

Dominican joins Coursera for Learning Hubs Project

Dominican's decision to participate as a Learning Hub grew from work initiated as part of a planning grant from the New York-based Teagle Foundation. Dominican is leading a consortium of West Coast liberal arts colleges on a project examining how best to integrate innovative technology in education with high-impact educational practices commonly used in small liberal arts colleges and universities.

This comes as traditional brick-and-mortar institutions - particularly smaller, liberal arts colleges and universities - seek ways to use technology to offer a fresh response to areas of significant concern, specifically cost, access, and quality, said Dominican University of California President Mary B. Marcy.

"We are excited to be partnering with Coursera," Marcy said. "Our goal is to provide intellectual integration for the student, championing what has been proven to be the best of teaching and learning while embracing new technology."

[CLICK HERE](#) to read NBC News.com "Education Nation" commentary by Dominican President Mary B. Marcy on integrating best on-campus practices and technology.

READ ABOUT it in [Inside Higher Education](#) and [San Francisco Business Times](#)

The Dominican-based Learning Hub, which began its first class in June, enables students enrolled in select Coursera courses to combine screen-time with face-time by attending in-person sessions at the University. The classroom sessions revolve around discussions and projects that run parallel to the online course.

Coursera announced its first group of Global Learning Hubs partners, including the U.S. Department of State, last October. The second group, announced in May, also includes the New York Public Library; Azusa Pacific University's South Africa program; Marconi University in Rome; the Carlos Slim Foundation in Mexico City; the Bionic Hill Innovation Park in Kyiv, Ukraine; Brainstation in Toronto; and Guokr in Beijing.

Teaming up with Coursera is aligned with Dominican's own efforts to transform the liberal arts university through initiatives focused on best practices in higher education. Known as 'high-impact practices,' these teaching techniques include hands-on research with faculty mentors, learning communities, capstone projects, internships, and writing intensive workshops. They are proven to deepen learning, foster student engagement, and improve student learning, retention, and graduation rates.

Dominican's first Coursera course will be "Understanding Research Methods." Taught online by faculty from the University of London, the course is designed to enable students to develop their understanding of research methods. It focuses on designing a research project, choosing and executing appropriate methods, and assessing a project's intellectual/academic rigor.

Hanna Rodriguez-Farrar, Dominican's Senior Advisor for Strategy and Planning, is facilitating the weekly, 90-minute in-person sessions at Dominican. Rodriguez-Farrar, who earned a Ph.D. in Art History from Brown University and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Policy from Harvard University Graduate School of Education, draws on her expertise in both qualitative and quantitative research to shape classroom discussions.

The goal is to create a learning community in which participants can advance their own research projects while also helping their peers organize thoughts and content, Rodriguez-Farrar said.

"The classroom sessions will be an extension of the Coursera content and an extension of the participants' own work," Rodriguez-Farrar said. "Participants will figure out how to advance a project together. The course will move from passive – participants watching a video – to active as participants apply the content of the Coursera course into their work."

The course is open to anyone with an interest in research. This could include a high school student wanting preparation for future college assignments, a college student working on a thesis, a graduate student seeking a research methods course, or a local resident interested in conducting research as professional development.

Research, Rodriguez-Farrar noted, is enhanced when shared with others. She plans to emphasize the social aspect of learning in her classroom discussions. The opportunity to gain input from students interested in a variety of disciplines is particularly valuable, she added.

“Research often can be a solitary process,” Rodriguez-Farrar said. “A community of students, scholars, and researchers can greatly help the research projects being done by its members. In most academic settings, the community researchers work with can be rather insular: historians talking with historians or sociologies working with other sociologists. A researcher gains valuable input from an audience that is not a part of only one discipline, and this Coursera course gives participants thousands of other researchers from around the globe. The Learning Hub provides participants with a setting to deepen the lessons of the course and a way to advance each participant’s research project.”

At the end of the six-week, non-credit course, participants will receive a certificate of completion from Coursera. There is space for up to 20 participants in the first course. To enroll, please contact Jaime Castner at 415-257-1300 or jaime.castner@dominican.edu.

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