

TEACHx

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Course: Career 911 Coursera MOOC

Discipline: Health Care, Public Health, STEM

Students: 8,300 students in the first run

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Career 911

Your Future Job in Medicine and Healthcare

Context

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have the potential to address two long-vexing problems in higher education: cost and access for nontraditional students from underrepresented populations. We wanted to create a unique MOOC that aims to teach students, especially underserved and nontraditional students, valuable professional skills that will enable them to successfully explore, envision, and pursue a range of different careers—and in particular, health care careers. We wanted to promote health equity by bolstering the pipeline of underrepresented students pursuing careers in health care and research. In a country with rapidly changing demographics, we must continue to pursue novel strategies for enhancing diversity. This MOOC was an exciting opportunity to directly address pervasive diversity gaps in higher education, in career development, and in health care professions. Although MOOCs are touted as a means to reach disadvantaged students, recent studies suggest that students who enroll in MOOCs are disproportionately well educated, currently employed, and male. We wanted to disrupt the usual pathways and barriers that low-income populations tend to face when trying to learn and practice non-cognitive but essential skills to help them move upward in higher education and seek employment. Although this course was geared toward health professions, the skills taught—including leadership, goal setting, interpersonal communication, networking, resume writing, and interviewing—have been applied to any number of career choices. This course provides not only the opportunity but also the open space for students to interact, learn, and explore health care career opportunities together.

Project

The course focuses on professional skills needed to pursue a career in the health sciences and provides mentoring and support for students as they begin their pursuits. This course was the first of its kind offered through Coursera and the first of its kind offered at Northwestern University. It aims to increase diversity throughout the educational spectrum and in the health care workforce, which is a complex challenge.

The Career 911: Your Future Job in Medicine and Healthcare MOOC is available at <https://www.coursera.org/learn/healthcarejobs/>.

Objectives & Outcomes

For students enrolled, this course directly ties material learned to real-world applications and real-world outcomes (e.g., from learning networking skills and submitting a resume to landing an internship). In addition, an integral part of the student experience was online mentoring through Google Hangouts. Students are able to ask real-world health professionals for advice and feedback and engage in inspirational stories from nontraditional leaders in the field of health. Locally, students and instructors have benefitted greatly by having Career 911 TAs come into high school health science classrooms and talk about health care careers.

Results

Overall, the project worked well and met our team's expectations. Our project is still under way and has currently been migrated to On-Demand format through the Coursera platform. In the first two session-based runs, we had over 10,000 students enrolled from 159 different countries, with 56% of students identifying as female. We want to continue to enhance entry into health care careers and impact health equity globally.

We anticipate expanding our reach locally by partnering with additional Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and charter schools.

Lessons Learned

Locally, our MOOC has had great success. We have piloted our course as a supplement in CPS high schools and with Northeastern Illinois University students. We are also in the process of partnering with the City Colleges of Chicago to implement our MOOC at Malcolm X College. We have collaborated with various faculty members and student services staff across Northwestern University and Feinberg School of Medicine. In terms of improvements, we would have liked the course to be on demand from the start as our instructors at CPS had to work with tight time frames and sometimes students weren't able to complete their work in time.

We want to improve some of our course content and include more onboarding tips for students transitioning to freshman year of college. As we continue to run the course, we would like to implement global team-based projects and crowdsourcing to enhance the course. As an instructor, I learned that there is truly a vast disparity in the exposure to pathways to health careers in high schools in the Chicagoland area.