

MIT to make nearly all course materials available free on the World Wide Web

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass. -- MIT President Charles M. Vest has announced that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will make the materials for nearly all its courses freely available on the Internet over the next ten years. He made the announcement about the new program, known as [MIT OpenCourseWare \(MITOCW\)](#), at a press conference at MIT on Wednesday, April 4.

President Vest focused on how OpenCourseWare reflected the idealism of the MIT faculty and the core educational mission of MIT in his remarks to print and television reporters.

"As president of MIT, I have come to expect top-level innovative and intellectually entrepreneurial ideas from the MIT community. When we established the Council on Educational Technology at MIT, we charged a sub-group with coming up with a project that reached beyond our campus classrooms.

"I have to tell you that we went into this expecting that something creative, cutting-edge and challenging would emerge. And, frankly, we also expected that it would be something based on a revenue-producing model -- a project or program that took into account the power of the Internet and its potential for new applications in education.

"OpenCourseWare is not exactly what I had expected. It is not what many people may have expected. But it is typical of our faculty to come up with something as bold and innovative as this," President Vest commented.

"OpenCourseWare looks counter-intuitive in a market driven world. It goes against the grain of current material values. But it really is consistent with what I believe is the best about MIT. It is innovative. It expresses our belief in the way education can be advanced -- by constantly widening access to information and by inspiring others to participate," said President Vest.

"Simply put, OpenCourseWare is a natural marriage of American higher education and the capabilities of the World Wide Web," he said.

Potential impacts

President Vest next spoke in anticipation of reporters' questions on topics ranging from the role of OpenCourseWare on enrollment and quality of life at MIT as well as its potential impact on revenue-generating programs and competition from other institutions.

"OpenCourseWare combines two things: the traditional openness and outreach and democratizing influence of American education and the ability of the Web to make vast amounts of information instantly available.

"OpenCourseWare is firmly at the heart of MIT's educational mission: MIT faculty have a deeply ingrained sense of service and mission -- they like to work on big problems and frankly, they like to influence the world. There is an incredible idealism in this faculty.

On OpenCourseWare's impact on education at MIT, President Vest commented, "We believe OpenCourseWare will have a strong impact on a residential learning at MIT and elsewhere. Let me be clear: We are not providing an MIT education on the Web. We are providing our core materials that are the infrastructure that undergirds an MIT education. Real education requires interaction, the interaction that is part of American teaching.

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"We think that OpenCourseWare will make it possible for faculty here and elsewhere to concentrate even more on the actual process of teaching, on the interactions between faculty and students that are the real core of learning.

"Am I worried that the OpenCourseWare project will hurt MIT's enrollment? No. In fact, I am absolutely confident that providing this worldwide window onto an MIT education, showing what we teach, may be a very good thing for attracting prospective students," President Vest said.

"How will OpenCourseWare relate to revenue-generating educational projects at MIT? I do believe that revenue-generating distance education will have a role in the world and will probably have a role at MIT. It is clear to me that revenue-generating opportunities are there, for example, for professionals learning about new developments in their field.

"There's the possibility of developing courses in the humanities or the arts, for example, for retirees or for people who have wanted to go back to school for a long time. A lot of opportunities are out there to make money. But I want to emphasize that there is no commercially available MIT degree," he declared.

As for the likely role of other universities, President Vest emphasized the idealism behind OpenCourseWare.

"This is about something bigger than MIT. I hope other universities will see us as educational leaders in this arena, and we very much hope that OpenCourseWare will draw other universities to do the same. We would be delighted if -- over time -- we have a world wide web of knowledge that raises the quality of learning -- and ultimately, the quality of life -- around the globe," he asserted.

Contributors to idea

Sitting beside President Vest at the press conference were Steven Lerman, professor of civil engineering and chair of the MIT faculty; Harold Abelson, Class of 1922 professor of electrical engineering and computer science and MacVicar Teaching Fellow; and Dick K. P. Yue, associate dean of the school of engineering and professor of ocean engineering.

Professor Lerman noted the potential of OpenCourseWare to teach and to train students and young faculty in developing countries and said, "We hope our materials will be translated. Developing countries need information, and they need to develop infrastructure and institutions."

Professor Yue based his vision of OpenCourseWare on his own experience as a boy in Hong Kong who was inspired by an MIT textbook his father gave him. "MIT will miss its goal if it reaches just the students within its walls and not in the larger world," he said.

"OpenCourseWare stimulates real reflection on what we're doing in the classroom. If my students get all their raw materials on the web, what am I doing in class? This also makes it possible for faculty colleagues to keep up with one another's work and research," remarked Professor Abelson.

Professor Abelson also noted that the pioneering new program may set in motion innovations in teaching. Once students begin acquiring course content on the web, faculty will be able to pay more attention to the actual process of teaching. OpenCourseWare will enable faculty to concentrate on using classroom or lab time to enhance learning, he said.

The OpenCourseWare project will begin as a large-scale pilot program over the next two years. The first steps include design of the software and services needed to support such a large endeavor, as well as protocols to monitor and assess its utilization by faculty and students at MIT and throughout the world. By the end of the two-year period, it is expected that materials for more than 500 courses would be available on the MIT OpenCourseWare site.

MIT sees a variety of benefits coming from the MIT OpenCourseWare project:

- Institutions around the world could make direct use of the MIT OpenCourseWare materials as references and sources for curriculum development. These materials might be of particular value in developing countries that are trying to expand their higher education systems rapidly.

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- Individual learners could draw upon the materials for self-study or supplementary use.
- The MIT OpenCourseWare infrastructure could serve as a model for other institutions that choose to make similar content open and available.
- Over time, if other universities adopt this model, a vast collection of educational resources will develop and facilitate widespread exchange of ideas about innovative ways to use those resources in teaching and learning.
- MIT OpenCourseWare will serve as a common repository of information and channel of intellectual activity that can stimulate educational innovation and cross-disciplinary educational ventures.

The program will continue the tradition of MIT's leadership in educational innovation, as exemplified by the engineering science revolution in the 1960s. At that time, MIT engineering faculty radically revised their curricula and produced new textbooks that brought the tools of modern science, mathematics, and computing into the core of the engineering curriculum. As their students joined the engineering faculties of universities throughout the country, they took with them their own course notes from MIT, and spread the new approach to engineering education.

In similar spirit, but with new technologies, MIT OpenCourseWare will make it possible to quickly disseminate new knowledge and educational content in a wide range of fields. President Vest commented that the idea of OpenCourseWare is particularly appropriate for a research university such as MIT, where ideas and information move quickly from the laboratory into the educational program, even before they are published in textbooks.

MIT believes that implementation of OpenCourseWare will complement and stimulate innovation in ways that may not even be envisioned at this point. "We expect that MIT OpenCourseWare will raise the tide of educational innovation within MIT and elsewhere," said MIT Provost Robert A. Brown.

"By making up-to-date educational content widely available," he said, "OpenCourseWare will focus faculty efforts on teaching and learning on their campuses. It also will facilitate a new style of national and global collaboration in education through the sharing of educational content and the potential of telecommunications for real-time interactions."

The concept of MIT OpenCourseWare was born from deliberations of a study group chartered by MIT's Council on Educational Technology. The Council, a group of educational leaders from throughout MIT, asked the study group to consider ways to use Internet technology to enhance education within MIT as well as MIT's influence on education on a global scale. The group was composed of faculty and staff from MIT, and was assisted by consultants from Booz-Allen & Hamilton, who are helping with organizational aspects of the project.

The Booz-Allen team was led by BAH Vice President Reginald Van Lee. Mr. Van Lee, an MIT alumnus, said "MIT continues its role as the preeminent, global leader in the development and dissemination of new ideas and knowledge. We are excited to have contributed to this innovative and important step in the advancement of higher education."

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