MOOCS and Quality Issues: A Student Perspective
Glenn Finger & Lisa Capan

Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have become the focus of exploration and analysis as a disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997) to education. There are significant claims made about the potential of MOOCs to transform schooling and higher education (Ernst & Young, 2012; Norton et al., 2013). Education policy and practice is guided by considerations of quality. This paper provides a student perspective ‘from the inside’ in relation to MOOCs and questions of quality. The perspectives are situated within wider, more general, questions about quality issues about MOOCs ‘from the outside’ which remain largely unresolved (Kinash, 2014). Those concerns about quality include questions relating to the business model to sustain MOOCs, intellectual property issues, course design including the assessment design, and questions about credit for completing a MOOC. Value propositions for students and for faculty staff involved in the design, creation and delivery of MOOCs are discussed. The paper concludes that, while MOOCs are potentially a disruptive innovation, it is possible that future designs of MOOCs will see improvements on the current learning design evident in early versions of MOOCs.

Introduction – MOOCs, Quality and Student Perspectives

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have become the focus of exploration and analysis as a disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997) to education. There are significant claims made about the potential of MOOCs to transform schooling and higher education. This is reflected, for example, in the Ernst and Young (2012) report University of the future A thousand year old industry on the cusp of profound change which sees digital technologies and global mobility as two of five megatrends as drivers of change that will transform higher education; namely,

- Democratisation of knowledge and access,
- Contestability of markets and funding,
- Global mobility,
- Integration with industry, and
- Digital technologies (Ernst & Young, 2012).

In relation to digital technologies and MOOCs, they indicate:

*The so-called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are an early stage example of the search for new models. Some of these models will decline and fail, others will create very substantial economic value. Winners are likely to be a mix of new, pure play online businesses and traditional businesses with powerful online models and capability.* (Ernst & Young, 2012, p. 9)

In relation to global mobility, they warn:
Global mobility of academic brands is a newer phenomenon, but is also growing in importance. ‘MOOC-based’ distribution of content by the likes of Harvard, MIT and others is creating a global brand impact, if not revenue at this stage. (Ernst & Young, 2012, p. 10)

While these transformations might be possible (Ernst & Young, 2012; Norton et al., 2013), education policy and practice is guided by considerations of quality. Similarly, as shown in the review of relevant literature presented in this paper, the growth of MOOCs has been accompanied by questions of quality (Fain, 2012; Legon, 2013; Quality Matters, 2014) with unresolved issues (Kinash, 2014). This paper provides a contribution to this ongoing MOOC conversation by providing a student perspective in relation to MOOCs and questions of quality. The perspectives have been generated by a co-author as participant in the Surviving Disruptive Technologies MOOC offered by Coursera in late 2013.

Thus, this paper, in presenting these student perspectives from the inside (Everet & Louis, 2001), is situated within wider, more general, questions about quality issues about MOOCs from the outside which remain largely unresolved. Those concerns about quality include questions relating to the business model to sustain MOOCs, intellectual property issues, course design, the assessment design, and questions about credit for completing a MOOC. Value propositions for students and for faculty staff involved in the design, creation and delivery of MOOCs are discussed. The paper concludes that, while MOOCs are potentially a disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997), it is possible that future designs of MOOCs will see improvements on the current learning design evident in these early versions of MOOCs.

**Review of relevant literature**

This review of relevant literature examines the emergence of MOOCs, and then proceeds to examine and identify some of the issues being raised in relation to MOOCs and quality.

**Emergence of MOOCs**

The rapid emergence of MOOCs in 2012 and their subsequent growth has been highlighted well by Norton et al. (2013) in the Grattan Institute report *The online evolution: when technology meets tradition in higher education,*

In higher education, 2012 was the year of the MOOC – the massive open online course. At the year’s end, several million students had enrolled in education providers started during the year. The big MOOC providers – Coursera, edX and Udacity – were the fastest-moving start-ups in higher education history. (Norton et al., 2013, p. 5)

To illustrate the growth of MOOCs, that report published in April 2013 stated that Coursera had “signed up over 60 top-tier universities from around the world and enrolled more than three million students in 330 courses” (Norton et al., 2013). At the time of writing this paper, approximately 12 months later in March 2014, this had grown to Coursera having 108 partners, with more than 6,500,000 ‘Courserians” and Coursera now offering 631 courses.

Similar growth and presence is evident in edX (edX, 2014 - see https://www.edx.org/) governed by MIT and Harvard University, and Udacity (Udacity, 2014a - see https://www.udacity.com/), started by several scientists from Stanford University. There are similar themes conveyed in their respective missions. For example, Udacity claims that:

*Our online courses are rigorous and may even make you sweat. Tackling projects built by tech leaders like Google, AT&T, and Intuit, you’ll stretch yourself and learn new and relevant skills. Enroll today—we’ll help you succeed and cheer you on every step of the way!* (Udacity, 2014b)

Elsewhere, the Coursera mission is outlined on their website as follows:
Coursera is an education platform that partners with top universities and organizations worldwide, to offer courses online for anyone to take, for free. We envision a future where everyone has access to a world-class education. We aim to empower people with education that will improve their lives, the lives of their families, and the communities they live in. (Coursera, 2014a)

Undoubtedly, the emergence of MOOCs reflects not only significant growth in the numbers of students and courses being offered, but there have been associated issues in relation to MOOCs and quality, which are discussed briefly in the following section.

MOOCs and quality

An excellent starting point in discussions about quality of online courses is the Quality Matters (QM) Higher Education Rubric (Quality Matters, 2014) which highlights the importance of alignment of course components, including the Learning Objectives, Assessment and Measurement, Instructional Materials, Learner Interaction and Engagement, and Course Technology and how these enable students to develop and demonstrate the learning outcomes. The rubric provides 8 general standards and 41 specific standards and can be used to evaluate the design of online and blended courses. Moreover, “The Rubric is complete with annotations that explain the application of the standards and the relationship among them” (Quality Matters, 2014, p. 1). To illustrate, one of the standards – Standard 5 – focuses on Learner Interaction and Engagement and provides 4 indicators; namely,

5.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives.
5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.
5.3 The instructor’s plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated.
5.4 The requirements for student interaction are clearly articulated.

Earlier in 2012, the Gates Foundation which had offered grants to support the development of MOOCs, engaged QM involvement with that grant program in what might have been “the first effort to test whether MOOCs can meet quality design standards, incorporate proven methods of effective online instruction, and be effective for different learners” (Quality Matters, 2014, p. 1). The QM review involved MOOCs delivered through various platforms, including Blackboard, Udacity, Coursera, D2Learn, and EdX. In relation to QM standards, the outcomes of that review were disseminated in December 2013. Twelve courses were completed by the review deadline, with three courses meeting the standards after the first review, one course met the standards after an amendment, and one MOOC is expected to meet the standards after changes are made. Consequently, the inference can be made that the other seen courses were problematic on one or more of the QM standards.

Shown in Table 1 is a synthesis from the summary provided in Quality matters applied to MOOCs (Heidi, 2 December 2013) drawn from the Eli Webinar presented by Deb Adair, QM Managing Director and Chief Planning Officer, and this represented QM’s first attempt at applying QM to MOOCs.

Table 1 Synthesis of Key Findings – Quality Matters applied to MOOCs (Source: Heidi, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was done well</th>
<th>QM Standards Issues*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Course Overview and Introduction</td>
<td>• Technology skills expectations clearly stated, articulation of course support services, uses accessible technologies - 50% missed these standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment and measurement</td>
<td>• Learning outcomes clearly stated, module learning objectives measurable, articulate accessibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MOOCs and Quality Issues: A Student Perspective

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>policies - 42% missed these standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Course learning objectives measurable, response time clearly stated - 33% missed these standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*It was determined that many of the accessibilities issues were related to the chosen delivery platform, not necessarily an issue with the way the MOOC was developed.

The Bottom Line

These non-credit bearing MOOCs could have obtained certification by addressing some basic policy information that should be standard in any course.

Elsewhere, Fain notes that “Early returns show that massive open online courses (MOOCs) work best for motivated and academically prepared students” (Fain, 2012, p. 1). However, Fain suggests that the question which the Gates Foundation wanted to answer was - could high-quality MOOCs benefit a broader range of learners? Similarly, Ron Legon, Executive Director of QM, in commenting on the quality of MOOCs, argued that far too little attention has been evident, and stated:

*On the face of it, the organizing principles of MOOCs are at odds with widely observed best practices in online education, including those advocated by my organization, the Quality Matters Program. Many of the first MOOCs are providing quality of content, but are far behind the curve in providing quality of design, accountable instructional delivery, or sufficient resources to help the vast majority of students achieve a course’s intended learning outcomes.* (Legon, 2013, p. 1)

Importantly, Legon suggests that “the best MOOC 2.0 courses may turn out to be “hybrids” that combine the characteristics of quality online courses with a lower threshold for risk-free exploration, enabling them to reach more online learners and stimulate them” (Legon, 2013, p. 1). Elsewhere, Gregson (2013) identified several concerns about the MOOC agenda. These included risks associated with corporate sponsorship and influence over content, MOOCs might become the ‘cheap seats’ of the increasingly, stratified, unequal higher education sector, and that MOOCs represent a “fairly naked threat to the working conditions of existing and future higher education workers” (Gregson, 2013, p. 33). Gregson concludes with a strong caution in relation to MOOCs and quality.

*MOOC fans will say this horse has long since bolted and those of us who still think quality pedagogy requires time and space are hopelessly utopian, but if we do not retain some vision of what quality higher education should look like, this form of online 'learning' may well become just another sign that the real focus is on the price!cost of education and not its true value.*” (Gregson, 2013, p. 33)

The co-authors of this paper attended and participated in the eLearn 2013 World Conference Pre-Conference Symposium dedicated to MOOCs in Las Vegas, and actively engaged in the MOOCs and Course Quality roundtable. Associated with the QM issues identified in the literature review, that roundtable identified issues associated with the monetisation and business models to sustain and grow MOOCs, intellectual property issues, MOOCs and assessment design, and credit issues. Evident also was the question – what is the value proposition for students and for faculty staff involved in the design, creation of MOOCs? At that symposium, George Siemens, in his presentation MOOCs: Where next?, suggested that, “While MOOCs as a concept are over-hyped and will likely fade in prominence, the attention now being directed to online learning, development of new software, new assessment techniques, and new pedagogies will last” (Siemens, 2013). The emerging analysis of this discourse about MOOCs reflect questions of quality and questions of what MOOCs might become and/or inform other forms of online learning.

Research design

This study aimed to investigate a student’s perspective on the experience of studying a MOOC in order to make assessments about MOOCs and quality issues. The course selected for this study was Surviving Disruptive Technologies offered by the University of Maryland, through Coursera, and was undertaken in late 2013. The authors disclose from the outset that the co-author was a participant in this study, who undertook this course, and successfully completed the assessment tasks for the course. This is important to disclose, so that critical perspectives are not seen as being influenced by a
negative outcome achieved by the co-author as the course participant. Thus, this should not be seen as an assumption that the outcome was negative from this student perspective. Similarly, as this student succeeded in this course, it should not be assumed that everything about the MOOC experience was positive.

Consequently, rather than relying solely on reports and research by other parties about MOOCs, this study was initiated by a desire to gain first hand experiences through a student perspective by one of the co-authors engaging in a MOOC. The co-author became a participant in the course. Therefore, the methodology was guided by this aim of the study which focused on a values-based approach, as there was a need to work within a qualitative, naturalistic paradigm in which the inquiry is value-bound, influenced by inquirer values as expressed in the choice of the problem itself, and in the framing, bounding and focusing on that problem (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2004, p. 137). In addition, as a co-author was involved in a program of learning, the context within which the study took place assumed that the attribution of meaning was continuous and evolving over time (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 137).

Elsewhere, in relation to organisational research, relevant to this study are two different paradigms discussed by Evered and Louis (2001) as inquiry from the inside and inquiry from the outside, with the former evident in this study in which the researcher is a participant in the course, rather than being detached from the outside. However, from the inside observations are complemented by an analysis from the outside, by couching the student perspectives of participating in the Surviving Disruptive Technologies course within wider literature, implications and issues.

In summary, data were collected throughout the course from the inside, focusing on the design and implementation of the course, including the content, delivery (such as the Video Lectures, Discussion Forums), and the assessment design (Mid Term and Final Term Projects. Specifically, these are couched within the 10 unresolved MOOC issues from the outside, as identified by Kinash (2014) and shown later in this paper in Table 2 in the following section, which provides a summary of the findings from a student perspective. This reflects alternating between inside and outside perspectives, and addresses the limitations associated with being limited to only the inside set of perspectives (Evered & Louis, 2001).

Summary of Findings – A Student Perspective

About the course – Surviving Disruptive Technologies

The course Surviving Disruptive Technologies was offered by the University of Maryland through Coursera. As shown in Figure 1, the purpose of this course was “to help individuals and organizations survive when confronted with disruptive technologies that threaten their current way of life” (Coursera, 2013). The aim of the course goes on to outline the focus of the course; namely,

We will look at a general model of survival and use it to analyze companies and industries that have failed or are close to failing. Examples of companies that have not survived include Kodak, a firm over 100 years old, Blockbuster and Borders. It is likely that each of us has done business with all of these firms, and today Kodak and Blockbuster are in bankruptcy and Borders has been liquidated. Disruptions are impacting industries like education; Coursera and others offering these massive open online courses are a challenge for Universities. In addition to firms that have failed, we will look at some that have survived and are doing well. What are their strategies for survival? (Coursera, 2013).
It was easy to enrol online, and there were no costs associated with enrolling. The admission requirements indicated that:

*By registering or participating in services or functions on the Sites, you hereby represent that you are over 18 years of age, an emancipated minor or in possession of consent by a legal parent or guardian and have the authority to enter into the terms herein. In any case, you affirm that you are over the age of 13 as the Site is not intended for children under 13. If you are under 13 years of age, do not use the Sites.* (Coursera, 2014b)

Therefore, as a student, it was noted that, with parental consent, a student might be 13 years or over. In addition, it was noted that there were no other entry requirements, such as previous secondary school or tertiary qualifications. This is an important consideration when assessment design is discussed later in this paper, particularly in relation to the use of peer assessment.

**Course Format**

The 7 week course format consisted of a ‘Syllabus’ which had two ‘classes’ each week. For example, Week 1 consisted of Topics, such as Class 1 – Survival, and Class 2 – Kodak misses its moment. As shown in the Course Menu in Figure 2, the course design provided Video Lectures, Discussion Forums, Weekly Assignments, details about the Mid Term and Final Term Projects, the Syllabus, Surveys, Course Wiki, and Join a Meetup.

Also, as shown in Figure 2, these video lectures ranged in duration from 4:56 minutes through to no longer than 21:47 minutes. Interestingly, from a student perspective, the asynchronous access was an effective design, as the student was travelling from Australia to the United States, Singapore and Malaysia during this course. From a student perspective, it seemed that videos that were 4-6 minutes seemed optimal, while those longer than 10 minutes seemed to be too long. Thus, weekly topics broken into smaller video lectures seemed to reflect better design than, for example, presenting a single one hour video lecture each week.

**Figure 1: Coursera - Surviving Disruptive Technologies – University of Maryland**
Figure 2: Surviving Disruptive Technologies Course Menu and Video Lectures

Student Perspective – Course quality – Discussion forums and peer assessment

There was a heavy reliance on the participation of students in the Discussion Forums, and all assessment tasks relied totally on students undertaking peer assessment.

While participation on the Discussion Forums was not an assessable component of the course, there was the generation of ‘Forum Reputations’. To some extent, this incentivized and encouraged the co-author as participant to engage in the forums. As shown in Table 1, the co-author as participant created 4 threads, provided 50 posts, and achieved 10 points, ranking 7th on the Forum reputations.

Table 1 Forum Reputations – at 16 December 2013 after the course was completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Threads</th>
<th>Posts/Comments</th>
<th>Upvoted/Downvoted</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Name Removed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name Removed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name Removed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name Removed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name Removed</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name Removed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEC 2014 Paper Co-author as participant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the Course Statistics are unknown, no commentary can be provided in relation to the number of students undertaking this course and the percentage of students who contributed to the Discussion Forums. However, it seemed that most of the discussion was contributed to by approximately 20-30 highly engaged, visible students in these forums. In addition, it was observed that comments were frequently about course related matters, rather than substantive dialogue about the content and the development of deep learning.

These perspectives are consistent with the findings by Brinton et al. (2013) who investigated forum activities, since social learning is a key MOOC design feature and driver in scalable models. They noted two features of MOOC forum activities, namely, a high decline rate whereby the volume of discussions in the forum declines continuously throughout the duration of the course, and that ‘high-volume, noisy discussions’ are evident. They warn that approximately 30% of the courses produce so many new discussion threads that it is not feasible for either the students or the teaching staff to read through and respond to these. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the discussions are not directly course-related, as experienced in the Surviving Disruptive Technologies discussions. Examples include the introductions which sometimes result in threads which talk about the roles and locations of students, rather than the course content.

Brinton et al. studied the discussion threads associated with 73 courses offered by Coursera, involving 115,000 students who wrote over 800,000 posts in 170,000 different threads. They noted a dramatic decline as a course progressed, and, classify the posts into three categories; i.e. small talk (student introductions that are of little use in completing the course), discussions about course logistics (such as when to submit assignments), and course-specific questions which are the most useful for students. This is consistent with the experience of the student in this study.

Student Perspective – Assessment issues

Students undertaking this course were not required to complete the assessments. However, for those seeking the Certificate, there was a Mid Term Project and a Final Term Project. For a student to have her/his work assessed, there was a requirement that the student agreed to peer assess at least 5 other student assignments. Both the Mid Term Project and the Final Project were peer assessed.

In relation to the Mid Term Project, no clear statements about the standards, criteria, length or referencing system and expectations were provided. Therefore, there were no standards descriptions for calibrating and moderating to guide the making of judgements about the standards of work being assessed. Importantly, there was no process for developing assessor capabilities. Given that enrolment in this course was ‘open’ to anyone over 13 years and previous tertiary experience was not required for admission, this held the potential for a novice student to be assessing the work of another student at a University level.

These concerns were evident in the discussion forums after the Mid Term Project had been assessed. To illustrate, the co-author as participant stated:

As a student in this course who wanted my work assessed, and therefore I agreed to assess the work of others, I had searched carefully for standards and criteria upon which to create my assignment, and to be able to reliably assess the work of other students. I was quite surprised when I saw these when I undertook the assessment of other students. (Co-author)
Another student commented, “I must say that the midterm exam was the worst exam I’ve ever taken”. In the Discussion Forums, the co-author noted that some who undertook the peer assessment said that they marked students low if their responses were short, while others indicated that they marked students low if they provided long answers. The way in which this was designed and implemented did not enable inter-rater reliability. For students who believed that there were problems in their marks, there was no review of grade or appeals process. In terms of quality and governance of assessment, Universities must have well articulated assessment policies which include these provisions. These were not evident in this MOOC.

Professor Hank Lucas, who was the lecturer for this course, provided the following, honest explanation, though this did not engender confidence in relation to inter-rater reliability. It is interesting that he refers to ‘grading rubrics’ as none were provided. This might be explained as he indicates that he found these difficult to construct.

> I have found creating the grading rubrics the most difficult part of preparing the course. I do not particularly like multiple choice questions and objective tests because they tend to go after facts. An essay lets people show that they can think about the issues and reason from what they have studied. I hope that in evaluating answers people will use the rubric as a guideline. In most cases I think the answers should say mention some of the items in the rubric. For example, in question 1 a student should observe the relationship between loss of viewers, loss of advertising and then loss of revenue. However, if there is a great answer that deviates from the rubric I would give it full credit. (Professor Hank Lucas)

It seemed that fewer students completed the Final Term Project, which logically meant that it was more likely that the students completing this were more likely to have been engaged and understood the key concepts and content being developed in the course. It was perceived, from comments in the Discussion Forums, that those who failed the mid term project were less likely to complete the final project. The student perspective was that, while there were issues relating to inter-rater reliability for the Mid Term Project, the marks and the quality of the comments received for the Final Term Project seemed to have been provided by a smaller set of students who had developed deeper learning in this course.

**Student Perspective – Unresolved MOOC issues**

Due to length limitations of this paper, these are presented in summary form in Table 2. *From the outside*, Kinash (2014) identifies 10 unresolved MOOC issues which are used as organising issues in Table 2, and supporting commentary from Kinash is provided to elaborate on those 10 unresolved issues. These are used to frame student perspectives gained by being a student in this MOOC *from the inside*.

**Table 2 MOOC Issues - A Student Perspective on Surviving Disruptive Technologies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unresolved MOOC Issues</th>
<th>Supporting Commentary (Kinash, 2014)</th>
<th>Student Perspective in relation to Surviving Disruptive Technologies Course through Coursera</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. High drop-out rate. | “Estimates vary, with some news articles listing drop-out rates of 40-85 per cent. …Surveys from people who have failed to complete MOOCs state that it was not what they expected and/or that the quality of the MOOC they tried was poor.” (Kinash, 2014, p. 57) | • Course statistics were sought by several students, but these were not provided.  
• Indications were that few students successfully completed the Mid Term Project, and even fewer completed the Final Term Project.  
• It was perceived that to succeed, a student needed to have the academic capabilities for independent, self-directed learning. |
2. MOOCs are online. | “Advocates for a blended approach believe that some learning content and activities are best suited for online (e.g. multimedia lectures) whereas others must be facilitated face-to-face with educators present (e.g. labs).” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • The content of this course was suitable for being provided online. • As the student was travelling overseas during the course, online was very effective. |

3. MOOCs produce sub-standard or lower tier graduates. | “A high proportion of surveyed employers have indicated that they would not consider graduates from university programs offered via MOOC… MOOCs often have no criteria and poorly developed pre-requisites for student enrolment.” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • Due to the issues associated with the assessment design, there are major concerns regarding the relationships between the learning outcomes expected and the way that students were asked to demonstrate these through the assessment tasks. • Peer assessment lacked inter-rater reliability. |

4. MOOCs have proliferated before a rigorous and robust business model has been developed. | “Is there cost-recovery for the original university?” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • There were no costs for students to enrol. However, it was evident that considerable investment had been made to construct this course, and to employ those who delivered the course. • There was an option to pay a small amount ($39) to undertake the ‘Signature Track’. |

5. The development of a crediting system. | “Who decides which MOOCs are credited for which programs in which universities? Will there be a global master-list of transfer credits? Will there be an accreditation process and quality audits? …What if the subjects are offered through corporations rather than universities?” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • While the intention was not to gain credit, the Certificate was able to be recognised through the student’s profile on LinkedIn. • Importantly, the student can claim that they were immersed in a course offered by the University of Maryland, which provides some status to this course. |

6. Will MOOCs become the enactment of an Ivory Tower Imperialism? | “There is a fear that a few powerful universities will situate themselves to offer, credit and advertise MOOCs, and that the current context of diversity and multiculturalism through numerous universities in each nation will be replaced by online global learning through a few dominant institutions.” (Kinash, 2014, p. 57) | • There is a perception that MOOCs might be positioning themselves to be the ‘Google of Higher Education’. |

7. Quality MOOCs are resource demanding in the design, student administration and teaching phases. | “…requires a team who understands the discipline and curriculum, pedagogy, contemporary students, and technology-enabled and technology-enhanced learning.” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • While this was not researched, it was evident that significant resource investments had been made to construct and deliver this course. |

8. MOOCs are new in their development. | “Universities must invest time and money into keeping the content, pedagogies and technologies current, up-to-date and cutting edge.” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • If this course is offered again, it will need upgrading in terms of content. • Course improvements are needed, for example, in assessment design. |

9. MOOCs heighten intellectual property issues. | “Who has the copyright on online materials?” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) | • There were some student concerns that solutions provided by them became the intellectual property of Coursera. |

10. Many universities are hesitant to enter the | “The curriculum and teaching approaches may provide a market” | • The co-author as participant undertook this course with the purpose
MOOC arena is that they worry about sharing trade secrets advantage to the university. Putting those strategies up online for their competitors to see may be counterproductive.” (Kinash, 2014, p. 58) to learn both the content and to learn how this MOOC was designed.

- A great deal was learned from this immersion in this MOOC, which can be used to inform online course development elsewhere.

### Conclusion

This paper examined MOOCs and quality through the presentation of a student perspective through immersion in the *Surviving Disruptive Technologies* course offered by the University of Maryland through Coursera. These perspectives *from the inside* were situated within 10 unresolved MOOC issues provided *from the outside* by Kinash (2014).

This paper has identified and examined the challenges associated with improving the quality of MOOCs, and associated questions relating to the business model to sustain MOOCs, intellectual property issues, course design, the assessment design, questions about credit for completing a MOOC, and the value propositions for students and for faculty staff involved in the design, creation and delivery of MOOCs.

To conclude, while MOOCs are potentially a disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997), we agree with Legon (2013) and Siemens (2013), that it is possible that future designs of MOOCs will see improvements on the current learning design evident in these early versions of MOOCs. It is also likely that there will be business models which monetize MOOCs to enable their financial sustainability. The next generations of MOOCs are also likely to be more seriously informed by quality frameworks, such as *Quality Matters* (2014).

### References


