

**Subject:** Blended and Online Education

**Date:** Wednesday, July 25, 2012 5:38:13 PM ET

**From:** President Wallace Loh and Provost Ann Wylie

July 25, 2012

Dear University of Maryland community:

Leading research universities are engaging in technology-enabled education on a larger scale and at a quickened pace. We want to update you on developments in this area at the University of Maryland.

Many of our faculty members already offer blended learning courses, online courses, and other technology-mediated courses. Today's students have grown up electronically connected all the time. Our Division of Information Technology and Center for Teaching Excellence provide outstanding support for these forms of pedagogy.

Nobody knows for sure what will be the long-term impact of new technological advances on higher education. We believe that the University of Maryland must develop an innovative, strategic, and judicious approach to these developments.

Therefore, we are forming the Provost's Commission on Blended and Online Education. Its charge begins with determining the full extent of technology deployment on campus. Then, it will recommend ways to improve and expand the technology-enabled education that we offer on campus and to the world beyond. The work of this group will enable us to make the most of what we are already doing and accelerate progress. It will host open forums in the fall for the University community.

We are pleased that Dean Jane Clark of our School of Public Health ([jeclark@umd.edu](mailto:jeclark@umd.edu)) has agreed to serve as chair of this Provost's Commission. It will include faculty, deans, staff, students, and possibly external stakeholders.

In the meantime, we are exploring joining Coursera, the "social entrepreneurship" company that partners with universities to offer online courses for free. Started by two Stanford professors, it currently has 14 AAU universities and two European counterparts as members of this consortium. Coursera's technology platform supports MOOCs (massive open online courses) that attract tens of thousands of students from around the world. MOOCs can also be blended with face-to-face learning in the classroom.

To start, we would provide three to four outstanding courses from interested faculty members representing various disciplines. There is no upfront fee and no obligation to remain. We would be free to form other partnerships in this fast-changing environment. (Earlier this year, Harvard and MIT announced "edX," a joint platform to put all their courses online and for free. UC-Berkeley just joined them.) By partnering with Coursera sooner rather than later, we can learn from this educational venture as we continue to assess and develop our own pedagogical innovations.

All of us are committed to making a University of Maryland education even more excellent, accessible, and affordable. Our faculty and staff are continually engaged in improving the learning and teaching process. We invite your participation in the open forums this fall. The work of this Provost's Commission will help us thrive in a world reshaped by information technology, globalization, and a changing economy.

Sincerely,

Wallace D. Loh, President and Ann Wylie, Provost

cc: Mary Ann Rankin, Provost-Designate

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University of Maryland Community by: