

**Title:** MOOCs as LIS Professional Development Platforms: Evaluating and Refining SJSU's First Not-for-Credit MOOC

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**Short Abstract:**

In Fall 2013, the SJSU School of Library & Information Science is offering the university's first not-for-credit MOOC, adapting an existing online graduate course for practitioners in the field. This paper will evaluate it, identify exemplary practices, and offer recommendations regarding how to improve the design of future MOOCs as a mechanism for delivering professional development opportunities.

**Extended Abstract:**

**Overview**

This year's conference theme of "educational entrepreneurship" asks us to consider "new ways of doing things" related to emerging practices, technologies, and institutional arrangements in higher education (ALISE, 2013, para. 2). Either on the sideline or on the frontline, LIS administrators and faculty are beginning to address the

potential and pitfalls of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in a spirit of risk taking and environmental scanning of future realities, especially in the broad area of online education. This paper begins a vein of research to empirically address if, in fact, LIS programs can serve new populations of learners in MOOC learning environments. Specifically, the authors' research addresses if MOOCs can be deployed for professional development learning opportunities by studying their own MOOC designed for such purposes.

## **Background**

In Fall 2013, the SJSU School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) will be offering its first open online course, the Hyperlinked Library MOOC. It is adapted from an existing online graduate course offered to SJSU students enrolled in the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program, and is intended to serve as a professional development opportunity for librarians, library staff, and professionals who work in other types of information centers. Unlike SJSU's partnership with Udacity, the SLIS MOOC will be free and will not be offered for academic credit. It will run from September to November, and will explore how libraries are using emerging technologies to serve their communities. The authors will serve as the instructors for the course.

Up to 400 MOOC students will have the opportunity to explore the Hyperlinked Library model through recorded presentations and other content, as well as practical assignments that encourage students to apply what they are learning.

Using a customized version of the open-source blogging software WordPress with BuddyPress, a plugin that transforms the platform into social software, the learning environment for the MOOC will afford students an opportunity to engage each other in a social, community-centered atmosphere of collaboration and content creation. Additionally, the MOOC platform utilizes a badge system to "reward" participants for various system-released tasks, instructor-assessed assignments, and community-nominated behaviors.

## Literature Review

Professional development avenues have evolved just as LIS technology has. In person learning, still popular in the form of workshops, conferences, and in-service learning days, has given way to training delivered online. These include recorded tutorials and self-paced learning. A notable part of this evolution is the Learning 2.0 model of self-directed learning modules for library staff created in 2006. Delivered via a blog site or wiki, the program has been described as transformational (Abram, 2008) and lauded for its ability to bring staff together in a common goal: learning emerging technologies. “The Learning 2.0 program had a great impact on staff, who now know they are capable of learning new technologies,” noted Lewis (2008) in a case study of an early program. Stephens and Cheetham (2011, 2012a, 2012b) mounted a large-scale study of Learning 2.0 in Australia and described the benefits of the program for library staff and library service. We might argue these innovations in online learning paved the way for the massive, open course.

The term Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was first used in 2008 by George Siemens and Stephen Downes as the moniker for a free, online course taught at the University of Manitoba for 2,300 students (Educause, 2011). Since then, MOOCs and MOOC-related for-profit companies have offered larger and larger courses and partnered with many universities to deliver courses (Pappano, 2012). Beyond for-credit and for-profit endeavors, the potential for MOOCs to provide professional development and lifelong learning is high. “One of the most appealing promises of MOOCs is that they offer the possibility for continued, advanced learning at zero cost, allowing students, life-long learners, and professionals to acquire new skills and improve their knowledge and employability” (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 4).

A recent study by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* found that 79% of MOOC instructors believe MOOCs are “worth the hype” (Kolowich, 2013) but scholarly research related to the effectiveness of MOOCs is just beginning. John Daniel’s 2012 paper *Making Sense of MOOCs: Musings in a Maze of Myth, Paradox and Possibility* outlines the

emerging issues: technology platforms, for-profit versus nonprofit models, effective pedagogy, and student success within large learning environments. A scan of recent research includes gauging the potential of for-credit MOOCs, assessing the experiences of students and professors in MOOC environments, and evaluating various MOOC platforms and their impact on student learning.

### **Potential Impact of Research**

This paper will contribute to a better understanding regarding how not-for-credit MOOCs can serve as professional development tools. The investigators will evaluate the SLIS MOOC, identify areas where the model is effective, and provide recommendations regarding how to improve the design of MOOCs in the future.

The investigators will study the MOOC from the students' perspective, exploring topics such as why students signed up, the extent of their participation, and what type of support they needed. Roadblocks to course completion will be identified, along with what motivated students to complete the course. The MOOC will also be evaluated from the perspective of instructors, exploring areas such as what strategies were most effective at fostering student interaction with course content and with peers, how to best involve course assistants in mentoring students, and how to assess student performance. Findings will also provide insight to LIS program administrators, identifying challenges associated with offering MOOCs and sustaining the model in the future.

### **Scope of Research and Methodology**

Evaluation of the SLIS MOOC will include multiple methodologies and explore various perspectives. Pre- and post-course online surveys of MOOC students will gather data regarding expectations and motivations for enrolling in the course; opinions regarding the course design, course content, and perceived sense of community; and perceptions regarding the course's value as a professional development venue. Qualitative survey data will be analyzed using content analysis procedures.

Additionally, the investigators will evaluate the WordPress/BuddyPress platform used to deliver the course in order to determine the platform's viability for large-scale learning communities. The investigators will also collect quantitative data, such as the number of students who register for and complete the course, the number of times students post to the course blog, and the number of assignments completed by each student. The investigators will analyze the qualitative and quantitative data, identify exemplary practices and areas for improvement, and develop recommendations for improving the MOOC.

### **Future Research**

Interviews with approximately 10 course assistants and content contributors will expand on survey findings and provide further insight regarding challenges and effective practices. For example, interviews will explore pedagogical issues and activity on the course site. After an analysis of survey findings, some students may also be interviewed. Interviews will be analyzed via a grounded theory or phenomenological approach.

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