently issued for successful completion of a MOOC.

In effect, MOOC’s will become a subsidized product which will allow Learners to get a “free taste” of the quality of the professors and courses on offer.

## You can supply Content without generating Learning.

* The content (videos) on both the MOOC’s I am doing is impressive.
* **That having been said, the learning experience in my MOOC’s is dismal.**
  + **I would compare it being a fois gras goose – having a large funnel filled with huge amounts of information stuffed down your throat.**
  + My sense of the two MOOC’s I am doing is that there is a lack of engagement between the Instructor and the Learners and between the Learners and the materials.
  + Taking these MOOC’s consists almost entirely of watching a ton of videos, in a traditional lecture format, with absolutely no personalized attention or assistance.
  + In the two I am in, there is no interactivity.
    - When a Learner pauses the videos, nothing happens – they are not asked any questions. There is no feedback on performance as Learners work through the videos, and despite their claims to the contrary, no ongoing performance data is being collected in these courses by Coursera and then being used to improve the experience for future Learners or to provide feedback to existing Learners.
  + Based on my experiences with the forums and the assessments, the engagement between the Learners and their peers is not the best either.
* **Though we will probably never see the official figures published, I posit that the drop-out rate from the two MOOC’s I am enrolled in will be extremely high because of the high level of discipline and time commitment needed, the significant amount of work required to *legitimately* complete the course-work, and the dispiriting lack of any kind of personalized assistance or direction.**
  + **In my professional opinion as an educator, I would suggest the 5% success rates I have seen in a number of articles may even be too high.**
    - I would note that firms like Coursera do not seem to publish their failure rates, though Coursera did recently issue a press release saying it had over 1 million Learners enrolled in over 100 courses.
      * **To admit the true failure rate on MOOC’s would discourage potential Learners and reveal the weakness of the business model being proposed.**
  + **Finally if a traditional live course/online course at BCIT delivered such extremely dismal Learner performance, someone would be fired!**

## No *dollar* cost to Learners, but MOOC’s are not free for them either.

* *Currently*, there are *no* *upfront* *dollar* costs to Learners of attending a MOOC.
  + However, to *legitimately* complete a MOOC, Learners must be extremely disciplined, putting in significant time and energy to view the videos, to prepare for and to complete the assignments, and to write any tests/quizzes/exams.
* **For Learners there is a huge non-dollar opportunity cost to attending a MOOC.**

## Poor definition of a “peer” with resulting negative consequences.

* In MOOC parlance a “peer” is someone you must rely on to assist you to learn, since the Instructor (and any assistants) will be inaccessible in any MOOC you register in.
* Who is a peer?
  + For a firm like Coursera, the definition of a “peer” is *anyone* logged into their website as a fellow Learner in any MOOC you are completing.
* **Registering for a MOOC, and logging on to a website, though it may make a person a “peer” in terms of being a “colleague”, does not confer skills as a “peer *tutor*”, which is what you want, if people are to learn from each other.**
* As I saw on both MOOC’s I am enrolled in, my “peers”:
  + Could be illiterate/innumerate.
  + Could be completely ignorant of the subject matter and incapable of learning it.
  + Could have weak communication skills.
  + Could have poor teaching skills.
  + Could be malicious.
  + Could be stupid.
* If a Learner needs peer assistance, how do they determine who is reliable on the forums?
  + If a Learner is ignorant of the subject matter, or is an ESL Learner, or has a disability, how do they find people they can trust for intelligent direction?
    - How does a Learner separate the people who can validly guide them from those who are as lost as they are, but have no problem posting their stream of consciousness?
* Peer tutoring only works if the peers a Learner turns to for advice have worthwhile knowledge to impart *and* know how to communicate that knowledge effectively.
  + **We do not let *just* *anyone* be a peer tutor at BCIT!**
    - They have to have demonstrated skills:
      * As well as providing an Instructor recommendation, they must “*have achieved superior grades in their previous terms and … understand the pressures and challenges of being a BCIT Learner*”.
    - I believe our peer tutors also get training in *how to* effectively tutor a fellow Learner, plus oversight from a professional, at the BCIT Learning Commons.
  + **However, absolutely anyone, with NO oversight, can be a peer tutor for a firm like Coursera!**
* A second issue arising on the peer front, is the following: What if a Learner does manage to determine that say Vickie and Tom, who have contributed to the forum, are knowledgeable and reliable peers, how does the Learner now ask them for assistance?
  + Learners cannot email / contact fellow Learners on the forums.
  + There is no way to directly question them, or to ask for assistance or support.
  + Learners with questions/problems have to hope that a reliable peer posts something relevant to them on a topic that they are interested in.
  + Learners could post a request to Vickie and Tom asking for them to post again, perhaps on a particular topic, but there is no guarantee they will read the post, or if they do, that they will reply.
  + Learners could also set-up a discussion group outside the website and invite others to join, but there is no guarantee that Vickie and/or Tom will join the group.
* Then there is the problem of “Anonymous”.
  + Large numbers of people on the forums choose to post anonymously – so many that it was a subject of complaint on one of the forums.
  + Such a large number of posts under the name Anonymous makes it extremely difficult to separate the intelligent / useful peers from the ignorant / useless ones.

## No assistance from professionals, meaning Learners must rely on “peers” of questionable ability. Combine this with the fact that the s**heer quantity of information on the Forums is overwhelming, often of poor quality, and with limited search capacity, and the result is disastrous.**

* Instructors tell Learners right-up front not to contact them, or their teaching assistants, that they will not respond.
  + There is no personalized attention from a professional.
* Instead, Learners are told that they MUST rely on their “peers” for assistance.
* Key Learner problem: How do you separate the wheat from the chafe if you do not know the subject matter?
* **After completing Unit 1, there were 62 pages of comments in the SF & Fantasy MOOC and 59 pages of comments for the Finance MOOC.**
  + Thus by the end of Unit 10, there could be over 600 pages of comments, not easily searched, arranged basically in a linear column.
  + **The sheer quantity of information is intimidating!**
  + **The quality of the information provided is on average quite low.**
* **Try reading ALL of those comments … now, try determining what is relevant / irrelevant, what is high quality / low quality, what is valuable / useless.**
* **It is a huge waste of time and energy to deal with the forums**:
  + Many Learners posted absolutely idiotic recommendations / comments.
  + A few Learners were rude, inconsiderate and obnoxious.
  + Some Learners posted what I believe were *deliberately* *misleading* recommendations/comments.
    - People are people, and there are always a few who are malicious and/or so highly competitive they need to sabotage others.
  + Many Learners were ESL, or functionally illiterate, which made reading / understanding their comments a nightmare.
    - This problem worked in both directions – judging from the number of desperate pleas in broken English, many of these Learners found it difficult not only to post, but also to access, quality help on the forums.
* Search functionality is very primitive, restricting the ability to find information.
  + Learners have to know a “key” word in the existing materials.
    - What if the Learner is searching on the key word “dog”, but the post they want contains the word “canine”?
    - What if a Learner doesn’t know the “key” word because they are not familiar with the subject matter?
    - What if a Learner’s English skills are weak?
  + Language barriers are a huge complaint on the forums, despite the existence of translation software on the web.
* I posted comments on each of the two MOOCs, and found it hard to find them again.
  + The forums use a linear layout, fixed, with limited headings and search capability.
  + A Learner cannot organize the information in the way they want it unless they copy and paste to another document.
* **Comment 1: The forums were a dissatisfying, time-consuming and frustrating experience. I would posit that they are probably one of the reasons why the drop-out rate for MOOC’s is so high.**

## Idiotic, rude, misleading and small-minded posts.

* Here are two posts, one from each forum in the two MOOC’s I did:
  + “However there is no excuse for the level of rudeness and one has to say, pretention that we see on these forums.”
  + “My son is a university math professor. He has taught online courses. The level of discourse on this site is the norm. The university noted this problem and changed the format to hybrid courses, where Learners meet face to face for some sessions. This has helped with the problem.”

## Grading insanity (Finance MOOC): A **computer cannot provide the professional feedback of a person.**

* The Finance MOOC is marked by a computer.
  + Learners do not submit their calculations -- they submit ONLY the answer.
    - Learners type a single number into a text box or choose from options **A** through **D** (4 option multiple choice).
      * Superior learners could successfully *guess* the answer for the multiple choice if they did a few quick calculations and narrowed it down to 1 of 2 close numeric options.
  + **No feedback is provided as to why the Learner got the wrong answer or how to improve their methods even if they got the correct answer.**
  + No part marks are provided for complex calculations.
    - Some of these calculations were extremely complex, but the only part of the work that Learners get credit for is the answer.
    - A computer cannot mark “input” calculations.
      * It cannot assess them or provide feedback or recommendations.
      * Many Learners complained on the forum about this.
        + No feedback for incorrect answers.
        + Or, they may have gotten the right answer, but did not understand why it was correct, or if they had done a ton of calculations, how to shorten the process to get to the answer more efficiently.

## Grading insanity (SF & Fantasy MOOC): H**ow does one competently mark an essay if one speaks English as a second language, or is functionally illiterate, and/or one doesn’t have a clue about education, intelligent marking, or the materials being marked?**

* **The SF & Fantasy MOOC uses an even more questionable method of marking.**
* **4 of your “peers” examine your essay and then provide a mark** based on the following criteria:
* **Please grade the FORM of the essay you have just read on a scale of 1 to 3. FORM here refers to matters of grammar, usage, and structure.** Are the sentences grammatically correct? Are the words properly used? Is the exposition and argument laid out clearly? An ideal response would note one aspect of Form that the writer does well and would profit by continuing and one aspect of Form that the writer would profit by improving in ways you make clear.
* Since everyone can learn to write better, at least 10% but no more than 30% of the grades should be 1. Everyone should strive for perfect grammar. However, if someone writes in ways that are particularly vivid or uses particularly incisive key terms to focus the argument or in some other way is outstanding in usage or structure, that essay should be awarded a 3 but no more than 20% of the grades should be a 3 because, by definition, "outstanding" is comparatively rare. Most grades should be 2.
* **Please indicate in 30-150 words your judgment of the CONTENT of the essay you have just read. CONTENT here refers to matters of insight, argument, and example.** Does the essay show a deep understanding of some aspect of the work or of a pattern that one can see in the work? Does the argument make sense, feel persuasive, and reveal the significance of the insight or insights? Are there concrete details from the text that support the argument and that we come to understand more powerfully because of the argument? An ideal response would note one aspect of Content that the writer does well and would profit by continuing and one aspect of Content that the writer would profit by improving in ways you make clear.
* With such a crude grading system (1, 2 or 3), how do you mark someone who speaks English as a second language (or is functionally illiterate), has failed to express themselves well, yet has obviously tried very hard or actually has a very intelligent and incisive insight into the reading?
* Conversely, what about an erudite Learner, with high level English skills, who posts a sophisticated load of nonsense?
  + How does someone with no training catch this?
* The marking scheme calls for between 1/10th and 1/3rd of 4 essays to receive a “1” and 1/5th of the four essays to receive a 3.
  + Try implementing that schema when marking only 4 essays.
    - In my opinion, Coursera would need to use 10 essays to have any hope of effectively implementing this scheme when dealing with the average human being, who is largely innumerate.
    - Since Learners cannot handle the math, really don’t have a clue how to mark what they are reading, and have been told by the Professor to hand-out 2’s, you can actually predict they will just default to the lazy setting and giving a 2, even for the very worst and best essays.
      * Then, as pointed out below, these assessors look for “critical” and “negative” things to say about the essay they are reviewing in order to justify the mark.
* Here are the results from the 1st and 2nd assignments (as per Coursera emails):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Grade** | **Percentage everyone gave out** | **Target range** |
| Form | 1 | 22.5% | 10% - 30% |
|  | 2 | 65.1% |  |
|  | 3 | 12.4% | 0% - 20% |
| Content | 1 | 24.5% | 10% - 30% |
|  | 2 | 62.0% |  |
|  | 3 | 13.5% | 0% - 20% |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Grade** | **Percentage everyone gave out** | **Target range** |
| Form | 1 | 21.6% | 10% - 30% |
|  | 2 | 65.5% |  |
|  | 3 | 12.9% | 0% - 20% |
| Content | 1 | 23.1% | 10% - 30% |
|  | 2 | 61.8% |  |
|  | 3 | 15.1% | 0% - 20% |

* Skewed marking ***must be*** the result of this system.
  + As can be seen above, assessors are indeed defaulting to the option dictated by the Professor.
  + There are no part marks – no range from 0 – 3.
    - 1, 2 or 3 is too crude a tool for marking.
    - The computer will not accept a zero.
      * One of the essays I assessed had the words: “Just testing the system” as the answer.
      * I had to give this essay a “2” because the lowest mark you could provide in each section is a “1”
* **Comments provided for my essay were extremely short, poorly written (ranging from barely to completely illiterate), off-base, and largely idiotic**.   
  For example:
  + I learned that in an *academic* essay one *may* *not* use bullet points, short sentences, quotes or citations (!!).
  + I was told that all paragraphs must always have 3 to 5 sentences in them.
  + I was informed that “*the quotation*” I used needed improvement.
    - No further details were provided. Since I used two quotes, as a “Learner” I am now confused as I am not certain which one needed improvement, and since both were bang-on the topic, I am uncertain how my assessor expected me to improve them.
  + I was told that I had failed to provide a thesis statement (though that was in the first two sentences), and that my argument was unclear.
  + I was informed that in an essay limited to 320 words to define an entire book, I had over-simplified because I focussed on one critical aspect of the book, *though this exact approach* to analysing the materials *was* *recommended* in one of the emails from the Instructor:

“*Some Learners have asked if it is necessary to write the Grimm essay on one tale, multiple tales, or the entire book. If you feel that you can fulfill the requirements of the essay (to enrich the reading of an intelligent and attentive fellow participant in the class) using only one tale, that is perfectly fine. You may also use several tales in your essay to fulfill the requirement. For example, if you happen to find a pattern in several the tales, you may want to address that. Although you are welcome to write on the entire book, given the variation that occurs between the tales, it may be difficult to write on them all. The choice is yours!*”

* + I was told that I could *not* talk about the stories in the context of the current time, though this was a *requirement* of the assignment as outlined by the Instructor himself in his videos: “*Explain why these tales have stood the test of time*.” (Indeed, it was a requirement based merely on the title of the MOOC: *Fantasy and Science Fiction: The Human Mind, Our Modern World*.)
  + I was told by one assessor that these stories did not teach children about moral behaviour, though that is one of the key reasons why they were created. Then this same assessor ends the assessment by saying that my “incorrect” analysis is “mitigated” because some of these stories do “caution against wicked behaviour”.
  + I was told that I was “*confusing of* (sic) *history and fiction*” because I provided some historical context for the stories. Conversely, I was told by a different assessor that my writing lacked context.
  + I was told that in a course on Science Fiction and Fantasy I could not talk about fantasy(!!).
  + I was told that my English was weak, my writing was disjointed, and that it was difficult to follow my argument.
* Wow … talk about doing a crap job (indeed I was astonished at how negative the assessments were) … and then the markers gave me an average of 2/3 on each of the Form and Content sections – **in other words, the assessors defaulted to the recommended mark and then nit-picked me to death to justify their choice.**
* **Comment 1:** **In my opinion, we have a complete failure of the peer assessment marking schema.** 
  + - **I cannot see any way to fix it.**
    - The 4 peer assessments done on my SF/Fantasy MOOC appear to have been written by people who didn’t have a clue about education, about how to intelligently mark an essay, or about the materials being marked.
    - If I were to summarize in one word their “interpretation” of marking it would be “negativity”.
      * **Instead of considering what the writer did correctly, assessors hand-out the recommended “2” and then focus obsessively on what *they* *THINK* the writer did wrong. They confuse marking with fault-finding, with unalloyed (and uninformed) criticism, and with pulling someone’s work down, rather than trying to build the person up.**
    - **In my opinion, the use of *peer assessments is an absolute garbage way of assessing performance* since it employs people who may have poor English/analytical skills, and who know little or nothing about a subject, little or nothing about teaching, and little or nothing about marking, to do the work of a trained professional.**
    - This is true despite the Coursera’s claim that it teaches Learners how to mark each other (<https://www.coursera.org/about/pedagogy>).
      * I watched the marking advice on video for this MOOC and found it pretty close to useless in training how to mark.
        + That point is proved by the low quality of the assessments provided.
    - Next, for future reference for firms like Coursera, 4 assessments does *not* constitute “crowd-sourcing”, which it claims as the intellectual basis for this marking schema (<https://www.coursera.org/about/pedagogy>).
      * There may be value in crowd-sourcing, but I suspect you actually have to have a crowd to do it.
      * I also suspect that for crowd-sourcing to be effective the crowd must have some insight into the topic being sourced.
        + For example, asking 10,000 average people to provide the trajectory information for a rocket to land on the moon probably wouldn’t provide a reliable answer.
        + Asking them to tell you whether Coke or Pepsi is the more popular beverage probably would provide a reliable answer.
    - *Crowd-sourcing* is another one of these au courant, and ohhhh so sexy words now being tossed around as “the” solution to absolutely everything, when my experience tells me that its uses are limited and in a case like this, where highly specialized knowledge is necessary, that it has no validity at all.
* **Comment 2: Marking is an art-form which must be learned, especially if one is to provide intelligent direction on how to improve performance.** 
  + - Given the stupidity, lack of consideration, and obtuseness of the comments I received from my fellow graders, I can only begin to imagine the cruelty of some of the comments, the callousness, the idiocy, how deflating and uninspiring and un-encouraging they would be, particularly to someone very new to the subject matter, or with a disability, or with poor English skills.
      * The peer assessments are described on the forum as: “insults, cruel remarks and nothing but trolling” and “offbase comments”.
    - No wonder the drop-out rate is so high in these MOOCs!
* **Comment 3**: No comparison is provided for assessing performance.
  + - Very little information is available on performance.
      * For the Finance MOOC, it appears that nothing is provided – no stats on average performance, range of performance or high/low mark.
      * For the SF & Finance MOOC, a chart is provided (see above) after each assignment which allows Learners to see that approximately 65% of their peers handed-out “2” for Form and a “2” for Content.
        + In other words, as could be reliably predicted, people are defaulting to the Professor’s recommended assessment.
        + The charts provided above, in my professional opinion, are designed to put peer pressure on those who do not conform to the recommended assessment to “get into line”.

I have no doubt that by the end of this MOOC the essays will have all come in, regardless of their quality, quite robotically within the conditions set by the Professor.

I do not feel that such a pre-defined set of results for marks on essays may be truly called marking.

* + - * Again, for the future reference of firms like Coursera, it is highly unlikely that “crowd-sourcing” will be an effective source of reliable information if you have a “known expert” tell the crowd the result you want *before* you ask the question.
    - Lack of information about the MOOC means it is difficult for all parties involved to make informed decisions.
      * A critical question for Institutions/Instructors donating so much of their time and other resources would be, “Is it really worth it?”
        + Are Institutions/Instructors getting the data they need to answer this important question?
        + In my professional opinion as a business person, the answer is, “No.”
      * A critical question for Learners would be how many people got discouraged by the assessment they received and/or by the workload and have dropped out?
        + If a Learner knew that say 1/5th of the people in a MOOC dropped-out after the first assessment that might affect future decisions about that course.
        + Likewise, if a Learner were to make it through the course, a high drop-out rate might affect a potential employer’s opinion of them (staying-power, determination and discipline evidenced).
  + This lack of information is rectifiable, but I suspect Coursera, *if it is even collecting this information* [[2]](#footnote-2), is holding-it proprietary because they are considering selling the results of their MOOC’s to potential employers.
* **Comment 4: A course which involves sophisticated content requiring depth of knowledge, cannot easily be assessed, except by a professional.  And unfortunately, with so many Learners enrolled, professional assessment is not feasible in a MOOC, thus assessment *must be* left to amateurs.**
  + - As I predicted, it is entirely possible to pass the SF & Fantasy MOOC with little or no work – I got the default mark (4/6) even though I did not read the assigned materials.
      * **Because marking is being done by Learners not trained in this area of expertise, or in how to properly assess a complex written work, this type of MOOC can be easily passed without actually doing the substantive work assigned.**
        + **Google a few things, use a few buzz words from the Instructor’s lecture, and you’ll sail through because the markers do not know the topic deeply enough to distinguish *real* comment from *really nicely faked* comment.**
      * The failure of amateurs to capture “baloney” essays based on sophisticated googling and “faking it” brilliantly is another major concern for MOOCs using “peer assessments”.
        + I’m not the only MOOC participant to figure out you don’t have to do the assigned work to pass this type of course. On my 3rd assignment for this MOOC, I deliberately handed-in a failing essay. One of my assessors gave me the following advice: “*I could have written most of the essays I've read on here without ever picking up the texts. Still, better luck next week*.”
      * But these are not the only tools for passing the MOOC without doing the work:
        + In the forums, Learners in this MOOC provided direction in the form of comments which constituted almost complete essays (nearly 320 words) and for the Finance MOOC, calculations were uploaded, including in some cases a numeric answer.
        + Learners also directed their fellows to articles and websites, such as Sparks Notes, which provide summaries and analysis of the materials being studied.

Several comments blatantly stated why bother with the readings if you are short of time – just short-cut the work.

* **Comment 5**: Faking the answer would not be possible for the Finance MOOC, which is a straight numbers course, marked by a machine.
  + - A number provided in a calculation is either right or wrong and a machine can objectively mark it.
      * That having been said, we come back to the question of validating the identity of the person submitting the work.
        + It would be relatively easy for a Learner in the Finance MOOC to get someone else to do the work for them.
        + However the same would also be true for the SF & Fantasy MOOC – why read a book and write an essay, when someone else could do it for you?

## Who is that Learner – cheating and the validity of performance.

* People in the Finance MOOC were posting the answers to the questions on the forum and offering access to Excel spreadsheets with the problems already solved.
* Interesting question for this type of computer-graded MOOC: If 60,000 Learners chose option D on the multiple choice, or put the number 5.5 into a text box, how would the computer know if they each did the work individually or if 59,999 people merely copied one person’s answer?
  + Because the work is not handed-in, just the numeric answer, it is impossible to identify how a Learner got the answer they did.
  + However, even if the work were submitted, with hundreds of thousands of calculations from tens of thousands of Learners, how would even a computer be able to identify what was original work and what was copied from someone else?
* The same concern can also be raised for the SF & Finance MOOC, where people were posting on the forum almost complete essays (320 words) with their take on the materials being studied and recommending websites with analyses of the materials being studied.
* I have not done the exam for either MOOC, but how would that be administered in a secure fashion?
* This is addressed in a recent article about one of the Coursera MOOC’s I am enrolled in:
  + <http://chronicle.com/article/Dozens-of-Plagiarism-Incidents/133697>
    - The title words “Dozens of Plagiarism Incidents” *severely* *underestimates* *the magnitude of the problem of cheating* in my professional opinion as an educator.
* **One of the key concerns with respect to MOOC’s must be validating the identity of the person submitting the work.**
  + **It would be relatively easy for a Learner to get someone else to do the work for them, by relying for free on materials widely available online and in libraries, or on the work of a friend/family member or by paying someone to do it for them.**
* **With no way to validate the identity of an enrollee, or the source of their work, in my professional opinion as an educator, cheating on MOOC’s is far more of a problem than it would be in a traditional or regular online course.**
* **As a consequence, all that firms like Coursera can currently say is that “someone” actually made it through all the units of a MOOC, though “we are not entirely sure who that ‘someone’ is, since we can have no idea if the ‘someone’ we enrolled actually did the assignments, quizzes and/or exams or if it was their friend/family member, for example, or the result of a collaboration of a group of people, or if the Learner was paying another individual to do the work.”**
  + **I suspect this is one of the critical reasons underlying the reluctance of institutions like Harvard and Stanford to put their name on the certificate earned from the completion of a MOOC associated with them or their Instructors.**

## No appeal process for errors in questions/marking.

* If a Learner does not agree with how the computer/a Peer graded their work, there is no appeal.
* This is frustrating and irritating if you have a valid question or complaint about the marking process.

## Marking is not useful to either the Instructor or Learner.

* For the Instructor, regardless of which kind of MOOC they are delivering, there is *very little* learning possible from the way questions were approached by the Learners.
  + I always go back over all of my assignments, exams and quizzes to see how the Learners fared and what I could do to improve my assessment/teaching skills.
    - This would be impossible in the MOOC’s I am enrolled in:
      * For the Fantasy and SF MOOC, who is going to read thousands of pages of essays?
      * For the Finance MOOC, the *only* info the Instructor has access to is the answer, usually a single number data point. There is no way to see how the Learner got the answer, where they did poor/inefficient work, or what could be done to improve their skills.
    - **Despite Coursera’s repeated claims that they are data collectors and analysers *par excellence*, there is no way for them (or any other firm, from what I can see), in either of these kinds of MOOC’s, to generate the type of *detailed* information *absolutely* *essential* to an Instructor if they are to understand the mistakes Learners are making and how to improve their performance.**
      * **In other words, MOOC’s are *NOT* *about quality of output* (properly educated and informed Learners), *but the quantity of output* (number of people who can be processed through a MOOC to the point where they will provide their credit card and generate some revenues).**
* Conversely, for the Learner there is no discussion about the mark with a professional and no opportunity to learn what they could improve / do better
  + Learning opportunities from the assignments are extremely limited for them.
    - If you pass, you don’t learn how to do it better. If you fail, you have no place but the forum to turn for assistance, but whom can you rely on for advice about where you went wrong and how to correct it?

## The homework in neither MOOC was particularly useful.

* In the SF & Fantasy MOOC Learners were expected to produce a 320 word analysis of a book (or books).
  + 320 words is a joke – less than 1 page to comment intelligently on an entire book!
    - People were extremely frustrated with the restriction which was considered far too small. However, to assign a *real* essay, say one with 5 or more pages of analysis, would make it impossible to use the peer assessment method of marking them.
      * How do you ask busy people, unfamiliar with marking, to intelligently mark and comment on 4 essays of that length.
        + Very obviously it is not going to happen.
  + However, even with an extremely short essay format, in my expert opinion so-called “peer assessments” provide Learners with *absolutely* no professional insight, direction or feedback.
    - If my peer assessments were reflective of the average quality, then the value of the feedback provided to Learners is extremely low to nil (or even negative, if the feedback were abusive or demeaning).
* In the Finance MOOC, a Learner gets a computer generated mark for a one number submission to each of the questions in the assignment.
  + Learner calculations were not assessed, their mistakes were not pointed out to them, and they were not shown how to improve their analysis.

## The qualification is of questionable value.

* Learners earn a piece of paper probably marked pass/fail.
* It is generic – there is no educational institution validating it or standing behind it.
* As per above, there is no way of certifying the validity of performance – that is, that the person who enrolled in the MOOC is actually the person who completed the assigned work.

## Questions about accommodating learning disabilities and other issues.

* A number of Learners left posts saying they had learning disabilities and that they would have to drop the MOOC’s because they could not handle the workload in the allotted time frame.
  + **Given the huge numbers of Learners, and the need for quick, cheap and simple processing of enrollees, disabilities would be nearly impossible to accommodate in any kind of MOOC.**
    - How do you determine the validity of a claim for a disability?
    - How do you handle a doctor’s certificate and determine its validity?
    - How do you determine the appropriate level of accommodation?
    - If you could determine the appropriate level of accommodation (say extra time to hand-in the work) how could you deliver it cost effectively and maintain the validity of the marking process?
* **Similar problems exist for people with irresolvable work/life balance issues, including injuries, sick or dying family members, etc.** 
  + Multiple posts on the forums discussed how difficult this was if one had a job, or a family, or a crisis.
  + No wonder the drop-out rate is so high for MOOC’s.

## Workload issues.

* The workload is extremely heavy for a voluntary course, with a generic certificate, and requiring a huge amount of discipline, time commitment, and a significant amount of work to *legitimately* complete a MOOC.
  + For my MOOC’s, there is a minimum of 2 hours of video per week to watch.
  + In addition:
    - In the SF & Fantasy MOOC, Learners must read a book per week.
    - In the Finance MOOC, Learners are advised to read a chapter per week in a Finance text.
  + On top of all that, Learners must take notes on what they see/read, perhaps watch the forum for intelligent and helpful posts, and complete assignments / quizzes / exams / essays.
    - It takes significant time to write an essay / calculate answers.
  + In the SF & Fantasy MOOC, in addition to the readings and the essay, Learners have to mark the essays of 4 of their peers.
    - One of the key results of time pressure is that peer assessments provided are superficial, short and largely useless to a Learner.
* **One would reasonably expect such pressures to lead to two things:**
  + **High levels of cheating and short-cutting of the process.**
  + **High dropout rates.**

## Machine cold efficiency, with a false bonhomie, but *absolutely* no humanity, no mercy, no kindness, and no understanding.

* Coursera has perfected the art of radiating chipper, upbeat emails saying how well everyone is doing, how proud they are of their Learners, and what a great course we must all be experiencing! (And this would also be true for Coursera’s competitors – to offer a MOOC is to require bubbly emails if you want to make an economic go of it.)
  + Ditto for the Professors – Learners receive regular hap! hap! happy! missives from them.
* **I found these emails to be alienating and dispiriting in their false bonhomie, their mindless upbeat attitude, with no way to reply and to inform a firm like Coursera, or the Instructor, that perhaps they were off-base.**
* **I found the lack of response by Coursera to certain critical events to be even more depressing.**For example:
  + I found my peer assessments dissatisfying and off-putting, despite the Rah! Rah! email I received from the Professor telling me how successful the process had been because so many of them had been completed and the marking was so close to the results the Professor had dictated.
    - In other words, quantity over quality – “We are an efficient sausage processing machine, pushing out crappy assessments, and delighted to report that if the Professor tells you how high to jump, then you are good little robots and do it. Don’t you just feel terrific about the process, huh?”
  + **As an Instructor who has dealt with Learners in distress due to personal, health, employment and financial issues, I can only begin to imagine how alienating such cheerful emails must be to an individual in sudden crisis.** 
    - **Even more important, there is no *personalized* appeal to firms like Coursera for anything.** 
      * **Your life just collapsed around your ears and all you can get from your “Instructor” is an upbeat *form-email*. Or you can uselessly post your problems to the forum. Or you can cheat/short-cut the process. Or you can drop-out.**
  + **I engineered a sudden drop in my marks in both MOOC’s I am attending. Surprisingly, given how much Coursera touts its “data-driven” format and abilities, this did *not* generate any kind of response from Coursera.** 
    - Even though I engineered the grade drop, nevertheless, I actually found it distressing to be ignored, to have no one notice I was in trouble, even if it was my fault.
    - But, what if the decline wasn’t my fault? What if there had been a family emergency? A death in the family? The illness of a child? A crisis at work?
      * With many tens of thousands of Learners enrolled in each MOOC, such issues must be common, yet I would posit that there is no way in firm like Coursera’s systems to deal with this in a humane, understanding or personalized fashion.
  + There was a “misstep” in the Finance MOOC in which the Professor sent out a tut-tut email blast saying that too many people were “cutting and pasting”, without attribution, information into the forums and the assignments (translation plagiarizing).
    - This generated a fire-storm response from all of those who had felt unjustly accused of a crime.
      * People were justifiably extremely angry and hostile about receiving such an email.
    - I have noticed that there have been no further emails on the topic, though copied materials continue to appear on the forums, and I can assure you, as a long time Instructor, that Learners are cheating on their assignments.
      * Indeed, with no way to validate the identity of a MOOC enrollee, or the source of their work, I am quite willing to posit that cheating on MOOC’s courses is far more of a problem than it would be in a traditional live or regular online course.
    - It should be interesting to see how firms like Coursera deal with the problem of copying work in the future:
      * To tell people not to do it, doesn’t work (ask any Instructor if they have a strongly worded “refrain from copying” stricture in their course syllabus).
      * The aforementioned misstep email states: “*You will be removed from the class if you indulge in such activity and reported to law enforcement*.”
        + But bouncing individual Learners out of a MOOC, either without providing them with a reason, or by accusing them, in writing, of cheating is to invite a lawsuit, particularly as a large percentage of MOOC Learners are currently from the litigious USA.
      * To tell people to stop doing it by blasting out an email to everyone in the course is, as actually occurred, to invite a fully justified backlash.
      * The SF & Fantasy Coursera Assistant avoided the email blast and instead posted the following on the MOOC’s website: “There are two new messages from Professor Rabkin that address the concerns some participants have expressed regarding plagiarism and the course workload. These messages can be found on the forums in the General Discussion sub-forum under "Plagiarism" and "Workload." Thank you for your continued discussions, participation, and patience.”
        + I would note that these postings, besides being nearly useless in the advice and direction provided are marked, “*You do not have permissions to reply to this thread*.”

Translation: “Screw-off! We really don’t want to hear from you.”

* So what is left to firms like Coursera if they wish to continue offering MOOC’s?
  + I suspect they will post warnings on their website, and in MOOC course outlines, but probably be forced to largely ignore all but the most egregious forms of plagiarism, because it is not that easy to catch, and even if the firm catches it, does the firm want to risk having to prove it in Court?
  + However, even if I am wrong, and firms like Coursera were to punish someone for cheating, how would anyone ever know?
    - It’s not as though a MOOC provider can post the names of the people they have caught cheating.
  + Indeed, firms like Coursera do not seem to publish any statistics on cheating in MOOC’s.
    - This is true despite the fact that postings on the forums by Learners, and emails / postings from the Professors, let us KNOW FOR A FACT that there is cheating and plagiarism regularly occurring in the two MOOC’s, I am attending.
    - This is also true despite all of the much vaunted “data analysis and collection” abilities these firms keep telling us is one of the key reasons for having MOOCs.
    - So critical questions about these MOOC providers are:
      * Do they even have the ability to collect this data?
      * If they do, are they collecting this data?
      * If they are collecting it, is there any way to use that information to effectively control the behaviour?
        + That is, that you know an event is occurring due to collected data (e.g. earthquakes), does not mean you can actually control that event.
      * If they are collecting it, where is the reporting on it for the world to assess how serious a problem cheating is in MOOC’s.
        + In my professional opinion, given the structure of these MOOC’s, and that there is no way to validate the Learner or their performance, cheating is far more prevalent on a MOOC than in a traditional live course or a regular online course.

## Effective instruction requires personalized attention.

* Traditional courses are effective because the Learner has access to the Instructor, and even more critical, the Instructor can “see the whites of their eyes” and knows when a point has been absorbed or has gone over their Learners’ heads.
  + Personalized attention means personalized and effective instruction are possible.
* To some extent this is also true with online courses with a limited number of attendees.
  + Email contact with the Instructor and seeing the results of Learner activity/assignments allows insight into performance and the ability to effectively intervene.
* This point is captured brilliantly in the following article (my emphasis): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/opinion/the-trouble-with-online-education.html/?_r=1>

“With every class we teach, we need to learn who the people in front of us are. We need to know where they are intellectually, who they are as people and what we can do to help them grow. ***Teaching, even when you have a group of a hundred Learners on hand, is a matter of dialogue***.

“In the summer Shakespeare course I’m teaching now, I’m constantly working to figure out what my Learners are able to do and how they can develop … ***Every memorable class is a bit like a jazz composition*.** There is the basic melody that you work with. It is defined by the syllabus. But there is also a considerable measure of improvisation against that disciplining background.

“Something similar applies even to larger courses. We tend to think that the spellbinding lecturers we had in college survey classes were gifted actors who could strut and fret 50 amazing minutes on the stage. ***But I think that the best of those lecturers are highly adept at reading their audiences***. They use practical means to do this — tests and quizzes, papers and evaluations. But ***they also deploy something tantamount to artistry. They are superb at sensing the mood of a room. They have a sort of pedagogical sixth sense. They feel it when the class is engaged and when it slips off. And they do something about it. Their every joke is a sounding. It’s a way of discerning who is out there on a given day.***

“ … Online education is a one-size-fits-all endeavor. It tends to be a monologue and not a real dialogue. The Internet teacher, even one who responds to Learners via e-mail, can never have the immediacy of contact that the teacher on the scene can, with his sensitivity to unspoken moods and enthusiasms. ***This is particularly true of online courses for which the lectures are already filmed and in the can.*** [As is true for MOOC’s.]  ***It doesn’t matter who is sitting out there on the Internet watching; the course is what it is.***

“… A truly memorable college class, even a large one, ***is a collaboration between teacher and Learners***. ***It’s a one-time-only event.*** Learning at its best is a collective enterprise, something we’ve known since Socrates. ***You can get knowledge from an Internet course if you’re highly motivated to learn. But in real courses the Learners and teachers come together and create an immediate and vital community of learning. A real course creates intellectual joy*** … Internet learning promises to make intellectual life more sterile and abstract than it already is — and also, for teachers and for Learners alike, far more lonely.”

## The Disposable Learner I: Failure to follow-up and deal with issues.

* **In a traditional course, or a regular online course, at BCIT, if a Learner’s performance went off the edge of a cliff, that decline would be noticed and there would be follow-up and access to personalized assistance.**
  + Depending on the cause, this might mean counselling, Instructor/peer tutoring, working more closely under the supervision of the Instructor, etc.
* What follow-up, if any, would there be if the same thing were to happen in a MOOC?
* To test this, in the second through the fourth assignment for the Finance MOOC, I chose option **A** for every multiple choice question and wrote the number 500 in every text box.
  + Having got 90% on the first assignment, my mark dropped to the 5% to 25% range.
  + **There has been *NO* follow-up from Coursera regarding this dramatic slide in my performance.**
  + Even more interesting, every Learner gets to do each assignment twice to bring their mark up if they do poorly the first time.
    - I did *not* take advantage of this opportunity, something that Coursera’s computers ought to have been programmed to notice.
    - The also ought to have been programmed to send out an automatic email prompting me, one would think, to try the assignments a second time if I would like to increase my marks.
    - Again, I begin to wonder about claims by firms like Coursera to being able to provide a superior education through superior collection of data and enhanced response based on the data generated.
      * If you look above you will see numerous comments about Coursera’s seeming failure to collect relevant and easily collected data, and to then use it to provide appropriate feedback to Learners.
* In the SF & Fantasy MOOC, my mark dropped from 4/6 to 2/6 on my 2nd assignment.
  + No follow-up here, either.
* On Tuesday, August 14th, at 9:49 am, I unenrolled from the Finance MOOC.
  + This action has elicited absolutely no response from Coursera, not even a *form-email* saying, “We’re sorry to see you go.”
    - Even more appropriate, and important from a business success point of view, why haven’t I received a survey trying to ascertain why I dropped-out of the MOOC after completing 4 assignments?
    - Surely this kind of data collection is critical to the success of Coursera, both its educational and business models?
    - Surely this kind of data collection would also be critical to improving the learning experience for future Learners?
* Firms like Coursera claim that one of the “key advantages” of MOOC’s is the ability to collect massive amounts of data on Learner performance and then to use the “big data” generated to improve the educational experience.
  + I am beginning to suspect that to be absolute piffle.
    - The results of my experiments with two MOOC’s suggest that a major MOOC provider like Coursera isn’t collecting as much data as they claim and/or that they haven’t got a clue how to utilize that data and/or they don’t care to use that data (e.g. to assist their Learners /Institutions / Instructors) by publishing it.
    - **In fact, with respect to assisting Learners, I suspect, with so many enrollees, it would be impossible, regardless of the data collected, for a firm like Coursera to provide any kind of quality follow-up when a Learner experiences problems.**
      * **With tens of thousands of people experiencing trouble of some kind every week, firms like Coursera don’t dare open a conversation with any of them – they might reply!!!!**
      * **And then what would the firm do?**
* **So, let’s chalk-up another extremely serious problem with MOOC’s and massive numbers of attendees: THE DISPOSABLE LEARNER.**

## The Disposable Learner II: Extremely high failure and drop-out rate.

* When you have a million Learners enrolled, who cares if several hundred thousand desperate individuals get lost by the side of the road?
* One of our Instructors, Bob Santarossa, provided the following analysis for the original Stanford AI MOOC, based on the figures provided by Mr. Norvig, the Instructor, who went on to found Udacity, a for-profit MOOC firm:
  + About half of the 160,000 Learners watched at least 1 video each week – a 50% success rate (= not very good).
  + Over 20,000 finished all the homework in 50 to 100 hours (a 3 credit course at BCIT runs 3 hrs./week for 15 weeks in Term A = 45 hours...The Law of Diminishing Returns here ardently at work).
  + BTW, 20,000/160,000 = 12.5% success rate.
  + As an academic I would consider myself a failure if this was the classroom result I obtained in any course I taught.
* **As an Instructor at BCIT, I can state with certainty that any individual at BCIT producing such dismal results in a course would be subject to disciplinary action.**

Conclusions – Grade for MOOC’s = “F”

* My assessment based on (1) my professional expertise in business and education, (2) my research and reading, (3) my experiences in attending the two different kinds of MOOC’s, and (4) my experiences with the discussion groups (forums) / assignments associated with those MOOC’s is THUMBS DOWN.
* Based on the Report Card above, it is hard to give MOOC’s anything but a failing grade as an educational product. Their problems/disadvantages far overwhelm the few (and largely temporary) advantages discussed. It is also hard to see them as anything but an economic failure from the perspective of a “for-profit” business model.
* My first call based on the evidence to date that I have amassed:  MOOC’s are a flash-in the pan, a marketing mania induced and shared delirium about how we’re going to change education for the better, drop the cost, and serve the masses … I stand ready to be corrected and to change my mind based on the acquisition of additional evidence, but I suspect my analysis is bang-on.
* My second call: The for-profit ventures, like Coursera and Udacity, will go under – there is very little money to be made here and enormous costs to be swallowed.    
    
  MOOC’s operated by educational institutions, like EdX (Harvard and MIT), will probably survive, not because of the MOOC’s themselves, but because these organizations already offer high-quality online content, can use MOOC’s as a branding exercise, and have a fat source of funding in the form of endowment funds.
  + These institutions do not have to make money off MOOC’s … so MOOC’s can be a “loss-leader” for them. They will also function as a way to say to the world “*Look how au courant we are, how IT advanced, how social media engaged, how sexy … you should consider the MIT/Harvard brand-name if you want a quality post-secondary education*.”

### Based on the Report Card generated above, MOOC’s are a failure, both as an educational product and as a business model.

1. Although I use Coursera as the model for my analysis and recommendations, this is *only* because I signed-up for their MOOC’s. Please note I am NOT picking on Coursera – most of what I say in this report, particularly my criticisms, though the Coursera name may be used, applies *pari passu* to all MOOC’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Given what I have seen to date, Coursera seems to be doing a questionable job of collecting information, despite its claims to being designed for data analysis [↑](#footnote-ref-2)