**ACE to Assess Potential of MOOCs, Evaluate Courses for Credit-Worthiness**

**November 13, 2012**

ACE today announced a wide-ranging research and evaluation effort that will examine the academic potential of massive open online courses (MOOCs).

Working with institutional leaders, organizations like Coursera and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA), and supported by generous funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ACE will leverage its position as the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions to identify and answer questions about the disruptive potential of this new and innovative approach to higher education.

The agenda for this project includes the following activities:

1.Creation of a Presidential Innovation Lab that will bring together presidents and chancellors from diverse institutions to engage in conversations about potential new academic and financial models inspired by the disruptive potential of MOOCs that can help address attainment gaps.

2.Evaluation of select Coursera courses for college credit by the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT).

3.Examination of effective approaches, pedagogies and practices that lead to student success, as well as the applicability of college credit recommendations for MOOCs to college degree completion programs.

"ACE's involvement in assessing education that occurs outside the traditional college classroom reaches back over decades, and our commitment to adult education stretches back to our very founding in 1918," said ACE President Molly Corbett Broad. "MOOCs are an intriguing, innovative new approach that holds much promise for engaging students across the country and around the world, as well as for helping colleges and universities broaden their reach. But as with any new approach, there are many questions about long-term potential, and ACE is eager to help answer them—questions such as whether MOOCs can help raise degree completion, deepen college curricula and increase learning productivity."

"MOOCs are an exciting innovation. They hold great promise, but are not without challenges—and we are still discovering their full potential," said Dan Greenstein, director, Postsecondary Success, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "We believe having diverse options for faculty and students that meet a wide array of learning needs and styles can enhance student engagement, improve educational outcomes and increase college completion rates. We are eager to learn from and share the data that will be generated from these investments in MOOCs."

Much of the work of this initiative will be overseen by Cathy A. Sandeen, who will join ACE in January 2013 as vice president for Education Attainment and Innovation. Sandeen has served since 2006 as dean of Continuing Education at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she recently negotiated a partnership with a Silicon Valley start-up called Empowered Careers, which re-trains baby boomers affected by the economic downturn. She previously served as vice provost and dean of the University Extension and Summer Session at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and assistant dean for educational support services at the University of California, San Francisco.

Presidential Innovation Lab

As traditional higher education considers the potential of MOOCs to challenge or transform current instructional and financial models, it is important to engage leaders in conversations about these issues. The Presidential Innovation Lab will offer an opportunity for higher education leaders to engage in proactive thinking about this new learning space and guide a national dialogue about potential new models that can help close persistent attainment gaps, including those among young, low-income adults. The outcomes of the Lab will be shared with the ACE membership, policymakers and the press.

"ACE is in a unique position to engage the higher education community in dialogue, informed by research-based evidence, about the potential of new learning designs, delivery methods and possible business models as creative responses to the nation's needs," said Patricia A. Book, ACE assistant vice president for Lifelong Learning and the principal investigator for the Gates grant.

Credit Evaluation

Adding to its roster of more than 600 clients, the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT) will evaluate for potential college credit select courses offered by Coursera, a leading provider of massive open online courses (MOOCs).

ACE CREDIT has connected workplace learning and higher education since 1974 by helping adults gain credit for courses and exams taken outside traditional degree programs. Clients include Fortune 500 companies like Starbucks and McDonald's, education providers like Skillsoft and government agencies like the Federal Aviation Administration.

During the ACE CREDIT review process, a team of academic faculty from relevant disciplines carefully evaluates courses and exams and makes college credit recommendations. (Actual credit is awarded at the discretion of individual colleges and universities.) In this way, qualified nontraditional education becomes eligible to count toward traditional degree programs. Through the ACE CREDIT Registry and Transcript System, adult learners who have successfully completed courses or exams with valid ACE CREDIT recommendations can obtain official transcripts for documentation.

"We believe strongly in the value of a college degree and, by offering these high-quality courses to students in a way that opens the potential of college credit, we hope to ease the path for students toward graduation," said Daphne Koller, co-founder of Coursera. "Our work with ACE aims to increase the number of students who attempt a degree, and further their chances of completion in a timely manner," added Andrew Ng, co-founder of Coursera.

Coursera, founded by Stanford University (CA) professors Koller and Ng, partners with more than 30 colleges and universities nationwide to offer high-quality online courses at no cost to the student. Courses are offered in the humanities, medicine, biology, social sciences, mathematics, business and computer science. To date, nearly 2 million students have registered for Coursera courses.

"The unique model Coursera is using enables higher education to embrace yet another way of serving individuals whose work and family responsibilities make it difficult to meet the time and place requirements of campus course offerings," said Gretchen M. Bataille, ACE senior vice president for Leadership and Lifelong Learning. "This initiative will add to, rather than subtract from, course offerings of higher education—serving more students and giving them more opportunities to access and succeed in higher education."

Research Agenda

Among the questions ACE will address in research undertaken in collaboration with the University of Illinois Springfield's Center for Online Learning, Research, and Service are to what extent do MOOCs reach low-income young adult and older adult learners, what is the level of satisfaction of students enrolled in MOOCs, and do MOOCs have the potential to help lead to degrees or certificates. This work will be performed using data from several MOOC platforms, including Coursera.

Working with UPCEA, ACE will assess the applicability of ACE CREDIT recommendations to degree completion programs aimed at adult learners. A pilot project with a small number of colleges and universities will seek to determine whether or not MOOCs are successful in re-engaging adult learners.

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