Evaluating a Mini-MOOC:

Evaluation Plan for a Project-Centered Mini-MOOC in Coursera

Tiffani K. Reardon

Georgia State University

Kennesaw State University

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background

In the fall 2015 semester, Coursera, an open online education company that is popular for running MOOCs, sent out a call for proposals for a new kind of MOOC that they hope will revive the declining popularity of MOOCs. This new kind of MOOC is called a project-centered course, and is nicknamed here the Mini-MOOC. They were and are looking for courses that are centered around professional skills that can be taken on-demand and in one sitting or spread out over several days. These courses are meant to be a quick way to learn an individual skill without being too much of a grading burden on the instructor(s). This means that they are primarily peer-graded, and they result in one final project.

I, the author of this paper, and a colleague at Kennesaw State University, Dr. Tamara Powell, submitted and were approved for a project-centered course on writing professional memos. This Mini-MOOC is not complete, and in fact is not even past the outlining stages. However, we do know that the MOOC will need to be evaluated when it is complete, especially because this is a new kind of course and we are the first test. This plan serves that purpose.

In this plan, we will evaluate three broad topics: objective alignment, instructor satisfaction, and student satisfaction.

Decisions

- Should any assessments, activities, content, or materials be changed to align better with the objectives? Or vice versa?

- Should the peer-grading alone be evaluated and improved upon to lighten the instructor's grading load?

- Are there changes to be made based on student feedback?

Questions

Are various course elements aligned and complimentary with the objectives?

For objective alignment, we will be looking at several elements of the course that should be aligned with the objectives. We want to know that the assessments, activities, content, and materials are all aligned well with the course objectives. By assessments we mean graded items (the final project), by activities we mean any interactive part of the course in which the learner does something other than watch or read, by content we mean the lecture and reading assignments, and by materials we mean technology and/or software required. All of these things need to align and/or compliment the achievement of the learning objectives.

Is this going to be too much work for the instructor to handle without pay?

Mini-MOOCs are, just as MOOCs are, taken by thousands of people at once. While these courses are significantly smaller and require significantly less time from the student, is that the same for the instructor? We want to evaluate the instructor's role in the course from a discussion, grading, and question-answering point of view. We want to know exactly how much they are having to moderate the discussion boards, how much grading they are having to do by hand, and how much question-answering they are having to do via email.

Are students getting what they are meant to get out of this course?

The student satisfaction part of the evaluation will be determined primarily by assessment of the final project and an attitude assessment given to students via survey. We primarily want to know if their final projects reflect the content learned in the course, whether the students feel they have met the objectives at the end of the course, and whether they feel they can apply this knowledge to their field of employment and/or study.

Methods

Question 1 will be evaluated by a panel of three to five people who will read through the course and compare the assessments, activities, content, and materials to the course objectives and determine whether they align well. Question 2 will be determined by a survey given to the instructor that asks them the approximate amount of time per week they spend on each aspect of the course (moderating discussions, grading poorly peer-graded projects, and replying to questions via email) and whether this amount of time is a burden to them based on other time commitments. Question 3 will be determined by comparing a random sampling of final projects to the course objectives and determining whether those projects meet the objectives or not, as well as a student attitude assessment by way of survey.

Sample

Question 1 will require a panel of three to five people, question 2 will involve the instructor, and question 3 will require a random sampling of about 500 students for the survey and a random sampling of about 100 final projects (not necessarily from the same students) for the project evaluation.

Limitations

One major limitation in the reliability and validity of this evaluation is the sample number. Because MOOCs can have infinite amounts of people in them, and because the students are at different places at different times in the course based on its on-demand nature, the sample is extremely hard to make reliable.

Logistics

The instructional designer will be responsible for managing the evaluation with the help of the instructor and administrative help from Coursera.

Sample Video

For the proposal on this project, we had to submit a sample video lecture that would showcase how we present ourselves online as teachers. To see the sample, click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Fc5y777VZA&feature=youtu.be