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New Web Venture Offers 'Syndicated Courses'

(Source: [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#))

[Omnicaademy](#), a for-profit institution conceived at Louisiana State University, hopes to allow professors to syndicate their courses this fall.

The company's system will let professors upload material from courses they're already teaching and offer the courses to students at other colleges through the Omnicaademy site, said the company's founder, Stacey Simmons, associate director for economic development at Louisiana's Center for Computation and Technology.

Universities can review the courses and decide which ones they want to adopt and offer credit for. When students log into Omnicaademy—using a .edu e-mail address—they will only be allowed to select from courses that have been approved by their institution.

If a student wishes to take a course offered through Omnicaademy that is not on the list approved by his or her university, Omnicaademy will negotiate on behalf of that student with the university, Ms. Simmons added.

Courses will be supervised by professors and a proctor. The proctor, who is selected or approved by the professor, is typically responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of a section of the course. All grades, however, have to be approved by a professor.

"One could look at this as similar to transferring a credit from another university," said Joel Thierstein, executive director of the open-source education project [Connexions](#). "If you can't get a course at your university, you go to another one and move the credit over."

Ms. Simmons said granting credit remains an obstacle, though. "The hardest part is figuring out the logistics of the credit system," she said. "Everybody is happy to share their content, but not very many people are willing to give credit."

"Universities are used to the ethos of having to serve their student population all themselves, and syndication, in any way, is a very novel concept," she added.

Omnicaademy will offer two payment methods for the courses taken on its site—an institution can charge a student on a regular tuition bill and then pay Omnicaademy, or a student can pay Omnicaademy directly, depending on the institution's preference, Ms. Simmons said.

Omnicaademy then pays royalties to the institution or the professor who designed the course, depending on the number of students who complete it.

The site provides a place for students to post a status, find out who their classmates are, discuss course material, read a "news feed," and view tags about recent posts. "It's effectively a social-networking site—it looks like Facebook," Ms. Simmons said. Omnicaademy is also developing a tablet version of the site for the iPad.

Omnicaademy has applied for "a number of high-profile grants," along with raising venture-capital funds, Ms. Simmons said.

Mr. Thierstein said ventures like Omnicaademy could let universities leverage limited resources to offer students a broader range of offerings. "I think these kinds of things are going to keep popping up," he said.

Publish Date:
01-14-2011

