Moving towards a MOOC at Ole Miss
By Deb Wenger, Director of Undergraduate Journalism, Meek School of Journalism & New Media

In recent years, thousands of University of Mississippi students have enrolled in hundreds of online courses offered by the university. Yet, not one of those courses meets the definition of a MOOC – a Massive Open Online Course.

Part of the reason may be the nature of the university. At UM, most classes are relatively small and most are taught by full and part-time faculty, rather than teaching assistants. With all this focus on personal engagement with students, somehow the MOOC just hasn’t seemed to fit in.

According to the 2014 edition of the Campus Computing Survey, an annual report on technology in higher education, more universities are beginning to question the MOOC movement. This year, just 38 percent of participants say MOOCs “offer a viable model for the effective delivery of online instruction,” down from a little more than half in 2013.

However, there are benefits to offering a MOOC -- one of the biggest is having the opportunity to analyze large samples of data that can be used to improve teaching methods, particularly in the area of online instruction. A 2013 survey of 41 colleges and universities conducted by The Parthenon Group, a Boston-based strategy consulting firm, found that most institutions are delving into MOOCs primarily to determine how to improve their online teaching.

Right now, with 110 students, the single course section with the largest online enrollment on the UM campus is IMC 204 Introduction to Integrated Marketing Communication. Scott Fiene, director of the undergraduate IMC program in the School of Journalism, developed the course.

“When I first was designing it, I wasn’t too keen on it,” Fiene said. “I like the personal interaction with students, but once I got going, I really liked it. There’s still just as much interaction, it’s just different.”

Of course, a class with a little more than 100 students is not truly comparable to a MOOC, but some schools around the country are experimenting with a sort of interim step – an online course with hundreds of students enrolled in a single section.

Associate Professor Jeff South teaches a class on mass communication at Virginia Commonwealth University. This fall, his online class has about 700 students enrolled. South says he actually likes teaching the course online better than in a large lecture hall.

“One of the advantages is the ability to truly track students’ work performance,” South said, “not in a punitive way, but in a way that I can see who really gets and enjoys the material.”

In addition to quizzes and other forms of assessment, South builds in
participation in the form of guided online discussions and uses Google Hangouts to bring in subject matter experts as guest speakers. He uses students who have successfully completed the course in previous semesters as paid teaching assistants to help with the grading.

But creating any high-quality online course is not easy. South, along with Fiene and Bonnie Bucqueroux, who teaches a communications course with a little more than 200 students at Michigan State University, all say you shouldn’t underestimate the work required to teach an online class well.

“It’s all upfront work,” said Bucqueroux. “You can’t build tracks as the train is going, and the tech obstacles alone can kill you. By the time some faculty learn the LMS (Learning Management System), how to record and edit videos, they want to run screaming off into the wilderness.”

Yet, South says it’s worth the frustration.

“I think for a survey course like mine, I see more benefits for online than face-to-face,” said South. “The content is asynchronous and on demand, which means it’s better suited for meeting student schedules. Students have crazy lives; if we can offload some of these courses on demand, I think that frees up time to devote to those courses that really, really need physical presence.”

The UM School of Journalism will soon be expanding its large enrollment online offerings, creating a new online version of Jour 101 Introduction to Mass Communication that will be capped at 200 students for the spring semester. Fiene thinks figuring out how to combine the efficiency found in MOOCs with the strengths of online instruction overall will be a positive.

“I went from being a little bit of a naysayer to thinking it’s a good thing.”


Interteaching: Combining Lectures
and Flipped Classrooms

By Kate Kellum, Institutional Research & Assessment and Nancy Wiggers, CETL Learning Specialist

Hineline (1970) suggested that having a lecture-based course for a class in swimming or basket-weaving makes little sense as the learning outcomes of such courses have little to do with effectively listening to a lecture. This may be true for most of our classes (i.e., the learning outcomes we want bear little resemblance to the students’ in-class behaviors). For example, we might want students to be able to discuss and use the content in novel ways rather than merely to transcribe what we say during a lecture. Moreover, lectures seem to be an efficient way to clarify some course content.

The belief that lectures were efficient led me to be reluctant to completely switch to a “flipped classroom.” At a conference in May of 2012, Bryan Saville and others had a presentation about the benefits of Interteaching. Later that day, we were talking and Bryan basically dared me to try it. Not being one to shy away from a dare, I tried it out that fall. Now, I’m hooked.

Interteaching (Boyce & Hineline, 2002) involves both peer-based instruction and lecturing. Scoboria (2007) noted that, “Interteaching shifts the responsibility for the initial presentation of material away from the instructor, and places the initial expectation for learning and discussion of material upon students.” Interteaching involves:

- prep guides which are completed independently by students prior to class
- faculty led brief lectures based on questions and confusions from the previous class
- student led pair discussions covering the prep guides, during this time the
A faculty member walks around the classroom to facilitate the paired discussions and guide students to better answers.

- regular testing - typically with questions similar to, but not verbatim from prep guides
- quality points based on how well the learning partner does on the exams (n.b., a component analysis has suggested these are not required, (Saville & Zinn, 2009).

Interteaching has been shown to lead to:

- higher exam grades than traditional lectures (Saville, Zinn, & Elliott, 2005), (Saville, Zinn, Neef, Van Norman, & Ferreri, 2006).
- higher exam grades even among those with lower GPAs (Saville, Pope, Truelove, & Williams, 2012).
- higher exam grades than peer-instruction alone (Saville, Cox, O’Brien, & Vanderveldt, 2011).
- higher quiz grades at 1 month follow-up than traditional lectures (Saville et al., 2014).
- larger perceived learning gains than traditional lecture (Arntzen & Hoium, 2011).
- high rates of student satisfaction (Goto & Schneider, 2009).

Using interteaching requires that faculty develop prep guides with a series of questions that guide the student through the reading material. Much like the first time a traditional lecture is prepared, this can be fairly time-consuming. But, this is off-set by the fact that the short clarifying lectures are much faster to prepare than longer ones.
