

Frequently Asked Questions OERs & MOOCs

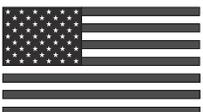


What is an OER? Open educational resources (OERs) are learning or teaching materials that can be used, adapted, and shared for free. Some can simply be downloaded and reproduced while others can be edited and reworked to suit a particular need. Among the organizations that provide information on and links to OERs are Creative Commons (www.creativecommons.org/education), OER Commons (www.oercommons.org/), and Connexions (www.cnx.org).

What is a MOOC? Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are virtual classes that are offered free and open to anyone with an internet connection. Most but not all MOOCs are produced by U.S. institutions; some are created and taught by faculty at higher education institutions in other countries. At this time, most MOOCs do not offer any credit to students who complete them, but they can provide useful information for those wanting to learn about subjects offered. They can also offer prospective

international students a glimpse of U.S. college or university-level classes. The MOOC environment is continually evolving, especially around the notion of providing credit for successful completion of courses. Some of the larger organizations offering MOOCs are Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/>), edX (<https://www.edx.org/>), and Udacity (<http://www.udacity.com/>).

MOOCs are a great way to give prospective international students a window into the U.S. system of higher education.



How is a MOOC structured? MOOCs are designed and taught by instructors from colleges and universities. Though the course delivery methods vary, a student enrolled in an open online course will usually follow an established course curriculum, which typically includes watching video lectures by the instructor and engaging in online discussions with fellow students. The student may have the opportunity to test her comprehension through quizzes and tests along the way. Some MOOCs have final tests that are graded electronically and may be proctored online or in a physical location for an additional fee. Others offer tests that require a written response, which are often graded by a group of students also enrolled in the MOOC. It is important to remember that the successful completion of a MOOC does not typically confer credit to a student.

Is there more to a MOOC than online videos and tests? Depending on the MOOC and the company or organization offering it, there are online forums and study groups in which students can participate. In some parts of the world, students taking the same MOOC organize in-person meet-ups to discuss course material and study together.

How are MOOCs useful for U.S. public diplomacy engagement? MOOCs created by U.S. institutions of higher education can offer free or low cost access to online courses at well-known U.S. institutions of higher education led by some of the most recognized experts in a given field. Most MOOCs offer a structured course timeline, reading lists, multimedia components, assignments, peer-to-peer study opportunities, and grading. In some cases, end users can receive a certificate of completion, credit, or a digital badge (see Mozilla Open Badge) for completing a course.

What information about MOOCs should EducationUSA advisers share with international students? EducationUSA advisers can share the above information with students who express an interest in MOOCs or who are looking for opportunities to experience an American higher education learning environment. Advisers should consider encouraging students who enroll in and complete a MOOC to include it in their college applications. Because MOOCs are generally full-length courses of study, students should be aware of the time and effort involved in participating in one. The EducationUSA network does not endorse any particular MOOC platform, producer, or provider.

