THE LIFE CYCLE OF A MILLION MOOC USERS

(Excerpt from unpublished manuscript)

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www. ahead-penn.org

May 12, 2014

We examine the flow of registrants through 16 Coursera courses that were taught by faculty at the University of Pennsylvania between June 2012 and July 2013. The study explores key user-transition points and variations in those points based on course characteristics. This excerpt supplements our initial findings.

One measure that we use is “sequential flow,” which we define as an orderly movement through a course. This approach considers, for instance, the proportion of users who accessed a lecture in the first course “module” (defined as the activities comprising the first segment or week of course material), the proportion of that group who then accessed a lecture for the second course module, and so on through the final course module. This pattern is akin to attending, at least part of, every class in a course delivered in face-to-face mode.

Figure 1 shows that, across the courses, the percentage of registrants who accessed the first course module ranged from 26% to 62%. Regardless of course length, considerably smaller shares went on to access a lecture in the second and third modules. At about the fourth module, access stabilized. The share of registrants who viewed at least one lecture in every module ranged from 5% to 13% of registrants.
Figure 1. “Sequential flow” of registrants: Percent of registrants accessing at least one lecture in each course module (in sequence)

Source: Perna, Ruby, Boruch, Wang, Scull, Ahmad, and Evans (May 12, 2014). Excerpt from unpublished manuscript.