

# **Coursera makes top college courses free online**

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That dream was joined this week by a dozen vaunted academic institutions including Duke University, the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland and the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

The schools will add online versions of classes to Coursera.org, a website

launched by Stanford University professors Koller and Ng early this year with debut offerings from Princeton, Stanford and two other US universities.

"We have a vision where students everywhere around the world, regardless of country, family circumstances or financial circle have access to top quality education whether to expand their minds or learn valuable skills," Koller said.

"Where education becomes a right, not a privilege."

Academic institutions are increasingly turning to the Internet as an educational platform. A Khan Academy website created by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate Salman Khan provides thousands of video lectures.

The nonprofit behind prestigious TED gatherings recently launched a TED-Ed channel at [YouTube](#) that teams accomplished teachers with talented animators to make videos that captivate while they educate.

In May, Harvard University and MIT announced that they were teaming up to expand their online education programs -- and invited other institutions to jump on board.

Called edX, the \$60 million joint venture builds on MIT's existing MITx platform that enables video lesson segments, embedded quizzes, immediate feedback, online laboratories and student-paced learning.

"Universities have come to realize that online is not a fad," Koller said. "The question is not whether to engage in this area but how to do it."

Coursera classes are free, and completion certificates are issued that people can use to win jobs or improve careers.

"If a student takes a Stanford computer class and a Princeton business class, it shows they are motivated and have skills," Koller said. "We know it has helped employees get better jobs."

Coursera is distinguishing itself with essentially virtual versions of real classes.

"A lot of what is out there is basically video with, perhaps, some static content like lecture notes," Koller said.

"We are providing an actual course exchange where people register and there is weekly homework that is graded with feedback about how they are doing."

Coursera classes launched in February with most of the courses slated to begin in the coming months but it has already attracted students in 190 countries, according to Koller.

Coursera uses crowd-sourcing to translate material into various languages and hopes to connect with French-speaking populations around the world with EPFL classes.

Hoping to spread knowledge around the world, Coursera is a way to inspire faculty to try new methods of teaching and find ways that Internet Age tools can enhance on-campus courses, according to Duke provost Peter Lange.

"Our faculty is incredibly excited by the idea of trying it out and seeing if we can learn from it," Lange said.

"I love the idealism of it; the potential to reach people who might never get the chance to attend the university."

Duke designs its online courses to get students involved, complete with social networking tools for collaborating outside of classes.

"This is a great experiment in innovation and learning," Lange said.

As of Friday, Coursera boasted about 740,000 students and that number is expected to soar as word spreads and class offerings expand.

Coursera plans to keep classes free but perhaps one day make money for operations by charging for course completion certificates or matching employers with qualified workers.

"Current ethos in Silicon Valley is that if you build a website that people keep coming back to and is changing the lives of millions, you can eventually make money," Koller said.

"If and when we develop revenue, universities will share in it."

Paying the bills is not a worry at Coursera due to generous backing that includes a \$3.7 million combined investment by the University of Pennsylvania and the California Institute of Technology, as well as funding from venture capital powerhouse Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers.

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