

B2 MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2013 // THE ENQUIRER OHIO

## THE COLLEGE BUBBLE LAST OF TWO PARTS

# University of the future?

The brave new world of online courses may disrupt higher education

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Imagine a college education, cobbled together on your laptop at home.

Here, an economics course from Stanford University, taught online with 100,000 other students.

There, a math class at your local state university. Take statistics from a professor at MIT and basic computing from a community college hundreds of miles away.

Package them all into a degree. "What you're seeing now with online learning is the potential to unbundle the degree," said Burck Smith, president of StraighterLine, which offers about 60 courses online for \$99 a month. "The question for colleges is, is college more than the sum of its parts?"

That's the technological revolution that threatens to disrupt the world of higher education, where the process of moving high-school graduates toward a college degree hasn't changed much in a generation.

"What we're dealing with is the digital natives who are expecting this," said Christine Colella, director of the nurse practitioner program at the University of Cincinnati, who teaches several online courses. "It doesn't matter if your butt's in the seat or if you're at your own house."

A new path to a degree using different online providers would dramatically lower the cost for students, and even for universities.

More fundamentally, however, it could render the 20th century college campus, with its football stadiums and recreation centers and gleaming classroom buildings, less relevant for the 21st century college student.

Universities have been expanding online classes for at least a decade. Proprietary schools such as the University of Phoenix have collected huge profits from them.

"I wouldn't be able to go to college if it weren't for online classes," said Mariah Cunningham of Rising Sun, an online student in hospitality ad-

The screenshot shows the Coursera interface for the course 'Writing II: Rhetorical Composing' from Ohio State University. The course is taught by Susan Delagrange, Cynthia Selfe, Kay Halasek, Ben McCerle, and Scott Lloyd DeWitt. A 'Watch intro video' button is prominent. Below the course description, there are statistics: 55 students enrolled, 15 weeks long, and a workload of 6-10 hours per week. There is a 'Sign Up' button. The page also includes an 'About the Course' section and an 'About the Instructors' section.

A Coursera course description of a class taught online by Ohio State staff. Coursera was founded at Stanford University and has 2.5 million students worldwide. Many of the courses now are led by staff from other universities with which Coursera has partnered. Other course providers are increasing in number, quality and acceptance. PROVIDED

ministration at Beckfield College.

"You're not going to college to make friends. You're going to college for your future learning."

But in the last 12 months, the revolution has accelerated, with open online courses available to as many as 100,000 students – yes, in one class.

Those courses already have started gaining credits from traditional universities around the world, with more sure to follow.

That would create millions of new opportunities for students, tightening the noose around the necks of traditional universities that will have to adapt.

They're called MOOCs – massive open online courses – and they are perhaps the biggest challenge to traditional universities in 200 years.

Since they started sprouting up last year, the biggest MOOCs have earned endorsements from some of the nation's most prestigious universities. The biggest is Coursera,

### COLLEGE BUBBLE

Join the conversation as the Enquirer in 2013 explains the confusing and costly world of higher education. Today we examine an industry experts say is ripe for disruption, with consequences for students, parents, workers and the region's economy.

### VISIT A CLASS

▶ Sit in on an online course from UC's College of Nursing at Cincinnati.com

### WHAT CAME BEFORE

Also read Sunday's initial installment of our look at the potential college bubble. At Cincinnati.com.

which was founded at Stanford University and has 2.5 million students worldwide.

Traditional universities have reacted to MOOCs in the same way – ramping up their own online courses

and emphasizing the face-to-face interaction with professors and campus experience.

None of the universities in Greater Cincinnati offer credit for MOOCs, although Ohio State offers several Coursera classes and UC has started its own open online course for next fall.

The threat from providers such as Coursera or StraighterLine is no longer academic. Sometime soon, a student could walk into the registrar's office at UC or Northern Kentucky University or the College of Mount St. Joseph and request credit for an online course taught by another provider.

The American Council on Education has recommended five Coursera classes for credit, which means that universities will have to decide whether to allow students to take the class and claim credit.

Liz Thompson, a regent at Northern Kentucky University, said at a board meeting in November that

NKU should realize that MOOCs are an option.

"It seems to me we should consider using those courses in our courses of study and using that to lower the cost of education for our students," she said.

**Convenient for students:  
'It's just like being in class'**

The popularity of online courses is simple: Students love the convenience.

"To me, it's the real college experience because of the instructors," said Will Fitzimmons of West Chester, who's working toward an online criminal justice degree at Beckfield. "I don't really feel like it's lacking in any way. I love it."

Cunningham, who works as a housekeeper at a southeastern Indiana casino, said she's using college just as a traditional student would use it, to earn herself a better life.

"We have the discussion forums, and I talk to my classmates. It's just like being in class."

Local universities have invested big into online education. At UC's College of Nursing, for example, thousands of students take online courses developed by three instructional designers and two course builders, all devising new ways to translate classes online.

In one course taught by Colella, she posts a video walking through a clinical setting, while the students post video and audio to simulate the experience themselves, writing in an online journal as they go. At some points, they answer questions to ensure they've mastered one concept before moving on.

"It's all done in first person so the student feels like they're walking into the room," said Matt Rota, director of instructional design. "We're going to be focusing on more simulation in our courses."

Colella said students who did the exercise on-site came up with the same diagnosis as those taking the course online.

There are barriers to overcome.

For example, supervising an exam with 150 online students is a challenge. UC has hired a vendor, ProctorU, with the student required to show their ID card to a camera and upload the photo to a website.

Professors give the course content to Rota and other designers. Techniques include questions that students can answer both before and after the video exercise.

And this year, students can listen to lectures on their iPod, then join the rest of the class online later for the video exercise.

That's called "flipping the classroom," the newest trend that nearly all universities are embracing in some form.

"The beauty of it is, we're allowing them to get this education in a place where they want to do it, which means patients are going to get care everywhere," Rota said. ■