

Join movement to share courses, materials online

In the traditional model, professors impart knowledge to students who pay tuition for the privilege.

But there are good reasons why alternative course delivery methods are becoming popular, said Gary W. Matkin, dean of continuing education at the University of California, Irvine.

He heads up UCI's development of free, online course content and its involvement in the OpenCourseWare Consortium, an organization more than 200 institutions and associations have joined worldwide.

UCI offers open courses in subject areas including business and management, medical sciences and education.

If your institution doesn't offer open courses online, it's time to consider joining the movement. "My axiom is this: When something is possible and reasonably easy to do, eventually it will be mandatory," Matkin said. Reasons you might want to join the movement include:

1. Public service. Some of UCI's education courses are designed to help science and math teachers learn the material that enables them to pass the California Subject Examinations for Teachers. The state projects an enormous shortage of teachers in these subject areas in the near future.

2. Public relations. The service you provide to your community will enhance your brand.

3. Research. A traditional role of the university is to create knowledge and give it away, Matkin said.

4. Accreditation. Agencies expect institutions to be open and transparent about learning outcomes. Sharing materials online contributes to that goal.

5. Student services. Students who are enrolled in a class for credit can review material posted in the OpenCourseWare version. Also, students deciding what courses to take can access materials online.

6. Branding. "Your brand can be reinforced by using this kind of openness and presentation of your product," Matkin said. In academia, the courses are the product, and students want to know what to expect. Some students who have taken UCI's open courses have enrolled in for-credit courses as a follow-up.

Also, OpenCourseWare offers possibilities for sharing content in underserved regions of the world, Matkin said. For example, the Vietnamese government is pursuing open courseware as a means to revamp its educational system.

UCI has created a mutually beneficial arrangement with an institution in Brazil. The Fundação Getúlio Vargas, one of Brazil's largest providers of online education, licensed UCI's online Certificate Program in Project Management.

FGV officials translated the materials into Portuguese and customized course examples for local students. The institution offers the courses for credit and also allows users to take the courses free without credit. Noncredit students who pass assessments on the

site can print out a certificate of completion. More than 18,000 users have done so since the courses launched in the last quarter of 2008.

FGV shared the translated courses with UCI. UCI's promotion of the program led to more than 45,000 new visitors to its Continuing Education Web site, which lists fee-based certificate programs.

E-mail Gary W. Matkin at gmatkin@uci.edu. To learn more about OpenCourseWare at UCI, go to <http://ocw.uci.edu>. For more information on the OCW Consortium, visit www.ocwconsortium.org. ■

OpenCourseWare



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OpenCourseWare part of larger trend

The idea of offering free courses online is only a small part of a trend toward making information readily available to all, said Gary W. Matkin, dean of continuing education at the University of California, Irvine. Other developments that point to the trend include:

- Journals and scholarly publications are increasingly available online without charge.
- Free online textbooks and other course materials are being created. "The notion is beginning to swell under us that textbooks are too expensive," Matkin said.
- Accrediting bodies want institutions to openly share learning outcomes for each program and results, such as how many graduates got jobs and how many enrolled in graduate school. ■