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## Northeastern launches lab to empower social change, civic engagement

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 23, 2014 03:58 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

The success of a free massive open online course focused on philanthropy has prompted Northeastern University, which founded the course in partnership with the sister of billionaire Warren Buffett, to launch a laboratory designed to empower social change and civic engagement, campus officials said.

The university [announced this week](#) the launch of the Social Impact Lab, describing it as “a hub of innovative experiential curricula, programming, and events designed to empower social change and civic engagement across disciplines and around the world.”

The lab’s signature program will be “Giving With Purpose,” a free online course that teaches effective charitable giving. The university said it is the first-ever MOOC focused on philanthropy and informed civic engagement.

The course, which [debuted this past summer](#), was created in partnership with the [Learning by Giving Foundation](#), which Doris Buffett, 85, founded and directs.

She is the older sister of billionaire investor and philanthropist Warren Buffett.

“I am invested in sharing my passion for philanthropy with the next generation of philanthropic leaders,” Doris Buffett said in a statement.

“‘Giving With Purpose’ exceeded all of our expectations last summer, and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to offer it again this spring with Northeastern University,” she added.

A key aspect of the course is having participants help decide how to award money from Doris Buffett’s foundation to local nonprofits. During the course’s inaugural run, more than 10,000 people participated helping to distribute \$130,000 to 40 nonprofits.

Guest speakers in the MOOC have included both Warren and Doris Buffett, as well as former Major League Baseball player Cal Ripken Jr., broadcast journalist Soledad O’Brien, Boston Red Sox chairman Tom Werner, and Ben & Jerry’s co-founders Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield.

The course will re-launch in March featuring new guests and a new platform. In the coming fall, the course will be offered as a credit-bearing course.

“It is a challenge and responsibility that we work together to create a global culture of philanthropy,” Northeastern president Joseph E. Aoun, said in a statement. “This

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MOOC is leading the field with its model of experiential philanthropy and will drive new ways of giving across platforms, continents, and generations.”

Along with the course, Northeastern’s new Social Impact Lab will feature several other “experiential learning programs that bridge the classroom and the community,” campus officials said.

A philanthropy education program run by the lab, Northeastern Students4Giving, has students “study civic engagement and social change while making real-dollar grants to Boston-area nonprofits,” officials said.

Rebecca Riccio, the founding director of Northeastern Students4Giving and the teacher of the “Giving With Purpose” MOOC, has been appointed director of the Social Impact Lab, which will be housed within the College of Social Sciences and Humanities.

“The MOOC epitomizes our vision of the Social Impact Lab as a conduit between theory and practice — a platform for students to apply what they are learning in the classroom to real-world challenges and opportunities,” Riccio said in a statement. “Our goal is to give students a comprehensive toolkit for translating good intentions into effective, financially sustainable strategies for achieving social change.”

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [matthew.rocheleau@globe.com](mailto:matthew.rocheleau@globe.com). Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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