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High quality education for successful social farming

Social Farming in Higher Education

Online Guide

Tips and tricks for teaching social farming online

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Online learning for social farming

This document is a guide to help those who wish to create online courses in social farming. It introduces the topic and the basic vocabulary of the field, and focuses on key themes such as design, pedagogics, etc., before providing a set of tips for how to structure and create content. This is followed by a specific section on MOOCs, again introducing the basic vocabulary used by their proponents, before providing a short analysis of the benefits and challenges of the format. Throughout the guide, we try to point the reader towards concrete examples, although whenever dealing with online matters, there can be no guarantee that links will continue to work over time.

It can be somewhat counter-intuitive to think of delivering farm-based courses online, but these already do exist and during the current Corona-crisis, they are growing in number and size. After careful thought and discussion, we believe that there is a positive place for online learning within the field of Social Farming and encourage you to consider adding competence at designing and delivering online courses to your portfolio.

Introduction to online learning

Recent events like the Covid-19 pandemic have stimulated an enormous growth of online learning across education, from primary schools to universities. Whilst many good examples of online learning can be found, the same could be said for bad examples. In the press, countless headlines have appeared about the poor quality of many of these emergency online offerings. One New York Times article claimed, for example, “Not surprisingly, the experience for both students and faculty has left much to be desired. According to one survey, more than 75 percent of students do not feel they received a quality learning experience after classrooms closed.” (Taparia 23.05.2020 NYT). Online learning does not, however, have to be a bad experience for students and staff. By applying core pedagogical principles to the creation and delivery of online learning, such courses can indeed satisfy all the various aspects of students’ needs and deliver a quality learning experience.

There are a number of benefits that the online delivery of learning can bring to those who wish to learn to participate in social farming. These include ease of access, convenience, customization, and the use of existing farm resources in the learners’ learning processes.

Because social farming takes place mainly in rural areas, learners can face costs to travel to central locations to study in face-to-face situations. These costs not only include travel but perhaps accommodation and subsistence, particularly when attending short multiple-day courses. Online learning can provide opportunities to participate without leaving home, as long as the home offers a reasonable quality of broadband and suitable digital equipment. Further, farmers have firm commitments to their animals, and the demands of the farming year, meaning that taking time from operating their farm can exert a large cost on their operations. Online learning, particularly in an asynchronous form, allows them to find time to participate at their convenience, greatly enabling participation.

The practice of social farming requires the development of many different skills and practices, and one benefit of online learning is that courses can be customized to address those taking them. For example, a group of dairy farmers could receive specialized training which focuses upon the farm assets that they already have in place, and they could indeed work together sharing their existing knowledge and practices, strengthening their learning opportunities.

Of course, online learning also presents challenges to both the teacher and the student, particularly around motivation, continuity and participative learning, but these can be addressed by careful pedagogical design in consultation with the participants.

The key to designing high-quality online courses is to start with face-to-face (F2F) courses. By understanding all the pedagogical components in F2F learning, digital versions can be created. In traditional F2F learning, some of these components are not obvious, hidden as they are within wider social phenomena, and within accepted blocks of practice such as lecturing. Thus, aspects such as social learning which happens between students within the physical space of the department building, if not the classroom itself, can be replicated by online discussion forums, even if such are asynchronous. And the lecture itself is something which can, and has been, broken into a set of pedagogical components which can inform the design of a number of different virtual parts of an

online course. Likewise, key pedagogical principles need to be kept in mind when designing online learning opportunities. Issues such as learning styles, educational goals, etc., (see the SoFarEDU Pedagogical Guide) need to be considered even more carefully when creating online learning environments. An online course needs well-crafted aims, learning outcomes, and formative and summative assessment instruments linked to the outcomes both to drive the choices the teacher must make from a wide range of technological features and offerings, and also because they must be laid out transparently within the online course in a way that seldom occurs in a F2F course. Posted in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), all aspects of the course are available to students at all times, should they express an interest – available in several clicks of a mouse – and these things are accessible and transparent to them with far greater ease than they are to students in F2F learning.

At the same time, the special conditions of the medium must be equally taken into account. Online learning delivery occurs in a realm which cannot refer to centuries of academic education, rather, students 'consume' it with reference to their consumption of contemporary media.

This is why one of the key things to keep in mind when designing online and blended learning courses is the medium being used. Recorded lectures, in particular, now must have the appearance of television shows. People have become much more media-literate in their consumption of news, drama, and social media, etc., in the same way that they have become used to studio voice-recording. The latter raises the issue of aural expectation – we are used to hearing voices recorded with 'outboard' processors which add depth, timbre and other qualities to the aural package. As a result, poorly recorded voices, without that outboard processing sound amateur, cheap and quite off-putting. The sound of our voices, recorded flat, simply doesn't sound 'right' anymore. Students are media-literate with visual media too, with the result that a 'talking head' droning on for a long period of time also seems amateur, off-putting, and boring. It is worth watching television news and the well-produced videos of 'social influencers' to see these effects. If we think of what we watch on television, or increasingly on social media, the camera techniques include 'panning' (moving the camera's focus from side to side) and 'zooming' (moving the camera's focus in and out),; 'framing' shots and 'cutting' from one shot to another. Without these techniques, the resulting output looks stilted and of poor quality. This is particularly a problem when a lecturer performs in a teaching studio with a single camera on a tripod which is not actively controlled. Ideally, pre-recorded lectures need a camera-operator who can pan and zoom, and who can frame the image in ways which look professional. Often this is not possible, but nevertheless it must be kept in mind when producing online learning materials.

If one cannot move a camera or its focus, one important thing that can be done is to become more conscious of how we use space in front of it. When teaching lecturers to teach F2F, we often focus upon 'using the space' – moving forward and back within the speaking space; moving arms and head for emphasis; scanning eyes across the audience, etc., -- and the same with the use of voice – louder and quieter for emphasis; using stops at appropriate times; questioning strategies, etc. Similarly, when recording lectures in video or audio, we need to develop a set of techniques which professionalize the production in order to gain the interest and respect of the audience.

Another consideration is the length of lessons, lectures, etc. Modern media production not only assumes that the consumer has a short attention span, it shapes it that way. The way that modern

videos are edited has increasingly led to shorter and shorter segments, and modern pedagogical practices are beginning to reflect this. Student participation and retention are aided by the use of short segments, giving students a change to reflect and retain material or skills that they encounter. Additionally, it can be useful to vary the type of actions that students engage with, following a short lecture with a participative exercise, for example. Or following group work with short presentations. In our world of modern media with its limits on recorded time or text, short and snappy is increasingly the norm and this must be taken into account when designing online learning.

Blended learning

One important variety of online learning is *blended learning*. This is a combination of live lectures, asynchronous learning materials, and asynchronous self-completion exercises. In many ways, this mirrors face-to-face learning in that students will read materials before and after the lectures, experience the lectures live, and then complete exercises out of the classroom. In online learning, these are considered to be *synchronous*, and *asynchronous* learning opportunities. Synchronous learning opportunities involve live interaction either between students and the lecturer or between students and each other (i.e. group activities), activities which happen in the same place and same time. Asynchronous learning describes forms of education, instruction, and learning that do not occur in the same place or at the same time. Blended learning allows the use of both.

Well-recorded lectures can give the illusion of synchronous learning in the sense that the learners experience the presence of the lecturer – if through a recorded medium – and it benefits the lecturer to lecture to some students, in a room, as the lecture is being recorded. The resulting video will feel more 'live' and a lecturer who is used to teaching in a classroom will be better able to delve into their experience of reaching out to an audience when being recorded.

Other ways that learning can be *blended* include group activities such as field visits where all students are included in a single visit, followed by presentation seminars where the results of student work are delivered to the whole group. Again, there is a range of possibilities from physical presence to the combined synchronous presence of all students via remote video – something which is becoming much more prevalent since the Covid-19 crisis has emphasised the use of live-streaming.

Another variation of this could be called 'hybrid learning' where some students actually attend a lecture, which is streamed to others who are not present, and at the same time recorded so that it is available both synchronously and asynchronously.

At the same time, the online resources and activities are just as important to blended learning as to wholly online learning.

Designing online learning

Given all the above, there are some important features that need to be a part of all online learning offerings. These include:

- Offering students three or more independent ways to encounter the same material – i.e. lecture, presentation, readings, discussion forum, assignment, self-completion exercises, etc. This requires the teacher to be clear what the lesson's key topic is, and expressing it in different activities, in order to address different learning styles.
- Offering both formative (self-completion) and summative assessment strategies and linking them to learning outcomes (LOs).
- The use of high-quality VLE (Virtual Learning Environment/LMS (Learning Management System), such as Moodle or others.
- Creating a common structure for each 'lesson' and sticking to it.
- Giving students a clear and concrete 'introduction' which tells them what they will be learning upfront and sticking to it.
- Keeping 'lectures' short. Experience has shown that 45 minutes is the maximum length any concentrated lecture should be. Online lectures can be even more exhausting than F2F lectures. After that, students should be given a 15-minute break to assimilate the material and to clear their minds. This also accords with popular consumption of commercial media, with segment lengths becoming shorter and shorter, and people becoming more used to this. In accordance to this it is useful to consider ordering the ways that students engage with the material, for example, breaking the order up into 45-minute sessions with a focus on problem-solving, Q. and A. or online discussions.
- Offering students an informal 'room' to continue discussions. In breaks during F2F lectures or meetings, discussions go on in an informal way during breaks, and the results of these kinds of exchanges between people are also important learning opportunities. In online versions of conferences, meetings or courses, you can also offer this room during breaks and let participants choose to join in or not.
- Acceptance that students are used to 'multi-tasking' when they consume media. Once rendered into online learning, a teacher's insistence on single-pointed attention to their lecture is no longer relevant. Young people, in particular, have become experts in multiple media acquisition, unlike their older lectures, and this must be respected. Rather, students should be allowed to consume online learning in the ways they have become expert at consuming online media, meaning that, for example, checking messages and posts whilst watching a lecture is an only normal behaviour – and there is considerable literature available which demonstrates that this has a minimal impact on student learning. If the course is designed well, even though students are checking their messages, they will learn and retain the material and will achieve the learning outcomes that are set for them.

Teacher presence

In F2F teaching, the presence of the teacher delivers important motivation for students in terms of engaging in learning tasks. Indeed, the quality of the teacher can have a significant impact on a student's learning. Without the teacher present, that can become compromised. Within online learning the same principle applies.

Very often, universities think that online learning is a way to economize on teacher labour. This is very seldom the case. The teacher needs to make regular contact with both the class, and individual learners even within an online learning milieu. This is one of the benefits of activities such as discussion forums, active feedback in both formative and summative evaluation, and the teacher's participation in group work.

In many ways, F2F learning milieus are actually more efficient for the teacher to contact each individual student because in a classroom the teacher can focus upon individual students for just a moment, letting them know that their learning is important to the teacher and to the institution. For a student, engaging asynchronously in online learning resources, it can seem that no one cares, and that there is no one to help them when they have a problem. Thus, the online lecturer must actively reach out to each student through messaging, feedback, 'online office hours', and other interactive means so that the student knows that their learning is valued. Similarly, eye contact and a smile can let a student know they are doing well. This is not possible in wholly online learning and other means need to be employed to replace those informal feedback modes.

At the same time, the use of interactive tools also can counter the isolation of the student who works asynchronously. Indeed, some students might prefer to learn asynchronously, depending upon the learning tasks and the individual student, but they still need encouragement through, for example, success in self-completion exercises.

This means that the online teacher needs to plan for frequent, if short, interaction sessions with the students, using the variety of online teaching tools that are available.

Tips and tricks for building online courses

The following section lists a variety of resources that can be used to build online courses in social farming. They are taken from the experiences of members of the project and the list is not at all exhaustive. A web search will turn up many more, but these are some of the ones that have worked for us.

I. Online excursions via webcasting app

Online Excursions should not totally replace 'real' excursions, but they can give good insights to a place that cannot be visited.

How to:

- Create two accounts on zoom.us or other online webcasting app such as Google Meet, etc
    - one account on your laptop
    - one account via the zoom app on your mobile phone (use a different email address)
- start with your laptop and send the invitation of the meeting to your second account
- mute the microphone on your laptop
- via your mobile phone you can walk around, filming live, showing the excursions´ place, …

The participants follow the excursion online. Questions can be asked by the participants; details can be shown via the video camera.

Good to have:

- an assistant for the moderation, chat & time
- internet connection, Wi-Fi, data volume
- fully loaded batteries, power bank, selfie stick
- permission of the participants for the recording
- headphones to hear the participants clear

II. Expert talks

Instead of inviting an expert to a F2F lecture, invite her/him to an online meeting.

How to:

- Before the talk: Students (one or two together) do some research on the expert's topic/enterprise and prepare questions they want to discuss together with the group and the expert.
- During the talk: First, the expert gets 20-30 Minutes to present. After that, the students lead the discussion and ask their prepared questions.

There is a need to use an appropriate webcasting/streaming app – which partly depends on the size of the student group or how many experts are invited.

III. Split the day

Staying concentrated during online learning sessions is more demanding than in F2F learning situations. Also, hands-on exercises can´t be done easily in this format of teaching and learning. Splitting a full day programme into two half days can help both mentioned issues. In the first half day, students should gain new knowledge, the teacher is presenting online. The second half-day will be held a week later. In between the students will have tasks to follow. These tasks could be practically orientated, hands-on, collecting, or creative tasks offline. After one week the second half-day online is used to discuss and reflect the students' experience, feelings and thoughts they had during their offline exercise.

IV. Creating crossword puzzles for vocabulary development

There are a number of useful tools which allow you to develop your own crossword puzzles. These can be excellent self-completion exercises for students, particularly for developing vocabulary. One example is called www.xwords-generator.de and can be used in either German or English. A crossword was created for Section 4 in the Text Book (Target Groups of Social Farming). So the crossword can be solved through referring to that Chapter in the Text Book. A German version can be found at *https://www.xwords-generator.de/de/solve/btgzh a*nd an English version at *https://www.xwords-generator.de/de/solve/3kc8c*

This is a free online tool that is actually created for entertainment. Teachers can also use it to develop exercises and homework and to check if students have read and understood the literature.

V. Useful online tools to create components for online courses

Feedback:

- easy-feedback.de
- get.plickers.com

Advanced:

- h5p.org (animated videos and memories)
- studio.gometa.io/landing (augmented reality)

Various:

- padlet.com (digital pinboard)
- learningsnacks.de (simulated conversation between teacher and learners)
- kahoot.com (quiz)
- mentimeter.com (survey)
- trello.com (project management)
- office lens (flipchart photos)
- wisemapping.com (mind map)
- wordle.net (word cloud)
- learningapps.org (quiz)

This completes the focus on general online learning in social farming.

Massive open online courses

There is a special type of online learning that may be particularly suitable for promoting a more highly-educated pool of practitioners – this is MOOCs. The following section discusses these.

What is a MOOC?

A massive open online course (MOOC) is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2016) Nowadays we often refer to MOOCs as "the extensive classroom". MOOCS are typically interactive online courses based on video lectures (often including some sort of presentation) combined with reading, tests, online discussions, assignments, interaction among the course participants etc. Some courses are self-paced (asynchronous courses), some are taught at certain times as they include online live sessions (synchronous courses), some courses are partly face to face and partly online; the last two types of courses may be called blended learning. Some courses are peer-graded or they are based on group collaboration while other courses are based on automated feedback through objective, online assessments, e.g. quizzes and exams, or they use machine grading of written assignments (Rivard, 2013). Most of the shorter courses (ranging usually up to 12 weeks) offer free access, yet those who wish to gain a certificate have to pay a fee. The fee depends on the platform and the length of the course, often the fee is around $50. MOOC platforms also offer whole study programmes, where the participants do have to pay for the course.

The vast majority of the courses are competence based. There has been reported very low level of completion rate (only 3-5% among those who do the course for free and 70% of those who paid in the beginning for the certificate). This is caused mostly by three factors - the course requires too much time, or it is too difficult or too basic. MOOC students prefer shorter videos (up to 5 minutes) and if the video is longer, they tend to stop it and continue only after a while. Also, many students watch the videos at 1,25 speed or even faster in order to save time. Most of the courses provide transcription of the videos as they count on the fact that not all students are native English speaking (There are also many courses in Spanish, Mandarin, etc.).

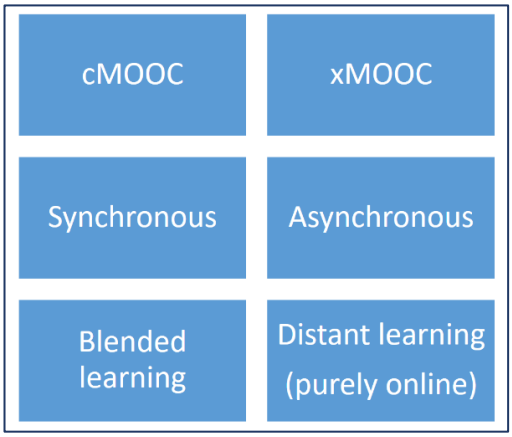
cMOOCs and xMOOCs

Stephen Downed divides MOOCs into two categories – cMOOCs and xMOOCs.

- **cMOOCs** (*Connectivist MOOCs*) which allow for dynamic development of study material. That is, instead of having a pre-planned set of reading materials and courseware, the material will be developed through online discussions and collaborations among learners taking the course across the globe. The primary purpose of cMOOCs is networking and thus learning takes place not only in the course but also in the processes and at all the places where participants look for information and when they work with them.

- **xMOOCs** (*Extended MOOCs*), based on the conventional approach where the courses are well-structured with pre-selected reading and reference materials (Srikanth, 2017). xMOOCs are designed for millions of people to engage in the same course at the same time.

	cMOOCs	xMOOCs
Learner role	Active	Passive
Instructor role	Facilitator/ co-learner	Guide on side/ sage on video stage
Learning theory	Connectivism/ socio-constructivism	Behaviorism/cognitivism
Pedagogy	Knowledge construction	Knowledge duplication
Delivery of instruction	Personal learning environment (PLE)	Learning management system (LMS)
Assessment	Self-assessment/ peer assessment	External assessment/ instructor assessment
Certification	Rarely	Usually
Business model	Non-profit	For profit



Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/cMOOCs-vs-xMOOCs-Adapted-from-Reeves-Hedberg-2014_tbl1_318209386

Major platforms offering MOOCs:

- edX *https://www.edx.org/*
- Coursera *https://www.coursera.org/*
- Udemy *https://www.udemy.com/*
- Udacity *https://www.udacity.com/*
- FutureLearn *https://www.futurelearn.com/*
- Many others

Existing MOOCs relevant to social farming:

- *Discover Best Practice Farming for a Sustainable 2050 (Coursera)*
- *The Future of Farming: Exploring Climate Smart Agriculture (FutureLearn)*
- *Sustainable Agricultural Land Management* (Coursera)
- Many other courses on farming, sustainability or social issues

Advantages and benefits of MOOCs

MOOCs are a very useful tool either to enhance ordinary study courses, or most often they stand on their own to address a specific issue or subject. As they are offered for free, they are easily accessible to all people who have the access to the internet and command the appropriate language. Other advantages and benefits:

- Open to everyone
- Offered for free (mostly)

- Learn from professors teaching at the top schools
- Learn from peers around the world and share knowledge, engage in discussion forums – that fosters cross cultural relationships
- Cover almost all imaginable subjects and issues
- A great number of the courses are self-paced with flexible deadlines
- It is possible to preview the syllabus and most of the course materials for free
- Most courses provide information how many hours are required to devote to a course
- Enhancement of Active Learning
- Most courses aim at deep learning and thus reduce the pressures of "exam fever"

Possible drawbacks or challenges of MOOCs

- No direct or personalized contact with the teacher / tutor (that also in long term harms the empathy, care and respect between the teacher and the student in a physical classroom)
- Dependent on the quality of internet connection and technical equipment of the learner
- So far most of the courses are only in most often spoken languages
- MOOCs (so far) cannot be used to gain credits at universities
- It is possible to go through a lot of materials or lectures in one day which diminishes the principles of deep learning
- It is very challenging to set the assessment tools and questions right so as to go deep enough and yet not to make it too difficult

Pedagogical issues of MOOCs

Characteristics of MOOCs and their related pedagogical benefits

MOOC characteristic	Pedagogical benefits
Online mode of delivery	Efficacy of online learning
Online quizzes and assessments	Retrieval learning
Short videos and quizzes	Mastery learning
Peer and self–assessment	Enhanced learning through this assessment
Short videos	Enhanced attention and focus
Online forums	Peer assistance, out–of–band learning

Source: Glance, D. G., Forsey, M., & Riley, M. (2013). The pedagogical foundations of massive open online courses. *First Monday, 18*(5). doi:10.5210/fm.v18i5.4350

Instructional design of cMOOCs

As in cMOOCs learners actively build the environment, they are considered more learner-centred than xMOOCs which must be well-stuctured up front. The cMOOCs are based on connectivism, ideas of J. Dewey (e.g. Learning by doing) and discovery learning which presents the new information in such a way that the learners should actively work with the information and connect it with their previous knowledge. At the same time the learners interact with other learners engaged in the course and thus the emphasis is not only on cognitive way of learning, but it also involves social interactions, social learning – so it is not only about "what" is learnt, but also "how". In cMOOCs it can be quite challenging for the pedagogue/facilitator of the course to keep track of what is going on.

Instructional design of xMOOCs

A highly-structured environment helps the students as well as the pedagogue/facilitator develop a clear view on where the student is and how he/she is doing. Often, the underlying principle of xMOOCs is behaviourism – information is structured in linear order and usually it is followed by some sort of an assessment. Most recently there has been a shift towards a combination of constructivism, social learning and connectivism. (Keramida, 2015)

Motivation

As the dropout rate in MOOCs is very high it is important to think of ways how to motivate the learners. If intrinsic motivation is not enough, other aspects come to play. These aspects include the prestige of the institution offering the course/certificate, the topic of the course which may enhance the learners career, friends who participate in the course, access to course materials or lectures by well known professors, etc. (Semenova, 2020)

Some of the principles the creators of MOOCs to motivate and actively engage the are following:

- During the course deliver exactly what you have promised in the annotation
- Keep the learners active by means of assignments, writing notes or reflections which can be shared and commented, use forums and discussions
- In blended learning courses use video conferences and online chats
- Use formative assessment
- When assessing, try to apply principles of deep learning – e.g. the students have to use the gained knowledge creatively (but never ask something you haven´t discussed in the course)
- Some form of gamification or awarding various badges also helps
- Clearly visualize (eg. bars or cakes) how much the learner already achieved and how much there is to complete the course

Online tools which can be used to create components for MOOCs

- Floop *https://www.floopedu.com/*
    - a cloud-based website where students can receive annotated feedback from teachers and peers
    - Students upload images of an assignment to the platform and teachers put markers in places where they want to provide written feedback
- Kahoot! *https://kahoot.com/*
    - a game-based learning platform which makes it easy to create, discover, play and share fun learning games in minutes
    - allows teachers to quickly create fun learning games for students based around multiple-choice questions
- Mentimeter *https://www.mentimeter.com/*
    - live polls, quizzes, word clouds, Q&As and more
    - an app used to create presentations with real-time feedback
- Slido *https://www.sli.do/*
    - Through the easy to use the platform the students may ask questions, fill in questionnaires, offer ideas
    - All participants may see what is going on + the lecturer may mark the most interesting questions/ideas
- Socrative *https://www.socrative.com/*
    - A smart way to monitor and evaluate learning
    - Quizzes, quick questions, etc with immediate feedback
- Wakelet *https://wakelet.com/*
    - A platform that allows to save and organise all kinds of online content into visual, engaging collections
    - copy and paste the address of a Youtube video, social media posts, podcasts, music, and much more into a Wakelet collection, it will embed - allowing viewers to watch it without leaving the site

Conclusion

This guide to online learning for social farming has been just a brief introduction to the subject.

Once you begin to explore it you will find much more material out on the web, much of it available for free. As the topic of social farming itself, there is both a strong heritage of agreed material and topics, along with the potential to invent new, innovative, and even radical approaches to both topics.

We encourage you to take what is offered here and to 'run with it'. Use it for your own purposes, and more importantly, use it as a springboard to find and create material which is most relevant for your own purposes, your own projects, and ultimately, your own social farming enterprises.

We wish you 'Good Luck' in your learning journey!

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