MOOC Course Evaluation: Pedagogical Approach

This paper provides a pedagogical evaluation of Nutrition, Health, and Lifestyle: Issues and Insights, which is an online course offered by Vanderbilt University through Coursera.org. This course is free to the public, but there is also a Signature Track option which requires a fee of $49 and includes a Verified Certificate for individuals who complete the course.

The layout of the course information pages on Coursera provides a summary of information for those who are interested in enrolling. The transparency of the course requirements and expectations makes learners aware of exactly what they are signing up for. This particular course runs for eight weeks, and students are assigned 14 activities. To earn a Statement of Accomplishment, the student must complete 64% of the course. Students earning 75% or more receive a Statement of Accomplishment with Distinction.

Each week, students have access to video lectures including subtitles and PowerPoint slides. After viewing the content, students are to complete one assignment and one quiz per week. Quizzes, which make up seventy percent of the overall grade, can be taken up to three times, and the highest score is recorded. Assignments make up the other thirty percent of the grade, and they can only be submitted once. Although there is a summary page of the content for the entire course, the videos, quizzes and assignments are made available on a week-by-week basis.

This pedagogical approach has several advantages. First, due dates have a soft deadline and a hard deadline. The soft deadline is more like a suggestion, while the hard deadline is the last day students are able to submit assignments – the last week of the course. Allowing students to turn in assignments at any time can be encouraging for those who fall behind based on the recommended due dates. The course content is also very accessible for students with differing
needs and abilities, and of course, it can be accessed at any time. The integration of google hangouts also allows students to connect with each other on a more personal level. This course has been extremely popular in the past, and over 25,000 students are enrolled in the current session.

Although this course is very organized and accessible, I would suggest that the instructional designer take the following three suggestions into consideration when evaluating the course.

1. Allow students to see course content for all modules rather than making them available week by week. If lagging students are able to watch videos and submit assignments late, it only makes sense to allow overachievers to do the activities early. Some participants may want to skip around or only complete the activities that interest them. Fischman (2011) found that students may be pushed to learn more when they are able to accelerate at their own pace.

2. Only give students one chance on quizzes. Allowing multiple submissions lowers the stakes for students. Rather than making their best effort at the quiz the first time, students are likely to click through the questions to find out what information they need to gather before taking it.

3. Reduce the amount of video content. For the first week, there are thirteen videos listed. While each one is under fifteen minutes, the number is still overwhelming. Guo (2013) reported that when watching videos, students reach the peak of engagement at the six-minute mark regardless of video length.
References
