‘CornellX’ to offer MOOCs through edX partnership

A number of “CornellX” courses will soon be available for anyone and everyone to take online, now that Cornell has joined edX, a nonprofit online learning enterprise.

EdX issued a press release about its newest university partners May 21, which include Cornell and 14 others, bringing edX’s total membership to 27. https://www.edx.org/

By joining edX, Cornell has formalized its commitment to help faculty start offering MOOCs – massive open online courses – which are burgeoning in popularity and have been called the democratization of education. EdX is a MOOC platform founded by Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University to offer online, university-level courses in a wide range of disciplines to a worldwide audience at no charge.

The details of exactly how Cornell will proceed to offer MOOCs through edX, including questions of administration, intellectual property, faculty support and course selection, will be guided by recommendations from an ad-hoc committee recently commissioned by the University Faculty Committee and by Provost Kent Fuchs and Dean of Faculty Joe Burns. Laura Brown, senior vice provost for undergraduate education, will chair the committee, which includes faculty members, staff and non-voting representation from University Counsel.

“In keeping with Cornell’s mission of teaching, research and public engagement, we are pleased to be joining edX to further support educational accessibility and the ability of our faculty members to expand the breadth and reach of their educational offerings,” Fuchs said. “We are committed to remaining in the forefront of educational innovation, and we expect that the wisdom and experience of our faculty and university partners will help shape the future of open online learning.”

Cornell has long been a leader in online education, including the creation of eCornell in 2000, which now delivers fully online, professional courses and certificates to tens of thousands of learners in nearly 200 countries each year.

The formalization of MOOCs at Cornell has been a much-discussed topic. In February, four professors received funding from Googlehttp://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/02/six-pretty-good-books-will-become-cornell-mooc to start a Cornell MOOC, “Six Pretty Good Books.”

Last fall, Fuchs appointed a faculty committee charged with deciding whether Cornell should join a MOOC consortium and if so, which.
“Interest among faculty has been growing to start experimenting with this new educational tool, ever since last September’s faculty forum on the topic,” Burns said. “Meanwhile, others believe that we should be cautious until the broad educational ramifications of MOOCs are fully understood.”

Eva Tardos, the Jacob Gould Schurman Professor of Computer Science, who chaired last fall’s MOOC committee, said that many faculty members are interested in offering MOOCs, but have been limited in doing so because Cornell was not a member of a MOOC consortium.

Now that Cornell has joined edX, faculty members who want to experiment with online courses will have the technology platform and support to do so, she said.

“The fact that we can provide this online educational forum will change education in fundamental ways, in both allowing us to reach students it was hard for us to reach before … but also in how we deliver education at Cornell,” Tardos said.

She added: “Technology is enabling us to do things in new ways … and I very much hope that Cornell faculty and administration will be leaders in this to experiment and figure out what works, and to make it better.”

While MOOCs have typically focused on offering free online courses, edX’s vision is much larger, the organization states in its press release. It is building an open-source educational platform and a network of the world’s top universities to improve education both online and on campus, while conducting research on how students learn. To date, edX has more than 900,000 individual users.