Title of Paper: MOOC Evaluation Paper

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Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are influential open resources that have been democratising and transforming adult education ever since it gained sufficient public interest and its placement on Gartner's Hype Cycle Model owing to its affiliation with elite universities (Eden, 2015). In spite of many of the benefits that MOOCs have brought to the distance education platform, it has been criticised and labelled as a fad that has low retention rates (Haber, 2014). This perspective is maintained by Greenstein (2013) who purported that MOOCs are an unviable means for educational reform that reinforce the digital divide and gender-based hierarchical structures. In order to measure their effectiveness and share further insight, this evaluator has enrolled in Coursera's 'e-Learning Ecologies: Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning for the Digital Age' course by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The course's philosophical underpinnings, teaching strategies, learning theories and assessments among other factors will be scrutinised as well as its design. Moreover, the evaluator will detail the course's strengths and weaknesses and suggest areas of improvement using a rubric provided by Online Learning Consortium, Inc.

Whilst perusing the four-week course page and interacting with its artifacts and activities, the evaluator's overall impression was that it appeared to be authentic and that learners could benefit from the experience. There is evidence of a gamut of teaching philosophies, instructional strategies and learning theories that are deep-seated in the course's design. This is a benefit for the e-Learning Ecologies MOOC since Bonk, Lee, Reeves and Reynolds (2017) posited that MOOCs tend to lack instructional design expertise such as research and theories to guide the course's design. Teaching philosophies for the course include:

1. Learners acquire knowledge best when they are motivated and self-regulated

Driscoll (2014) maintained that when self-regulation and motivation exist in a learning environment, goal-oriented behaviour is achieved. The instructor affords learning opportunities through goal-setting and learners consequently monitor their progress (Driscoll, 2014). This is evidenced in Coursera's MOOC page by its prompt for learners to set personalised goals and its visual depiction of a timeline where learners are shown their starting or current point of activity and what their next step is to move forward toward achieving their goal. In addition, the open course employs Learner Analytics that tracks learners' progress. Gentle reminders through the use of motivating messages remind learners of how many hours they have completed and their most productive day this week along with an encouraging message to continue learning. Please see Picture 1 and 1.1 respectively in Appendix A for the goal prompt and timeline.

2. Knowledge should be at the disposal to all at minimal costs

In navigating the course, learners are provided with free content and learning materials and there is an option of financial aid available if necessary. It is essential to consider that the course, guides learners to links to purchase the course text along with two additional textbooks, one of which is self-authored by the course administrators; however, the MOOC's administrators stipulate that it is not necessary to purchase these texts and that they have listed them as mere suggestions or references to get a better perspective of concepts. By offering free and quality information to its global participants, the MOOC attempts to bridge the digital divide gap and break geographical barriers. Bolt and Crawford (2000) stated that in education, technology advances sustain a disparity as not all students have accessibility. However, on the MOOC site, as long as persons have internet access and are enrolled in the course, they would have the same learning experiences as the average person who can afford technologies, would.

3. Learning is best acquired when there is a community of learners who collaborate with each other

A community of learners fosters an environment where there is trust and respect for each person's opinion in the learning community. Moreover, because of students' cultural background, there tends to be pluralistic opinions and ideas; however, a community of learners ensures that each individual's opinion is valued. This view is buttressed by Chen and Armstrong (2002) who stated that innovative classrooms are ones where there is curiosity, inquiry and collaboration between students to students and students to teachers. This community is necessary especially for diverse classrooms. In the MOOC page, several examples exemplify the MOOCs' attempt to promote a community of learning which include 'Introductions and get to know your peers sessions', 'Social Media Networking', mandatory 'Peer Review' activities, its urge for students to report any inappropriate comments in discussion boards and threads as well as 'voting' which is done at the end of videos where other participants can vote through a multi-option based on ideas presented in the video lecture. After voting, students discover how their other participants in the course voted as well.

4. The learning-teaching environment is evolutionary and educational technologists should embrace change

The course replaces traditional instruction with contemporary pedagogy. In this school of thought, concepts such as differentiated learning which believes that learning should be adaptive to learners' needs and peer to peer learning are emphasised. These are revealed in the course's learner analysis survey which is optional for its participants.

5. Students should master concepts before moving on to newer ones

In the MOOC, students are restricted to access newer concepts without firstly completing assessments in the previous section. According to Schunk (2011), the premise for mastery learning is to decrease students' differences over time.

Moreover, some prominent learning theories that are highlighted in the course include Andragogy, Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism and Cognitive Information Processing. This evaluator believes that there could have been a more strategic integration of theories. For instance, Cognitive Information Processing was displayed by having reduced content broken down into smaller pieces, succinct videos that are usually less than 10 minutes and also in the course's page by allowing learners to segment and extract video sections and save them accordingly. However, since learners are incrementally exposed to two Affordances each week as they progress through the course, Cognitive Information Processing should have been meshed with Schema Theory so that the learner gradually builds on ideas and appends them to older knowledge so that learning becomes meaningful for them.

Moreover, whilst there is not a great variety of instructional strategies used, there is a sensible blend of teacher-centred and student-centred strategies. Instructional strategies present in the MOOC include discussion, peer tutoring and short lectures. According to Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan and Brown (2010), a multi-methodology approach may be optimal when planning instruction. Multi-methodology refers to engaging students with equal distribution of teacher-centred and student-centred methods on the basis of both methods having links to activating both hemispheres of the brain (Orlich et al, 2010).

In the e-Learning ecologies MOOC course, terminal and enabling objectives concentrate solely on the cognitive domain and there is a misalignment of objectives and assessments. Learning objectives guide instruction and assessments and therefore,

assessments in the MOOC have been fashioned to be cognitive in nature as well. Therefore, students' learning is measured through discussions, peer reviews and extended response questions such as essays. Additionally, the evaluator has noticed that objectives do not align with its assessments. This is exemplified with the second week's objectives where the course seeks for students to achieve two higher-order thinking objectives which include:

- Judge the pedagogical implications of an active knowledge making and
- Analyse the dimensions of multimodal learning

However, in its assessment, students are merely asked to construct an essay of 300 words introducing an active learning concept to their peers and evaluate their peers' posts. In actuality, to complete this assignment, learners do not have to display any higher order cognitive skills such as judging educational implications as was stated in its objectives or even think critically.

The MOOC page does not include any interactive Open Educational Resources. Videos on the page are teacher-designed that can be downloaded; however, students are not at liberty to use or modify diagrams and charts. In addition, resources labelled as 'reading materials' are short brief sentences that are likely to have been composed by the course instructors. However, because of the growing popularity of concepts, a search for digitalised materials revealed a plethora of open resources including videos and e-textbooks that could have been embedded into the course page to enhance students' learning and make it more interactive. Furthermore, Shank (2014) recommended three components that should be present in Open Educational Resources for them to be considered effective which are 1) interactivity that requires participation, 2) multimodality such as combining audio and text, or video and kinaesthetic and 3) assessment and feedback.

In order to select effective and ineffective aspects of the course, the evaluator has judged each chosen aspect against criteria such as elements that enhance the learning experience and whether the aspect is in alignment with instructional design heuristics and best practices. One of the most effective components is that the course has creatively intertwined feedback into the course's design. In students' assessments, each student is given opportunities to review their peers' work, give helpful feedback and grade each other's assignments. According to Bonk et al (2017), feedback is essential in online environments but especially in MOOCs where students could conjure feelings of isolation, individualisation and loneliness. Consequently, there is an established learning community. Through the MOOCs efforts to foster feedback and collaboration, there is a sense of unity, trust and valuing of each other's opinions and ideas in the MOOC.

Secondly, teacher-designed videos are succinct and less than 10 minutes long. This view is buttressed by Bonk et al (2017) who stated that short and segmented videos are favoured by MOOC participants. Moreover, there is an attempt to reduce the English dominance in this MOOC. Bonk et al (2017) advanced that MOOCs were generally thought to heavily promote English language and Western culture for an open resource that caters to the international community. However, the e-Learning ecologies MOOC translates audio from videos into subtitles to eight other languages besides English for its global participants.

Conversely, ineffective aspects are noted in the MOOC's focus to only develop students' cognitive domain. According to Driscoll (2014), Bloom's taxonomy accepts the notion that learning comprises three major domains which include cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. This view is also maintained by Rowntree (1994) who stipulated that in writing learning objectives, the instructional designer should ensure that all bases are covered as it relates to the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that instructional

designers are desirous of learners acquiring. Therefore, by only focusing on the cognitive domain, the MOOC is failing to activate knowledge, skills and attitudes in other domains.

Secondly, the e-Learning and ecologies MOOC may not be a completely free open resource and its marketing strategy makes the course less substantial. It offers a course certificate only to students who purchase the complete course. In addition, there is a marketing of this course to the university's other paid programmes. Review Picture 2 in Appendix A where there is a hint that by completing this course, since the same information is offered in some of its Certificate, Masters and Doctorate programmes, participants can use this course and purchase one of their programmes and get accredited hours in exchange. According to Haber (2014), creating income opportunities by advertising goes against the business model of educational programmes like MOOCs whose purpose is to be altruistic.

Thirdly, the MOOC does not offer varied modalities and therefore lacks accessibility. In the e-Learning ecologies course, differently abled students are given the same access to information as students without disabilities. There is no option, besides providing subtitles, that enhances the learner experience for persons with special needs. Moreover, the MOOC does not modify its learner experience to suit persons with different technological capabilities and persons from different cultural backgrounds. According to Bonk et al (2017), MOOCs have been labelled as 'digital colonialists' since they are not preoccupied with the cultural practices and norms of the less developed world. This view is seen in the evaluated MOOC course since there are no cultural analogies, examples or metaphors to which persons from different cultures can relate. There are some references to Australia and Japan but these are hardly developing countries and the target audience may find it difficult to embrace these examples.

Fourthly, there are no authentic measures in place to stop plagiarism and consequently, it becomes difficult to ascertain whether students are acquiring the requisite knowledge and information. Despite its affiliation with the University of Illinois, which should have their own policies against plagiarism, the university neglects to enforce these on its MOOC site. The only element similar is a message when attempting to participate in discussion boards and submit assignments, which states that the participant is submitting his or her original work. Apart from this, and also along with peer grading, it would be difficult to curb plagiarism and as a result, challenging to verify whether students are competent on topics presented in each module. Bonk et al (2017) likened the mentioned aspects to complex issues that undermine the MOOCs' effectiveness and quality.

Lastly, the evaluated MOOC does not provide appropriate strategies to help learners organise information. There is a single use of a graphic organiser. However, and apart from this, instructors do not engage in activating prior knowledge. Each week and found in each module, learners are exposed to two Affordances, yet, there is no evidence of activating the previous information to make space for the new Affordance to be learned. Instructors continue with new information giving as though it is separate and not a part of the Seven Affordances. This view is buttressed by Merrill (2013) who stated in his Activation Principle that learners should be given opportunities to activate their prior learning by recalling their existing knowledge.

The course introduces learners to useful information but needs to go more in-depth. The e-Learning and ecologies MOOC's purpose is to explore seven Affordances that will help equip its participants for a transformative and digitalised education based on its course overview. As a novice instructional designer and an educator, the course presented new concepts that were novel and useful such as 'recursive feedback' and 'multimodal meaning'. However, content lacks volume and density as it relates to knowledge shared. Students are

introduced to themes but there is no further challenging of old information with new information. Unfortunately, the evaluator is unaware of the implications and pros and cons of each Affordance. In addition, the course does not concentrate on implementation methods, how to stay up-to-date with these technologies or Affordances and how to personalise them to suit different learner characteristics.

In order to make plausible recommendations, the evaluator uses a systematic approach whereby the course is evaluated with a rubric provided by Online Learning Consortium, Inc. The rating scale measures elements that are sufficiently present; those which need minor revision which would take half an hour or less; those elements which need moderate revision and would take half an hour to two hours to make amendments; and lastly elements which need major revision and could take more than two hours. Recommendations would be categorised according to their area of revision. Please see Online Course Scoring Rubric 1 in Appendix B for the rubric. The problems and recommendations are as follows:

Course Overview and Information

Minor Problem

- The course does not state whether it is fully online, blended or web-enhanced.

According to Standard 7 in the Open Suny Course Quality Review (OSCQR, n.d.), it is a best practice to communicate with participants how they are expected to interact with course content, facilitators and other participants.

Recommendation

- Explicitly communicate this information by placing it in the course overview and syllabus

Moderate Problem

- Course does not include links to campus policies which include plagiarism, handling grievances, accommodating disabilities and so forth

Due to the heavy nature of these policies, it is important to fully communicate these with students. The MOOC page does highlight that users could contact the Help Centre, however, issues with such heightened importance should be given a dedicated course space.

Recommendation

- Include this information explicitly along with hyperlinks, Frequently Asked Questions and a dedicated course space where learners could directly refer to this information at their convenience

Major Problems

- The course does not promote appropriate methods that support ubiquitous learning
- Course objectives do not align with students' assessments

Recommendations

- Use appropriate software to convert the course's site to support different devices (OSCQR, n.d.)
- Test the site on different devices and make the necessary modifications (OSCQR, n.d.)
- Revisit course objectives and assessments
- Create appropriate assessments that are aligned to assessments

Course Technology and Tools

Minor Problem

- Requisite technology skills are not clearly stated

Due to its reliance on multimedia such as videos, the evaluated MOOC could have suggested multimedia tools and software such as Adobe flash and audio output compatible software as supporting resources. By failing to do so, it is not in accordance with OSCQR's Standard 11 which states that it is the duty of course designers to include such information because technological issues can be frustrating for participants.

Recommendations

- Include tutorial videos
- Provide a space where participants could check and test their technology to see if students' technologies are compatible
- Hyperlink resources for additional help or steps to fix any issues

Moderate Problem

- Technology tools do not meet accessibility standards

Standard 5 of Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) Standards states that resources on platforms should be multimodal and as a result, cater to learners' different interests and capabilities (Piña & Harris 2019). Moreover, this Standard could benefit the evaluated MOOC since students' different cultural diversities are not currently celebrated.

Recommendations

- Before launching the course, review it from the perspective of a differently abled student or from the point of view of someone from a different culture
- Collaborate with others from less developed countries to collect appropriate examples, metaphors or analogies

- Use the Wave Accessibility Tool to detect compatibility. Further guidance is given on issues detected (OSCQR, n.d.)

Design and Layout

Minor Problem

- The course is free from grammatical errors and spelling mistakes

Spelling and grammatical mistakes can degrade the quality and hinder the impact of the course since it can cause students to question the instructors' competence (OSCQR, n.d.)

Recommendation

- Collaborate with other team members so that they can proofread and edit any spelling and grammatical errors

Content and Activities

Moderate Problems

- Lack of higher-order thinking and problem skills
- Real-world applications of the discipline

Recommendations

- Use performance objectives
- Use Bloom's taxonomy to create meaningful objectives targeted at every domain
- Include authentic and real-world applications such as case studies and scenarios (OSCQR, n.d.)

Major Problem

- The course offers very little engaging resources

Recommendations

- Exploit open resources and other digitalised materials that are aligned with target audience such as the resource being content and age appropriate and so on
- Ensure resources are in keeping with Shank's (2014) recommendations for engaging resources
- Have learners evaluate resources
- Constantly update or modify resources based on learners' feedback

Assessment and Feedback

Moderate Problem

- The course does not provide opportunities for learners to pre-test, self-assess nor does it set any reflective assignments

There is little chance for learners to formally develop metacognition in the MOOC course. In addition, learners are not given opportunities to activate their prior learning.

Recommendations

- Use polls to activate students' prior knowledge
- Include journals so students' could reflect on their learning
- Include reflective questions

In conclusion, having evaluated the e-Learning Ecologies MOOC and gained first-hand experience of its strengths and weaknesses as a participant and evaluator, this evaluator is of the opinion that the MOOC in question has far moved away from Haber's (2014) and Greenstein's (2013) notion that MOOCs are just a fad that reinforce systemic structures. Fortunately, this MOOC has promising potential and could be a viable resource for its global citizens. This is exemplified in its 'Interaction' where survey results revealed that the

MOOC's major strengths were aspects such as developing a learning community and having get to know the instructor and peers elements among others. In addition, it is backed in learning theories and instructional design principles. Therefore, without denying the MOOCs obvious shortcomings, a greater consideration would be Bonk's et al (2017) dissenting views who consider more contemporary issues such as cultural diversity, instructional design expertise and other aspects that could impact students' interaction and learning. With purposeful changes such as those presented in the evaluator's recommendation, this MOOC can be revamped so that the global community could benefit from this resource.

References

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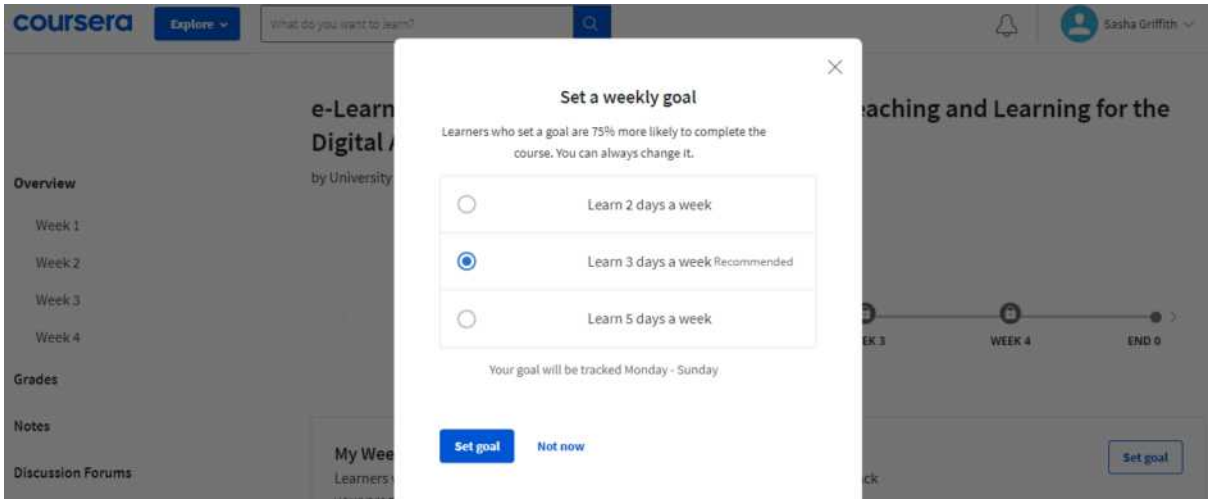
Appendices

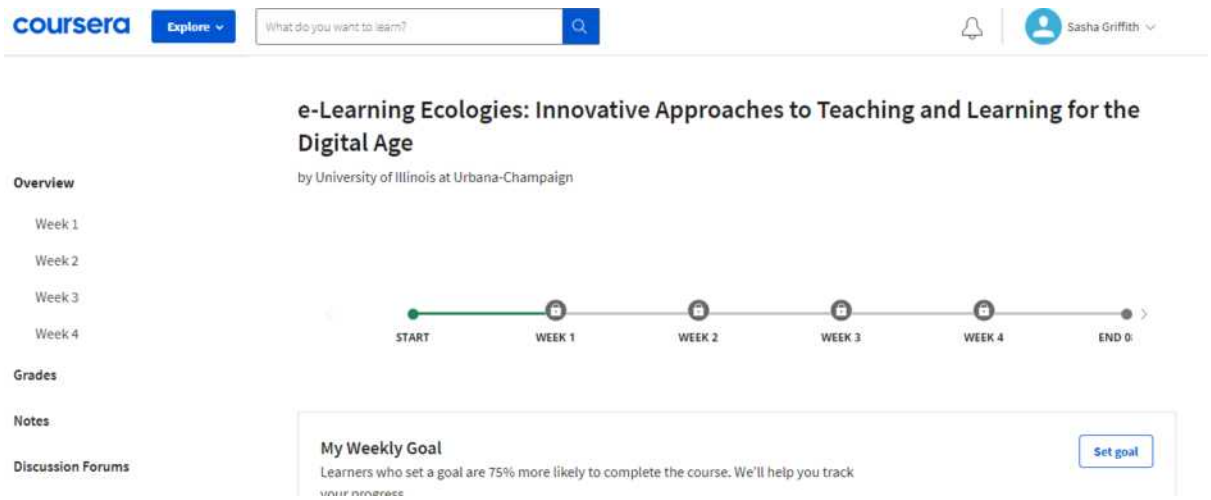
Appendix A

Picture 1



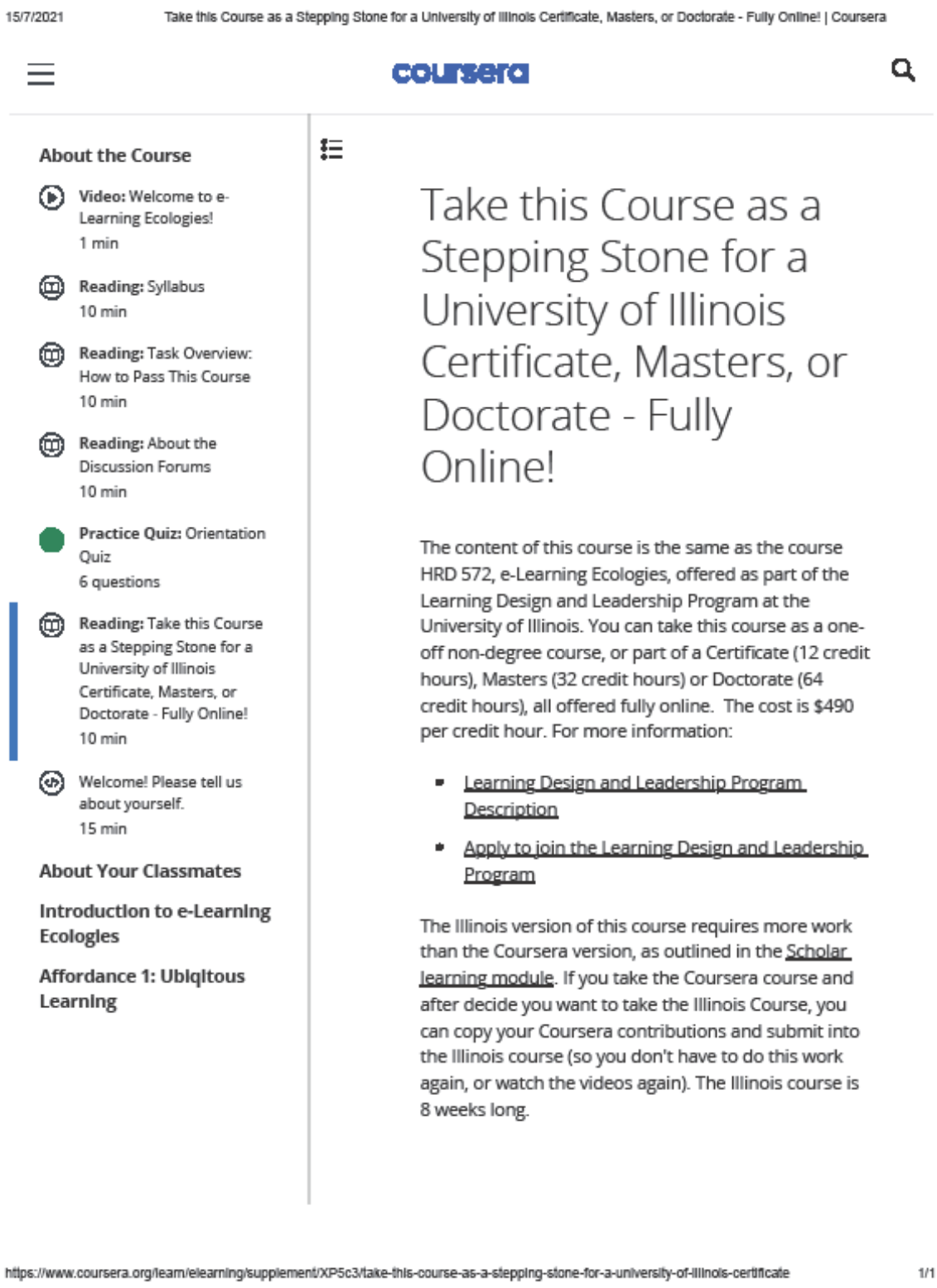
Picture 1 shows the MOOCs' prompt for learners to set goals

Picture 1.1



Picture 1.1 shows the MOOC's timeline

Picture 2



Picture 2 refers to marketing and advertising strategies employed on the MOOC by the University of Illinois

Appendix B

Online Course Scoring Rubric 1

OLC QUALITY SCORECARD SUITE

OSCQR Course Design Review

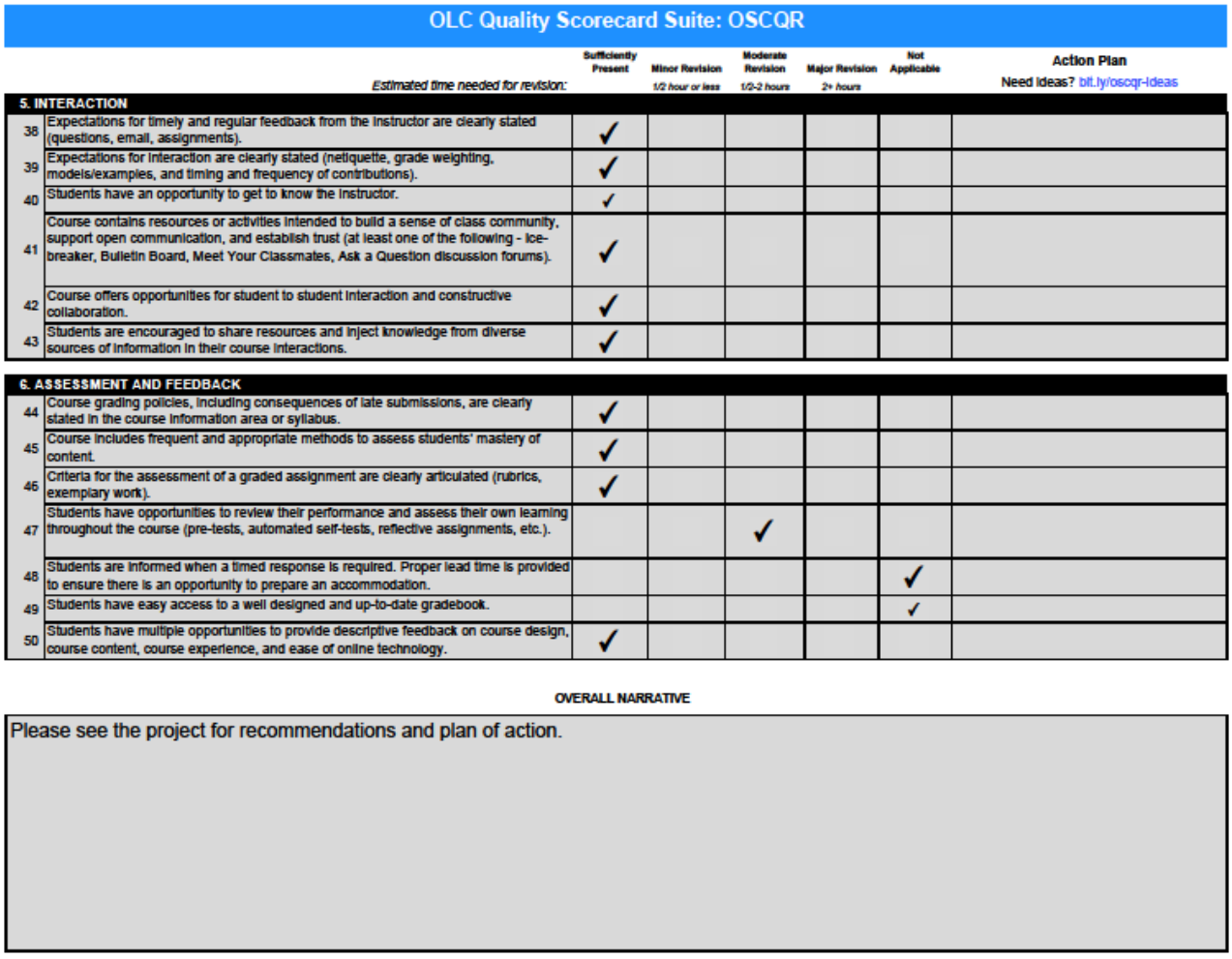
		Estimated time needed for revision:	Sufficiently Present	Minor Revision 1/2 hour or less	Moderate Revision 1/2-2 hours	Major Revision 2+ hours	Not Applicable	Action Plan Need ideas? bit.ly/oscqr-ideas
1. COURSE OVERVIEW AND INFORMATION								
1	Course includes Welcome and Getting Started content.		✓					
2	An orientation or overview is provided for the course overall, as well as in each module. Students know how to navigate and what tasks are due.		✓					
3	Course includes a Course Information area that deconstructs the syllabus for learners in a clear and navigable way.		✓					
4	A printable syllabus is available to learners (PDF, HTML).		✓					
5	Course includes links to relevant campus policies on plagiarism, computer use, student grievances, accommodating disabilities, etc.				✓			
6	Course provides access to student success resources (technical help, orientation, tutoring).		✓					
7	Course information states whether the course is fully online, blended, or web-enhanced.			✓				
8	Appropriate methods and devices for accessing and participating in the course are communicated (mobile, publisher websites, secure content, pop-ups, browser issue, microphone, webcam).					✓		
9	Course objectives/outcomes are clearly defined, measurable, and aligned to student learning activities and assessments.					✓		
10	Course provides contact information for instructor, department, and program.		✓					
2. COURSE TECHNOLOGY & TOOLS								
11	Requisite skills for using technology tools (websites, software, and hardware) are clearly stated and supported with resources.			✓				
12	Technical skills required for participation in course learning activities scaffold in a timely manner (orientation, practice, and application - where appropriate).						✓	
13	Frequently used technology tools are easily accessed. Any tools not being utilized are removed from the course menu.						✓	
14	Course includes links to privacy policies for technology tools.						✓	
15	Any technology tools meet accessibility standards.					✓		

ONLINE LEARNING CONSORTIUM

OPEN SUNY

OLC Quality Scorecard Suite: OSCQR

		Sufficiently Present	Minor Revision 1/2 hour or less	Moderate Revision 1/2-2 hours	Major Revision 2+ hours	Not Applicable	Action Plan Need ideas? bit.ly/oscqr-ideas
	Estimated time needed for revision:						
3. DESIGN AND LAYOUT							
16	A logical, consistent, and uncluttered layout is established. The course is easy to navigate (consistent color scheme and icon layout, related content organized together, self-evident titles).	✓					
17	Large blocks of information are divided into manageable sections with ample white space around and between the blocks.	✓					
18	There is enough contrast between text and background for the content to be easily viewed.	✓					
19	Instructions are provided and well written.	✓					
20	Course is free of grammatical and spelling errors.		✓				
21	Text is formatted with titles, headings, and other styles to enhance readability and improve the structure of the document.	✓					
22	Flashing and blinking text are avoided.					✓	
23	A sans-serif font with a standard size of at least 12 pt is used.	✓					
24	When possible, information is displayed in a linear format instead of as a table.	✓					
25	Tables are accompanied by a title and summary description.	✓					
26	Table header rows and columns are assigned.	✓					
27	Slideshows use a predefined slide layout and include unique slide titles.					✓	
28	For all slideshows, there are simple, non-automatic transitions between slides.					✓	
4. CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES							
29	Course offers access to a variety of engaging resources that facilitate communication and collaboration, deliver content, and support student learning and engagement.				✓		
30	Course provides activities for students to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, such as critical reflection and analysis.			✓			
31	Course provides activities that emulate real world applications of the discipline, such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities.			✓			
32	Where available, Open Educational Resources, free, or low cost materials are used.			✓			
33	Course materials and resources include copyright and licensing status, clearly stating permission to share where applicable.					✓	
34	Text content is available in an easily accessed format, preferably HTML. All text content is readable by assistive technology, including a PDF or any text contained in an image.	✓					
35	A text equivalent for every non-text element is provided ("alt" tags, captions, transcripts, etc.).	✓					
36	Text, graphics, and images are understandable when viewed without color. Text should be used as a primary method for delivering information.	✓					
37	Hyperlink text is descriptive and makes sense when out of context (avoid using "click here").	✓					



OLC Quality Scorecard Suite: OSCQR

		Sufficiently Present	Minor Revision 1/2 hour or less	Moderate Revision 1/2-2 hours	Major Revision 2+ hours	Not Applicable	Action Plan Need ideas? bit.ly/oscqr-ideas
	Estimated time needed for revision:						
5. INTERACTION							
38	Expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor are clearly stated (questions, email, assignments).	✓					
39	Expectations for interaction are clearly stated (netiquette, grade weighting, models/examples, and timing and frequency of contributions).	✓					
40	Students have an opportunity to get to know the instructor.	✓					
41	Course contains resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication, and establish trust (at least one of the following - Ice-breaker, Bulletin Board, Meet Your Classmates, Ask a Question discussion forums).	✓					
42	Course offers opportunities for student to student interaction and constructive collaboration.	✓					
43	Students are encouraged to share resources and inject knowledge from diverse sources of information in their course interactions.	✓					
6. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK							
44	Course grading policies, including consequences of late submissions, are clearly stated in the course information area or syllabus.	✓					
45	Course includes frequent and appropriate methods to assess students' mastery of content.	✓					
46	Criteria for the assessment of a graded assignment are clearly articulated (rubrics, exemplary work).	✓					
47	Students have opportunities to review their performance and assess their own learning throughout the course (pre-tests, automated self-tests, reflective assignments, etc.).			✓			
48	Students are informed when a timed response is required. Proper lead time is provided to ensure there is an opportunity to prepare an accommodation.					✓	
49	Students have easy access to a well designed and up-to-date gradebook.					✓	
50	Students have multiple opportunities to provide descriptive feedback on course design, course content, course experience, and ease of online technology.	✓					

OVERALL NARRATIVE

Please see the project for recommendations and plan of action.

Online Scoring Rubric 1 shows the rubric used to measure the evaluated MOOC's effectiveness in order to give recommendations. For better readability, the rubric can be viewed at http://higherelearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/OSCQR-Course-Design-Review.pdf or by clicking here.