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Statement Paper

Official Report: MOOCs and Thunderbird School of Global Management

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Thunderbird School of Global Management, a unit of the ASU Knowledge Enterprise has offered four MOOC courses through edX since 2017 towards a MicroMasters in International Business Management. Similar to the more than 800 universities around the world who have launched at least one MOOC (Shah, 2018), Thunderbird hoped to break into this market to increase brand awareness and profit from world-class business courses through conversion to in-person enrollment (T. Cross, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

The MOOC provider of choice for Thunderbird is edX. They are ranked second in terms of registered users with 14 million and boast more than 1,800 courses (Shah, 2018). While most platforms like Coursera and Udacity are moving to a fee based system, edX remains one of the only platforms that still offers most of its courses free (Schaffhauser, 2018). In its first year Thunderbird saw 26,736 students sign up for 40,622 classes. Of those students, 342 purchased 688 class at \$249 each and about 35 students purchase credit in every class run (Cross, n.d.). Thunderbird's statistics are higher than the national average, which fall between four, and six percent of students who purchase MOOC credits (Negera, 2014).

As an international business school who attracts students from around the world, Thunderbird is interested in strengthening our global footprint. With locations in Phoenix, Geneva, Moscow and Dubai (Thunderbird, 2018), a presence around the world is important for brand recognition, engagement with alumni and referrals to our school. MOOCs are also a great way to build rapport within these areas. If an online learner in Africa has a good experience, they may tell their friends who could sign up for a course. Even better they may want to explore the in-person offerings at one of our global locations, Executive or online programs. In fact, the frontrunner in MOOCs, Coursera, has stated that many of their students hear about their platform via word of mouth (Ng, 2012).

One area of concern however, is that MOOCs are not reaching high numbers of students in developing countries as they were intended (Alcorn et al, 2013). Thunderbird cannot achieve our goals of brand recognition and enrollment to this demographic of prospective students if MOOCs are not attracting them.

It may be important to note who is taking advantage of online learning through MOOCs. A 2013 study on the demographic of MOOC learners concluded that students who take classes are highly educated, tend to be younger than 30 years old, male, employed and a majority come from developed countries (Alcorn, 2013). When these statistics are compared to Thunderbird's similar results are realized with students who pay for their credits coming from the United States, Indonesia, Germany, Canada, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, India and Mexico (Cross, n.d.).

In order to strengthen the number of students who come from developing countries, I would like to take a page from St. George's University in Grenada, West Indies. St. George's went through the process of offering a traditional class and then implemented three key strategies to improve the class, increase enrollment and completion rates from students from developing countries and report on their findings. The three takeaways from their study is to build your course from scratch, do not try to create a MOOC course from an existing one. Students found the content much more relatable and easy to follow. Next, they found it valuable to maximize interactions between students, faculty and other students. This led to increased engagement and a

desire to continue to learn. Finally, a strong team is essential. This course had a program director, instructional designer, technical support and course instructor (Bidaisee, 2017).

So let us look at Thunderbird's MOOC program and it can be improved. Thunderbird currently offers four classes taught by our existing instructors. Since these instructors teach similar courses in-person, it will be important to ensure they are not simply repurposing the classes in a MOOC format. In addition, the opportunity to engage with the professor and each other will make the class more meaningful and students would be more likely to sign up for another one. Finally, additional resources can be devoted to this program to ensure student's need are being met, which translates to higher satisfaction.

Ted Cross, Clinical Assistant Professor and Thunderbird's driving force behind the MicroMasters MOOC program, identified the biggest concern looking into the future as the lack of marketing support that edX offers. If students do not know about the program, they certainly cannot sign up for it (T. Cross, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

To combat the lack of marketing challenge, I would like to propose a four-pronged approach to ensuring the MicroMasters is as successful as it can be.

1. Continue working with edX on marketing the program.

Since the website and marketing support were included in the investment to edX, there is no reason that we should not continue leveraging the support. However, since the current resources are not fulfilling our enrollment goals, we need to think of additional ways to realize our desired outcomes.

2. Brainstorm with our in-house marketing team to develop a supplemental marketing plan.

The MicroMasters program has the potential to be an incredible asset and profit driver for Thunderbird. Utilizing the talents of our college's marketing team to identifying all opportunities to promote the program should be of top priority. Inclusion in the monthly alumni newsletter is one way to promote. If an alum sees the program and has a few candidates in mind, they may recommend them for the class. Keeping alumni engaged is a great way to create an affinity to the institution (Kania, 2016). Another avenue for promotion are targeted emails through a database that is kept by Thunderbird. Thunderbird has also kicked off a webinar series hosted by Dr. Ted Cross. The webinar invites prospective students to a modified class to get a taste of what they can expect. This is a great opportunity to promote the MicroMasters and collect user information for the database. The last webinar had 350 registrants with 80 people who actually tuned in. Thunderbird is excited to have another team member who is focused on these efforts begin next semester as well.

3. Offer a Referral Program

EdPlus, the ASU MOOC middleman, made a decision to discount our MicroMasters complete program (all four classes) this year and we really haven't seen a huge spike in enrollment. I would like to propose another type of discount program based off referrals. Decreasing the

amount of the classes, helps attract more students in emerging markets, but if there were a referral program that may help as well. Students can earn credits or a fixed amount off their fees if they refer a friend who takes the class. The referring student benefits from a decrease in fees, the school benefits from attracting one more person to the program and capturing their information in their database and both students benefit because they get to take a class together, which is highly recommended to encourage friendly competition and to hold each other accountable (Reviews.com, 2018).

#### 4. Attract Donors

Up until now, all marketing has been a grassroots effort as financial resources are not readily available to market the program. As with anything, MOOCs can also be sponsored. If a donor believes in the mission, they can make a sizeable donation to help offset marketing expenses.

In order to execute this four-pronged plan, I would like to start by assembling all stakeholders at our college who have a participatory role in the MOOCs. This would include the academic program department responsible for the courses, the faculty who teach in the program, the marketing and admissions departments. Once the team comes together to discuss roles and responsibilities, desired outcomes and benchmarking, we will then bring additional departments into the conversation such as alumni relations (how to market to our alumni) and the career management center (what support services can we offer MOOC students that would boost the appeal). I would like to encourage this committee to meet bi-weekly to review content changes, enrollment, outcome attainment, surveying and will present to the Executive Committee monthly. It will be important for the committee to stay on track therefore Dr. Ted Cross will manage this committee, submit annual reports on progress, and return on investment. After five-years, the program will undergo an evaluation to prepare for the future.

I believe the four-pronged plan is unique because it does not rely on one specific marketing strategy to achieve our outcomes. If we attack this challenge of subpar marketing from many avenues, we can be hopeful that our desired results will be realized.

The challenges that I foresee lie in bandwidth. We are a small college operating with minimal resources and an ever-growing task list. If one department does not have the time to uphold their responsibilities, our timeline could be impacted. Additionally, since one of our outcomes is to attract students in emerging markets to come to a global location to study, we always have to be mindful of travel restrictions (especially coming to the United States) and how that affects a prospective student's ability or interest level. To resolve these issues, it will be important to ensure staff are staying on task and consider hiring additional support if elements are being neglected. Our admissions team will also need to stay informed of travel and visa sanctions to ensure their message is clear and well received by international students.

Next, I would like to explore the importance of social media, which plays a large role in the success of Thunderbird's MOOC program. We use LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other platform to promote the webinars, announce discounts, summarize topics and feature upcoming instructors. It is also a great way to attract future students, share students experiences and success stories and connect students with the answers that they need (Ridley, 2018). Since this is a

grassroots marketing campaign, our marketing department, the academic department responsible for MOOC's will play a large role in posting to social media. In addition, the four professors who teach in the course can boost interest by posting to their personal accounts along with any staff or other faculty who have an interest in supporting the efforts.

Thunderbird may also want to consider utilizing one of the up and coming social media platforms. College student Andrew Watts noted Houseparty (videochat application) is one to watch among college students. Institutions need to be sure they are communicating via the most popular channels to ensure their message is received. Watts listed Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter as the most used sites among his peers (Watts, 2017).

Social media is a powerful tool, even in emerging markets. Fewer people in these countries have access to smartphones and the internet, but those who do are the ones we hope have the resources to take MOOC courses and they have proven to be very active on social media. In a recent study by Pew Research Center, 76 percent of Internet users across the 40 countries used social networking sites, with the most frequent users coming from regions with less access to the Internet (Cohen, 2016). In 2017, 51% of people had access to the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2017). The good news is that by 2023, 80% of people on Earth will have Internet access, which will offer a larger pool for our marketing efforts (Thompson, 2015).

Therefore, what does this all mean for the future of MOOCs and higher education? In a recent interview, ASU President Michael Crow stated that the future of higher education lies in personalized learning. He emphasized that people need to learn how to learn. Coincidentally, the most popular MOOC course of all-time is a class called, "Learning how to learn: powerful mental tools to help you master tough subjects." This class offered by the University of San Diego focuses on learning techniques that are utilized in a wide array of fields and has attracted 1.2 million students (OCR, n.d.).

Technology can create personal learning plans for individualized students and it will be a great way to break barriers to learning challenges. "Every person is biologically, psychologically, culturally, and sociologically different. So, why would we all learn in the same way?" (Unknown, July 2018).

With personalized technology to offer learning options to a variety of students, there should be no excuse for a person not to be able get an education. MOOCs are just one option; Lynda.com is another that offers tutorials on any subject at the touch of a button. The platform prides itself on helping anyone learn business, software technology and creative skills to reach professional and personal goals (Lynda.com, n.d.).

If watching videos do not appeal to a learner, perhaps e-gaming will appeal to their preferences. Students of the 21st-century have grown up using different technology from that which their professors grew up with so the option to learn through gaming should be taken seriously (Unknown, May 2018). With more than MOOC 9,400 courses available it didn't take long to find one on edX called "Leading Change: Go Beyond Gamification with Gameful Learning." This free course offered through the University of Michigan is described as an eight-

week course to learn the tools to support gameful learning environments that foster personalize, engaged learning in schools (edX, 2018).

By 2020, e-gaming will be a \$1.5 billion industry (Dunn, 2017). As popularity continues to grow, I would like to suggest Thunderbird considers a platform where International Business is taught through a gaming MOOC. There are games talking about gaming theory and game design (Coursera, 2018), but in my research, I have not located a MOOC focused on learning International Business through gaming. It may be a niche area that we can take advantage of in the MOOC space.

In conclusion, Thunderbird has great intentions of breaking into the MOOC market with a MicroMasters that offers a highly specialized global management education that will open pathways to leadership roles in multinational corporations as well as in non-governmental organizations (edX, 2018). However, in order to realize success we need to find a way to tap into the emerging market sector, which is our target audience for success. Through a focused marketing effort including utilizing edX's resources, our own resources (including our marketing and alumni departments, the faculty of the four MOOCs and the academic program overseeing MOOCs), our alumni, social media, donors and a referral program I strongly believe we can achieve the outcomes that we are looking for.

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