

OpenStudy aims to create worldwide study group

November 17 2010



OpenStudy allows students from across the globe to turn to each other for study help. The company, which was started in Georgia Tech's Advanced Technology Development Center, is comprised of Ashwin Ram, associate professor at Georgia Tech's College of Computing; Phil Hill, Chief Executive Officer; Chris Sprague, Tech alumnus; and Preetha Ram, associate dean for pre-health and science education at Emory University. Credit: Rob Felt/Georgia Tech

Think about online courses. They're great, right? You take a professor who's interested in teaching a certain topic, say computer science, and hook him or her up with hundreds or thousands of students across the globe who want to learn. Add some podcasting technology and you've got an online class where people from all walks of life can learn about computer science. Except there's one problem.

"What happens when the [students](#) need help? Who can they turn to?"

said Ashwin Ram, associate professor in Georgia Tech's College of Computing.

So, Ram teamed up with his wife, Preetha Ram, associate dean for pre-health and [science education](#) at Emory University; Chris Sprague, a Georgia Tech alumnus; and entrepreneur Phil Hill in 2007 to create OpenStudy, an online system that links students with other students from around the world in real time, so they can get help at any time, day or night.

"We want to make the entire world your study group," said Ram.

OpenStudy debuted this August and already has more than 11,000 users from 151 countries, with a particularly large presence in the U.S., China, India and Brazil. Using OpenStudy is free. All a user has to do is sign up and connect with a study group that covers their topics of interest.

But why would people bother answering others' questions?

"We've found that people get significant gratification from helping people right now," said Hill. "Connecting, conversing and helping a stranger in need provides a unique feeling and actually helps the learner to better understand the material herself."

"We've seen some fantastic examples of students, worldwide, connecting and helping each other, such as a student from Los Angeles being helped with chemistry by a student from Istanbul, Turkey," added Ram.

Currently about 90 percent of the questions posed on OpenStudy are answered, and each question asked receives input from an average of 4.5 other students.

Each user has a profile page that shows how many questions each one

has asked and answered as well as how helpful their answers have been. A few weeks ago, OpenStudy added a feature that allows people to rate the quality of the answers they've been given.

"We've found that this feature helps to motivate our users. Strong peer recognition is really important to people who provide help," said Hill.

OpenStudy has more than 350 study groups that users can join, such as AP History, Natural Language@Georgia Tech or Emory Biology. To join a course, just use the search function to find a topic of interest. The site has also teamed up with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's OpenCourseWare, the world's largest provider of free educational classes. Students taking one of their courses can join one of 10 official MIT study groups on the MIT website.

"We will continue to extend the reach of OpenStudy so that study help is within reach of every student in the world regardless of location, social background or the time of day," said Hill.

Provided by Georgia Institute of Technology

Citation: OpenStudy aims to create worldwide study group (2010, November 17) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-openstudy-aims-worldwide-group.html>

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