

Stanford Artificial Intelligence course draws avalanche of sign-ups

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Image: ai-class.com

(PhysOrg.com) -- A whopping 58,000, [the number keeps climbing; this is a conservative total] people have signed up for a single free online course at Stanford. People from around the world—of high school age, adults, and elderly—want to do this one course. The freebie is on Artificial Intelligence. The two professors teaching the course have exceptional calling cards as AI experts. They are Peter Norvig and Sebastian Thrun.

Thrun, a professor of computer science at Stanford, helped develop the well-publicized Google self-driving car, a cloud computing vehicle that runs on sensors, cameras, artificial intelligence, and GPS.

Peter Norvig is Director of Research at Google and with Stuart Russell wrote an important textbook on AI, [Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach](#).

In a video to the world, Thrun extends the welcome mat. “Get ready to take a fascinating journey” into AI, he says. “When I was a young student in Germany, there were no classes in AI that I could take.”

He and Norvig did not know what to expect when they first announced the course, but an e-mail message that was sent out about it turned into an avalanche of responses that Thrun finds “amazing.” So might the results be as they settle in to teach the course. Their instructional system, to run on an Amazon cloud, will be drawing generously on user feedback.

Unlike Phase One of Internet online course efforts, which were flat video lectures, the Stanford scientists will use streaming Internet video and interactive features for quizzes. Google Moderator software will allow the two teachers to make sure they are answering the most pressing questions.

The 10 week course will present two [lectures](#) each week, lasting over an hour but cut up into 15-minute sessions when the user wants to access them, along with homework, and quizzes.

Their inspiration has been Salman Khan, the ex-hedge fund manager who quit his day job to sit in a closet in his home making videotapes of math and science lessons with the aid of a computer screen, tablet and pen. He used his own savings; then movers and shakers took notice. Educators praise Khan for being on to something important: technology as a medium for effective, engaging learning.

Khan’s dream has been to “flip the script” on the education system. In his perfect world, science and math concepts and procedures are taught via technology, not via a desperate teacher shouting about polynomials, to 30 students, many of whom are not keeping up. The Khan computer screen shows moving lines of an equation (not a human frowning face) doing

the real work of instruction. Classroom time is used for teacher student collaboration and review.

The online students in the Stanford effort will not get Stanford credit, but they will receive a “statement of accomplishment.”

The AI course is one of three being offered as an experiment by the computer science department at Stanford. The two other courses are an introductory course on database software and an introduction to machine learning.

"I personally would like to see the equivalent of a Stanford computer science degree on the Web," Andrew Ng told [The New York Times](#). Professor Ng will teach the course on machine learning.

More information: www.ai-class.com/

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