

Duke to offer free courses on internet

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Biologist Mohamed Noor, a teaching award-winner at Duke, says bringing the latest scholarship to the public through online classes "is a really good thing."

Duke University will begin offering courses free on the Internet, school officials said Tuesday. Doing so will extend Duke's expertise to a broader global audience while using technology to enhance the classroom experience for its students on campus, officials added.

Duke will accomplish this through a partnership with Coursera, a California-based education company that provides a platform for universities to deliver online [courses](#). Coursera was founded in 2011 with four partner universities: Stanford, Michigan, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania.

Duke is one of a dozen universities joining Coursera now. The others are the University of Washington, Georgia Tech, the University of Illinois, the University of Virginia, California Institute of Technology, Rice

University, the University of Toronto, Johns Hopkins University, the University of California-San Francisco, the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and EPF Lausanne, a technical university in Switzerland.

Coursera provides a single home for courses from multiple universities. The courses may include [video lectures](#) with interactive quizzes, collaborative online forums and interactive assignments.

"We're really pleased with this partnership," said Duke Provost Peter Lange, the university's chief academic officer. "Coursera has the potential to substantially influence how we teach our own students on campus as well as to extend the reach of our faculty and show their intellectual strength on a global scale."

The Coursera partnership is one of several Duke is exploring to improve teaching with technology, university officials say. A handful of Duke courses will debut on Coursera this fall, with more to follow in the spring, Lange said. About a dozen faculty members have expressed an interest in participating so far, he added.

Coursera was founded in fall 2011 by two Stanford computer science professors. It builds on technology they developed to host Stanford's free online courses. Since Coursera's inception, 650,000 students from 190 countries have taken courses with it more than 1.5 million times.

Anyone, anywhere can take a Coursera course. Lectures are broken into segments as short as 10 minutes and can be coupled with brief, online quizzes. Students interact primarily through discussion groups and message boards. Classes have been as short as four weeks and as long as 12 weeks.

"It just gives people who want to learn more very easy access to knowledge," said Mohamed Noor, a Duke biologist who will teach an

introductory genetics and evolution course through Coursera. "The idea of having this material available to the general public at no cost is a really good thing."

Noor expects to use his Coursera experience to improve the teaching he does on campus. He plans to offer his Coursera class and the traditional version of it at the same time next spring. He will provide the lectures he records for Coursera to his Duke students, who can view them before class and then spend class time working in groups and doing interactive exercises rather than passively listening to a lecture. It's a model Duke's medical school has applied at its campus at the National University of Singapore.

"It's an opportunity to change the classroom around and really engage the students," Noor said.

He views the Coursera version of his course as enhancing, not competing with, the traditional product his students pay to receive on campus. His Duke students also participate in laboratories and other hands-on activities and enjoy regular face-to-face interactions with him, teaching assistants and each other, Noor noted.

Nine other Duke faculty members have committed to the Coursera project so far and will teach courses in astronomy, engineering, philosophy, neuroscience, nursing, human physiology and cell biology. Duke's Center for Instructional Technology and the Office of Information Technology will work with faculty to design their online courses, record video and create online student assignments.

Duke's level of future involvement is contingent on the program's popularity and the faculty's interest in participating, say school officials, acknowledging that the relationship took shape over the summer when many [faculty members](#) weren't on campus. There will be more

opportunities for faculty to get involved, Lange said.

"We're experimenting," said Susan Lozier, an earth and ocean sciences professor who chairs Duke's Academic Council. "We're trying to be thoughtful and deliberate and figure out how this enhances what Duke already does."

Provided by Duke University

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