

Online Courses Raise Their Game: A Review of MOOC Stats and Trends in 2014

9 minute read

written by

Dhawal Shah

A shorter version of this article first appeared on *EdSurge*.

At TechCrunch Disrupt this year, Coursera Co-Founder Daphne Koller claimed that 2014 is the

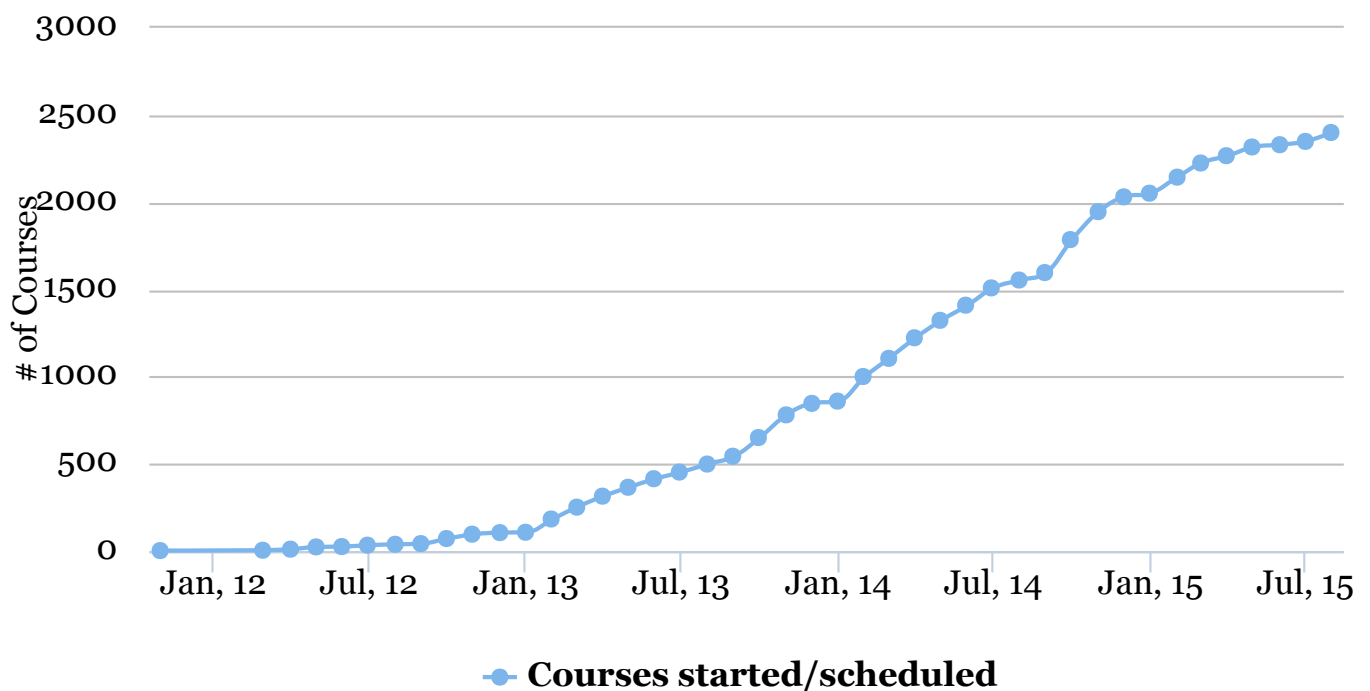
400+ universities. 2400+ courses. 16-18 million students.

year MOOCs will come of age. It is definitely the case that an ecosystem developed around MOOCs now: hundreds of people employed full-time, thousands of people involved in the creation of MOOCs, many millions in funding, and, importantly, **millions in revenue**. The big three (Coursera, Udacity, edX) employ more than a hundred people each, while universities are employing teams of video assistants, instructional designers, TA's, and other staff to support the more than 3,000 instructors that have created these courses.

Growth of MOOCs



Cumulative number of courses started/scheduled



This year, the number of universities offering MOOCs has doubled to cross **400 universities**, and resulting in a doubling of the number of cumulative courses, to 2400. 22 of the top 25 US universities in US News World Report rankings are now offering courses online for free.

22 of the top 25 US universities in US News World Report rankings are now offering courses online for free.

Providers

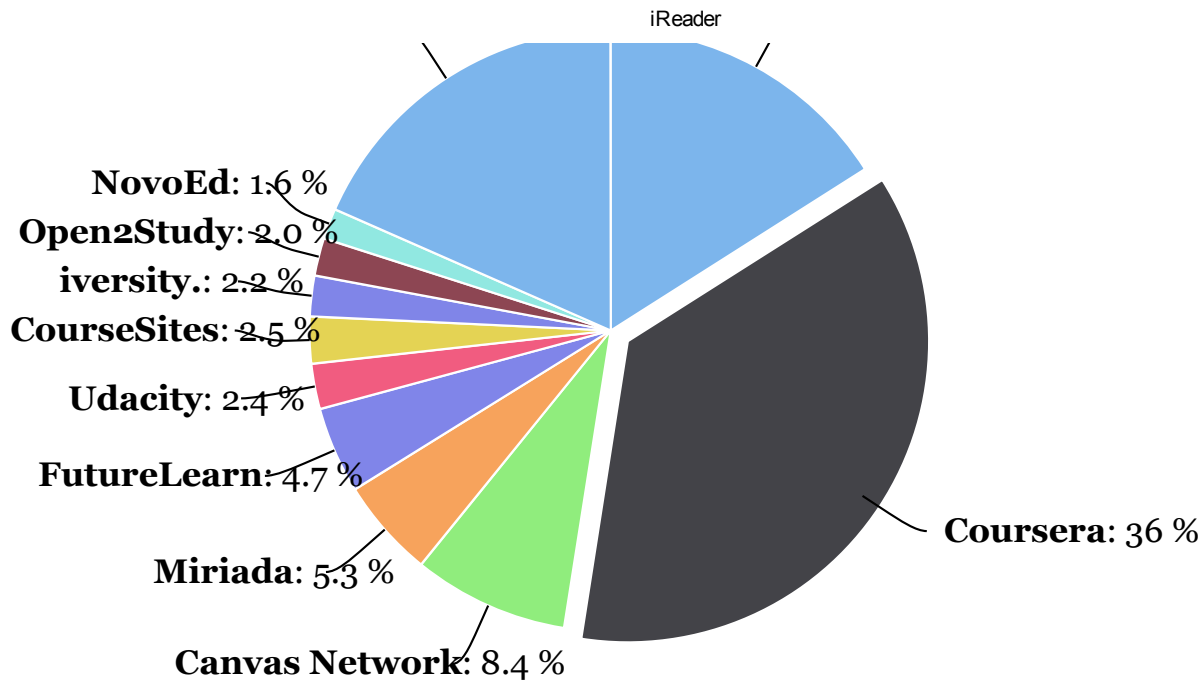
Course distribution by provider



Others: 18%



edX: 16%



There were no major new MOOC providers in 2014.

In 2013, Coursera offered nearly half of all MOOCs, but in 2014 its share has shrunk to a third. It is still

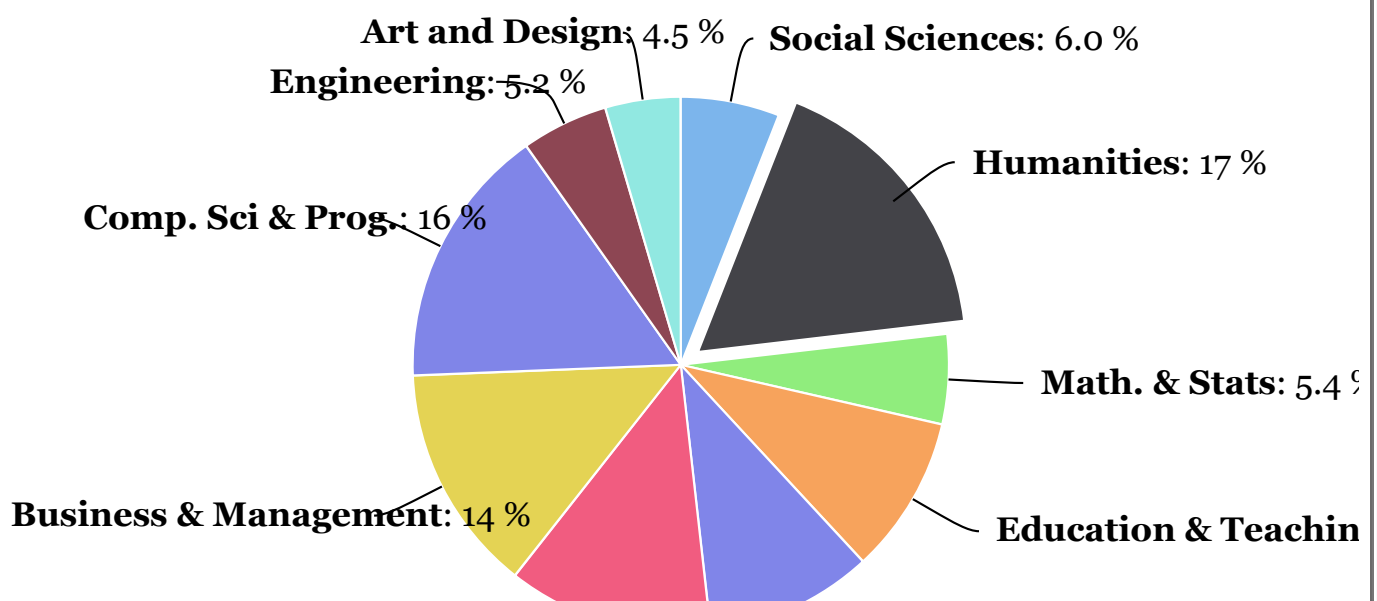
the largest, twice as large as edX, which doubled its share in the last year (and now has close to 400 courses on its platform). There were no major providers launched in 2014.

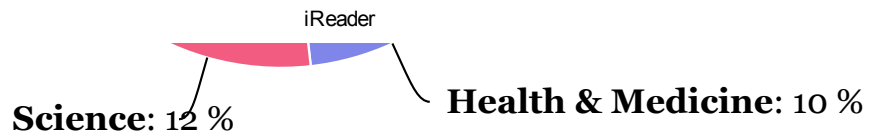
MiriadaX became the first non-U.S. MOOC provider to cross 1 million registered users, tapping into the large Spanish-speaking market worldwide. UK-based provider FutureLearn with 800K registered users should be the next provider to cross a million users.

Up-to date numbers can be found on our [provider listing page](#).

Subjects

Course distribution by subject





The subject distribution of MOOCs in 2014 are consistent with last year, with the top three subjects remaining the same: Humanities, Computer Science & Programming, and Business & Management. There has been **some debate** whether MOOCs can be as useful for teaching humanities and non-technical subjects as it is for computer science and math. Clearly, if there is a difference, it is a matter of degree, as from the standpoint of course offerings, there is a healthy balance of technical and non-technical subjects.

Languages

Courses are currently being offered in **13 different languages**, although 80% of courses are taught in English. Spanish is the next biggest language with 8.5% of the courses, mostly due to MiriadaX, a consortium of nearly 30 universities in Spain and Latin America, followed by French and Chinese.

Class Central Zeitgeist

Searches

When learners search for MOOCs, there is a great deal of diversity in what they are looking for. Among the 40,000 search terms used, the Top 20 (below) account for only 12.58% of them. A glance at the Top 20 do indicate that learners are searching both for topics that may help them in their education or careers as well as personal interests.

python, healthcare, java, finance, android, english, statistics, marketing, music, writing, psychology, accounting, design, spanish, programming, law, photography, big data, history

Courses

The ten most popular courses of 2014, as indicated by student interest are as follows:

1. **Developing Innovative Ideas for New Companies: The First Step in Entrepreneurship** via *University of Maryland, College Park* | Coursera
2. **Introduction to Statistics** via *Stanford University* | Udacity
3. **Learning How to Learn: Powerful mental tools to help you master tough subjects** via *University of California, San Diego* | Coursera
4. **Introduction to Computer Science** via *University of Virginia* | Udacity
5. **Principles of Project Management** via *Polytechnic West* | Open2Study
6. **CS50x: Introduction to Computer Science** via *Harvard University* | edX
7. **Inspiring Leadership through Emotional Intelligence** via *Case Western Reserve University* | Coursera
8. **Introduction to Finance** via *University of Michigan* | Coursera

9. **Strategic Management** *Open2Study*

10. **R Programming** *via Johns Hopkins University | Coursera*

This data is based on user intent collected by Class Central's **MOOC Tracker**

Trends in 2014

MOOC providers roll their own credentials: Nanodegrees, Specializations, Xseries

Last year we predicted that credit-granting MOOCs would be a key trend in 2014—we were wrong

Last year we predicted that credit-granting MOOCs would be a key trend in 2014—we were

wrong. There have been a few small experiments by universities to offer credit, such as a **criminal justice MOOC** at Penn State, and an **intro computer science MOOC** at the University of Oklahoma, though European universities seem to be closer in making this jump, with the provider iversity planning to **work with European universities** to offer credit. There are also MOOCs being offered in partnership with professional and continuing education programs (which confer professional education credits, certificates, or degrees): NovoEd is **helping Stanford's Graduate School of Business** to bring their executive program online, and edX partnering with professional education programs to **bring some courses online**.

However, besides these experiments, the major development in 2014 has been the Big 3 MOOC

The major development in 2014 has been the Big 3 MOOC providers, Coursera, Udacity, and edX, introducing their own credentials

providers, Coursera, Udacity, and edX, introducing their own credentials for paid courses. Udacity announced its **Nanodegree program** (and a **new round of funding**), billed as "Industry credentials for today's jobs in tech". Coursera announced **Specializations** in January and currently has developed 27 specializations, with more in the works. Specializations are already a **strong revenue driver** for Coursera. edX also has its version, called **Xseries**, of which 11 have been announced.

Upping the Production Quality Ante

Harvard has in-house course production studio with over 50 staff, including specialists in instructional design, production, research, technical operations, and program support.

In an interview with nymag.com, **Marc Andreessen** noted that MOOC production values are pretty low. However, this isn't necessarily true – some MOOCs have been very well-designed, and the bar has risen, with average course production quality improving considerably. Universities, seeing both large markets and big uncertainties in the online

learning world, have organized and staffed centralized departments to support professors creating these courses, including MOOCs. For example, Harvard has in-house course **production studio** with over 50 staff, including specialists in instructional design, production, research, technical operations, and program support.

Professor Michael Goldberg of Case Western Reserve University worked with, former 60 Minutes Associate Producer and Peabody Award winner, Catherine Levy, to help produce his documentary-style video lectures for **Beyond Silicon Valley: Growing Entrepreneurship in Transitioning Economies**.

Some instructors have made efforts to create specific tools to help them teach MOOCs.

Some instructors have made efforts to create specific tools to help them teach MOOCs. Ohio State

Assistant Math Professor Jim Fowler has spent **more than 1000+ hours** on his Calculus course on Coursera, including building **mooculus**, a tool to help students to practice math problems. Rice University's Scott Rixner built **CodeSkulptor**, an interactive browser-based python environment, used in courses in Coursera's **Fundamentals of Computing** specialization program. These are just a couple of examples of how additional course subject-specific tools are extending the functionality of the base MOOC platforms.

Institutions Choose Open edX for DIY

Open edX quickly seems to become de facto platform for organizations and groups who are looking to host their own MOOCs. It has been adopted by several organizations in diverse regions of the world

- Queen Raina foundation for the **Edraak** MOOC platform
- **George Washington University**
- **gacco** a Japanese MOOC provider
- **French Universities**
- **XuentangX** – a consortium of chinese universities
- **SWAYAM** – an India-based MOOC platform
- **EdCast** for its Open Knowledge Cloud

Open edX quickly seems to become de facto platform for organizations and groups who are looking to host their own MOOCs

Currently there are **60+ instances of open edX**, running over 400 courses. This has given rise to a large group of **service providers** who help deploy and manage open edX instances. Recently they met at the **first open edX conference**, with slides and recordings **available here**.

A Trend towards 'Always On' Availability

MOOCs started out, and

Udacity was the first provider to adopt a self-paced model.

for the most part still parallel college classroom courses with a start date,

end date, and specific deadlines for assignments/homework. Udacity was the first provider to abandon this paradigm (back in 2012) and adopted a self-paced model—users can sign up and complete the courses at their own pace (which allows both flexibility for students, and happens to fit well with Udacity's monthly subscription revenue model). This gets closer to the self-paced content available on Udemy or Lynda.com. However, to make a major jump towards this requires providing ways to supply the interaction and/or assistance that most MOOC-takers expect. Coursera had made a big push towards 'on-demand' courses. At the time of writing, there are **27 on-demand courses** available. Currently none of these have discussion forums (yet) or verified certificates. This is a clear boon to those students who want scheduling flexibility, but it also removes key elements that have been part of the "MOOC" formula that has been so popular. It also allows for sharing of individual lecture videos:

FutureLearn also has plans to make all the **content of their courses open**.

This is one of the key tenets of the original MOOC acronym, 'Open', as in open content.

FutureLearn also has plans to make all the **content of their courses open**. As more of the content from these hundreds of professors and thousands of MOOCs and becomes sharable (at an increasing level of production quality), perhaps we will start to see new forms of content aggregation, a la YouTube playlists or curated libraries. Having to take (or at least sign up for and wade through) whole courses is a very large bite of content, and going down to the lecture level allows for much more interesting compilation, sharing, and re-mixing.

2014 a Year for MOOC Maturation

We have seen strong development of the MOOC ecosystem this year. MOOC providers are

Universities are jumping on the online bandwagon and investing in online course development.

becoming more sure-footed in creating their business models. They will likely tune them and thus bring in even more revenues. Universities are jumping on the online bandwagon and investing in online course development. They will be eager to leverage this content (perhaps via blended learning) in their on campus and continuing education curriculum. Instructors and students are continuing to offer and take MOOCs in growing numbers. As more new courses cover the same or overlapping content and production values rise, we may start to see more options and choices that student learners have, and more 'winners' and 'losers' in the course offerings. It will be interesting to see how all of this plays out in 2015.

Thanks to Charlie Chung for contributing to this story.

 **www.class-central.com**

 <https://www.class-central.com/report/moocs-stats-and-trends-2014/>

 <http://goo.gl/ffgS>

