

MIT OFFERS FREE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES VIA THE WEB

By Jonathan Smith

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is offering free course material on the World Wide Web to anyone who wishes to access it. At first glance, this may seem to be more than it actually is. The program, known as OpenCourseWare, intends to provide the materials from almost any undergraduate or graduate studies course. It's reasoning is that the information and its presentation will lead the way into the future of the Internet and contribute to the evolution of global education. According to the MIT OCW website, the hope is that having such easy access to such information will add to society and spread the knowledge around the world.

However, the program does not offer web-based courses that can be taken and completed for credit. Nor does the program include any sort of interaction between a member of the faculty and the user. The information and course materials are simply uploaded to the site for public access, and are not meant to be a replacement for enrollment at an actual university and the completion of an actual degree. The most interaction one can find is an offer to send feedback via e-mail, which may or may not be forwarded to the faculty member involved with the material in question.

The good news, however, is that because it's simply information on the web, it's easy to view and requires no membership or registration and there are no prerequisites. Though the material is recognized as the intellectual property of those who created it, it is encouraged that it be used as a resource. Teachers, professors, and instructors are welcome to use the material while mapping out their own lesson plans, and people who are just curious about a subject can feel free to access it and educate themselves on a topic of their choice. All the standard laws regarding copyright infringement and plagiarism remain the same.

The website stresses the fact that the material is for adding and enhancing a learner's education, not replacing it altogether. The point made is that many university courses now have a web component, but one that is only available as a resource to students who have registered with and paid for the course. MIT OCW seems determined to remove that boundary and make information available to anyone under the grounds of improving society and better equipping it for the 21st century. It also hopes to bring academics closer across the world by breaking down walls that have separated them.

In terms of the website itself, it's fairly user friendly. A complete course list is available from the main page, as well as shortcut links to popular or featured course material. All one has to do is click on the subject they want to view. There is a list of the courses available in the subject, and from there one can choose whatever they like. From there, it's like actually attending the course (at least the first day). There is access to the course syllabus, assignments, sample exams, resources, and reading lists that one can note for independent study.

So while the site does not replace attending class in person, it does provide an effective way of finding a direction for studying a subject and getting access to resources. It's an interesting concept, and will be useful to those looking to study something on their own but who have no idea where to start. For students, it allows a

chance to see what is involved in a particular subject so that they may better decide whether an actual course at their own school is right for them. For professors, it provides resources and sources of information they may not be aware of or otherwise not use. Overall, an interesting use of the web and perhaps a glimpse of what the Internet could offer in the future.

Source: MIT OpenCourseWare Website:
<http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/index.htm>



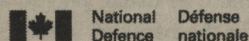
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