



Charles Darwin University Promoting Darwin's Unique Environment with MOOCs

Quick Facts

- › Public Higher Ed.
- › More than 22,000 students
- › 8,625 active course sites
- › 1,184 faculty members
- › 275 award courses available
- › 9 campuses, plus 2 centres

The Challenges

- › Promoting the idea of 'Free Education' to Faculty
- › Budgetary restraints
- › Time resources to develop course content

Interesting Fact #1

CDU is ranked in the top 2% of World Universities (*Times Higher Education, 2013-2014*).

With the rapid expansion of MOOCs as a recruitment and marketing tool for Universities around the world, Charles Darwin University decided to launch their own.

A large Australian University with over 22,000 students and offering a wide range of Higher Education degrees, Vocational Education and Training courses and flexible study options, Charles Darwin University (CDU) is also located in one of the more remote cities in Australia, Darwin in the Northern Territory. An industry leader in online education, CDU has been rated by Times Higher Education in the top 2% of World Universities (2013–2014).

In 2013, CDU decided to take a step in a new direction and invest resources into developing a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for a variety of reasons. As a leader in online education, CDU recognised the potential of delivering education beyond traditional boundaries and broadening their vision. As an intensive user of Blackboard's Learning Management System, Blackboard Learn™, CDU tapped into Blackboard's 'Open Education' which is powered by Blackboard as a free, cloud-based MOOC platform. This MOOC platform provides Blackboard customers the ability to run MOOCs using the technology with which they are familiar. These courses offered by the Blackboard community of global institutions are free and open to the public.

The MOOC, which was hosted on Blackboard's Open Education platform, allowed CDU to:

- › Reach new learning communities and potential students
- › Discover whether a MOOC could give prospective students a chance to experience what studying at CDU would be like
- › Uphold the University as one of the leaders in online education

Interesting Fact #2

Each year CDU teaches over 4,000 Indigenous students in over 150 locations across the NT.

Aligning Project Goals with Long-Term Institutional Strategic Goals

With a focus on the University's namesake and the unique natural environment in which CDU is located, the MOOC was launched in late 2013: ***Charles Darwin, Evolution and Tropical Australia.***

CDU had a number of goals when deciding to implement this MOOC that related to its overall strategy as an institution:

- › Exploring the effectiveness of a MOOC as a promotion tool, both nationally and internationally
- › Enhancing outreach and visibility of CDU and participating Faculties / Schools
- › Increasing conversion from “interest” to “enrolment”
- › Promoting its uniqueness regarding location and top quality environmental research status
- › Creating high quality interactive resources which could be used in credit bearing courses

Global Networking

“Working on the Charles Darwin MOOC gave me the opportunity to work with people that I normally would not...[sic] It was uplifting to see the enthusiasm of some of the course participants from different parts of the world, and it was great to strengthen the ties between Charles Darwin University and Charles Darwin the man.”

- Professor Keith Christian, Charles Darwin University

Inspirational Course Content

“The Northern Territory is simply stunning. It has been a very special experience visiting CDU. A highlight was participating in the MOOC and I also hope to participate in further collaborative projects with CDU.”

- Professor Janet Browne, Harvard University and Charles Darwin Scholar

Overcoming the Challenges

The implementation of innovation in Higher Education is never without its challenges. Project leaders at CDU faced several challenges in the lead-up and implementation of the project, including:

- › Addressing doubts from faculty about the benefits of providing a free learning experience
- › Securing a budget to promote and market the MOOC
- › Prioritising the time to develop content for the course

These challenges were overcome through patience and persistence. Excitement was gradually built up within the MOOC team as high quality, engaging learning resources were built that served the learning outcomes designed by faculty. These resources surpassed usual expectations, and the overall result was a rich learning environment that opened up stimulating and interactive opportunities for learners worldwide.

Success!

In the end, the MOOC hosted on Blackboard's Open Education platform was a huge success. It was first run from 11 November 2013 to 6 December 2013 with 419 enrolled.

The videos produced for the MOOC received over 7500 views on YouTube, and CDU produced 39 original videos and 10 interactive web pages. This MOOC was awarded the Blackboard Catalyst Award for Exemplary Course and Director's Choice Award for Courses with Distinction.

Students and faculty were incredibly impressed with the quality and the learning experience created by the MOOC.

“Excellent course - well done. Especially enjoyed week four - a great way to promote educational opportunities and research being undertaken in the Territory.” - Student

“The Badge system was a good idea and it kept me on track: It was motivating to have a goal to work towards (good psychological tool).” - Student

Following on from the success of their first course, CDU recently delivered another MOOC titled ***The Art and Science of Memory***, which will be run for a second time on Open Education starting February 22. You can sign up for the course now at: <http://bit.ly/memory2cd>

CDU will also be launching the MOOC ***Who's Counting: An Interactive Introduction to Accounting***, commencing March 14 and open for enrolment now at: <http://bit.ly/cduaccounting>

More Information on CDU

CDU is a member of the group of 6 Innovative Research Universities in Australia. CDU has campuses in the Darwin suburb of Casuarina, the city of Palmerston, and the towns of Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy, with smaller training centres in Jabiru, Tennant Creek and Yulara. There are also campuses located in Sydney and Melbourne where students can earn business and accounting degrees.

See it for yourself

The Charles Darwin MOOC entitled '*Charles Darwin, Evolution and Tropical Australia*' is currently offered on iTunes U, and is free and open to anyone to self-enrol:

<http://bit.ly/cduevolution>

This MOOC will be run again later this year on Open Education.



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