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**Subject:** MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) Moratorium at AU  
**Date:** May 8, 2013 2:17:30 PM EDT  
**To:** American University Faculty & Staff  
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AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

SCOTT A. BASS  
PROVOST

## MEMORANDUM

May 8, 2013

To: AU Faculty and Staff  
From: Scott A. Bass, Provost  
Re: MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) Moratorium at AU

On January 9, 2013, I issued to the deans a moratorium on MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) at AU. Recently, the Faculty Senate asked that I write to the campus community to clarify the current moratorium. In collaboration with the Faculty Senate, we are exploring the development of a policy regarding MOOCs at AU. The policy we craft will eventually be reviewed by the Board of Trustees. In the interim, there are many creative online instructional activities other than MOOCs in which the faculty may engage without violating the moratorium. Guidelines for these activities are cited herein.

As you may be aware, the swift rise of MOOCs has created a bit of national stir. A number of leading universities have partnered to offer free online courses through newly formed organizations such as Coursera, Udacity, and edX and now serve thousands of students at no cost. Seeking to lower the cost of higher education, governors, legislators, and boards are exploring the possible requirement that public universities accept academic credit for demonstrated competence based on MOOC offerings.

AU has just begun to set its direction in the online world. We have moved cautiously, but deliberately, to explore offering some of the very best credit-bearing, face-to-face programs online. MOOCs, however, are quite different from our efforts to offer online degree programs in that the courses are free, non-degree, and without credit. As an institution for which tuition is a financial necessity, our focus has been to find ways to offer our quality programs to a wider audience based on a traditional tuition model.

MOOCs raise a variety of important questions related to AU's underlying economic model. For example, what are the implications for our existing courses offered at full-tuition or should a similar course be available by an AU faculty member through a MOOC that is free? While other

universities may have worked through such issues, their financial underpinnings may be different than ours.

Other pertinent questions follow:

- What are the cost/benefits of offering a MOOC at AU?
- What is the justification for release time for an AU faculty member to teach for free?
- What is the initial course approval process by the unit and Faculty Senate?
- What is the approval process to allow a faculty member to teach a MOOC?
- Should there be evidence of quality prior instruction in order to be allowed to teach a MOOC?
- What is the role of the academic unit in oversight of the course?
- What are the legal responsibilities for a MOOC?

These are but a few of the questions that merit further discussion among faculty, deans, legal counsel, and university administration.

Despite these very real concerns, the Faculty Senate has suggested the following guidelines regarding permissible creative online activity (other than the university's regular tuition-generating, online, or hybrid courses offered through our schools and colleges) that may be undertaken and that do not violate the university's MOOC moratorium:

1. Traditional educational activities involving the exchange of material online, such as sharing a collection of lectures, i-Tunes material, workshops, blogs, and presentations, are permissible and does not require additional approval;
2. The activities should be non-credit bearing and free and may not be full courses;
3. The activities may be informal, but may not be graded or formally evaluated; lead to an academic certificate, badge, recognition or credential; bear academic credit, or offer certification of completion;
4. University resources are dedicated to the delivery of official AU online and face-to-face courses, and the delivery of other material should not utilize these resources;
5. Regular university obligations associated with teaching, scholarship, service, and other duties as assigned are priority and other creative online activities should not interfere with these priority obligations;
6. Faculty and staff must inform his or her chair, program director, or supervisor of such educational activities; and
7. Attribution of the affiliation with American University should be prominent without use of the AU logo.

The MOOC moratorium, and the aforementioned guidelines, will be in effect until a policy and practices related to this new online venue are approved.

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