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Online education company edX offering free high school courses

By **Matt Rocheleau**

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | SEPTEMBER 10, 2014



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The online-learning collaborative edX, a partnership between Harvard University and MIT, is expanding its reach beyond higher education and will begin offering courses geared toward high school students.

Edx plans to unveil its first free classes for younger students Wednesday, when most of the new courses will open for enrollment. The 26 high school courses were created by 14 institutions — including MIT, Georgetown and Rice universities, the University of California Berkeley, Boston University, Wellesley College, and Weston Public High School.

The online classes, available to anyone in the world, will cover such subjects as computer science, calculus, geometry, algebra, English, physics, biology, chemistry, Spanish, French, history, statistics, and psychology.

To date, edX has offered only college-level courses. And, while

a smattering of high school-level massive open online courses exist, company officials said edX is the first provider of so-called MOOCs to offer an organized set of free high school curriculums.

Anant Agarwal, chief executive of edX, said the offerings will help address a “readiness gap” that leaves a significant number of high school students unprepared for college studies.

“When students are not prepared, and if they have to take remedial courses, they’re highly likely to not succeed,” Agarwal said by phone Tuesday.

While edX’s existing courses are college-level, about 150,000 of the platform’s nearly 3 million users are high-school-age, and a 2013 survey of its users found 90 percent said they were interested in edX adding entry-level college courses, Agarwal said.

“It really goes back to our access mission,” he said. “If you have very advanced courses in quantum mechanics, students would like to take a course in algebra or calculus so they can take the more basic courses to build the background needed to take the more advanced courses.”

One high school course will aim to help students “demystify” the process of applying to selective colleges — understanding admissions requirements, navigating financial aid, and trying to help high school students match a college to their interests.

Agarwal said the new courses could also appeal to adults looking to refresh their knowledge of certain subjects.

Teachers could use the courses and the material to supplement their efforts in the classroom.

Some courses are designed for students who want to take the College Board’s popular Advanced Placement exams.

For a fee, students can sign up on their own to take an AP exam, which can earn them college credit if they do well on the test.

High schools, at their own discretion, could also decide to give credit to students who complete the online courses. Andover High School and edX partnered during the 2012-13 school year to run a pilot program for a small group of students that gave them credit for passing virtual classes.

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