



## Clarifying confusion: open content, MOOCs and online learning

The arrival of MOOCs, especially the so-called X-MOOCs from the elite universities of the USA and the rest of the world, have provoked conversations in traditional residential universities which simply did not take place on a broad scale before. In particular, the issues of online learning and of open content have found their way into senior academic forums, and the inboxes of senior management layers of universities. Of course, neither open content nor online learning are new per se, but they had not reached mainstream conversations in most residential universities, let alone the elite ones.

Whatever else one might think of MOOCs, they are to be welcomed for making these credible and legitimate issues to discuss. However, because they have all arrived at the same time in a sense, there is some confusion about the concepts and the parameters of what each of these issues refer to. I have even heard all of them described (more than once) under the umbrella term of "open source" as in open source content, open sources courses and open source learning.

So here is a summary of these three overlapping areas showing their similarities and distinguishing elements.

	Open content	MOOC	Online course
Cost to user (for access)	Free	Free	Student pays fees
Scale	Granular, ranges from single objects to whole courses	Massive 10s of thousands, up to over 100 000	Small(er) scale
Entrance requirements	For stand alone courses, no	No	Yes, likely, just as for f2f courses
Interaction with lecturers and peers	No, content only	Yes, in variable ways	Yes, in variable ways
Providers	All	Residential universities Private-university partnerships	Traditionally distance education providers
Analytics and automation	No	Yes, one of the advantages of the new technical platforms	No, limited to date, as they tend to run on traditional LMS's
Certification	No	No, not traditional ie not the same as doing the course through the same university in the traditional way	Yes, equivalent to f2f/
Synchronous (time limits)	Stand alone	Has a start date and end date, asynchronous within those parameters	Has a start date and end date, asynchronous within those parameters
Copyright	Open licenses (eg Creative Commons) or public domain	Variable, open content is not automatic, user generated content generally belongs to	Generally proprietary, using textbooks as f2f courses do, may include some open content

I started writing a narrative to accompany this table, but think it is self-explanatory! If it is not, let me know :-)

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